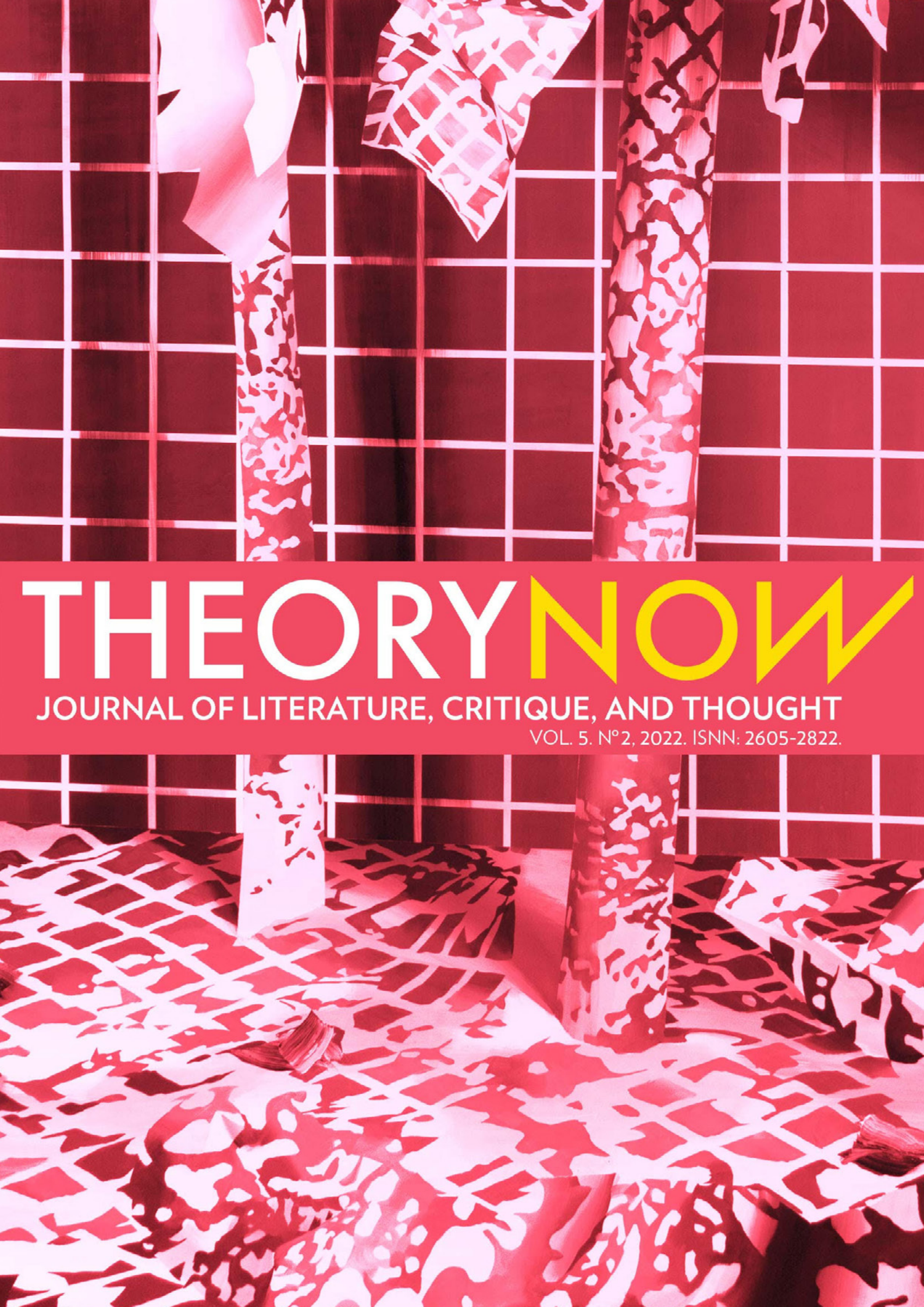

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THEORYNOW
JOURNAL OF LITERATURE, CRITIQUE, AND THOUGHT

FOREWORD: "THAT DREADFUL TERRY EAGLETON"*: POLITICS, ETHICS, AND LITERARY PRAXIS

PRÓLOGO: "ESE HORRIBLE TERRY EAGLETON": POLÍTICA, ÉTICA Y PRAXIS LITERARIA

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Terry Eagleton's is one of the most relevant interventions in the debates on the most burning issues of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. A formidable polemicist, he has questioned hegemonic discourses on relativism, truth, and universals. He has tackled the central issues in the humanities: social and moral order, law and desire, time and history, the mind-body problem, the subject, experience, freedom, violence, and love. He has succeeded in bringing into dialectical relationship Marxism, Psychoanalysis, Existentialism, and Christian thought. He has done more than anyone to renew materialism and propose an ethics inseparable from politics. He has revised key notions of critical discourse such as ideology, aesthetics, and culture. Eagleton has written on the main novelists of the English tradition – but his writings are full of insightful commentaries on European writers (from Sophocles to Calderon, Dostoevsky, Thomas Mann, Proust, or Lorca) – on major philosophers, especially modern and contemporary (but

*Comment by Prince Charles quoted by Terry Eagleton in his memoir *The Gatekeeper.*

also on Aristotle and Aquinas), and on the main schools of literary theory and criticism, from Leavisism to Deconstruction. Profound and funny, erudite and clear, he has both applied highly perceptive analysis to the concepts of ideology, aesthetics and culture, and provided an accessible introduction to the English novel and guides to the critical analysis of poetry and the novel. As if all this were not enough, Eagleton has also written and signed several plays, a screenplay, and a novel.

Eagleton's project is a sustained reflection on and exploration of the possibilities of emancipation and of living a good life in the context of late capitalism. Empowered by a deep understanding of theory, his readings reveal the relation of literary texts to the context of their production and present them not as mere ideological tools but as ideological battlefields and spaces for reflection on moral issues. His critical discourse incorporates highly abstract and difficult concepts, but for him the struggle against elitism must be part of any Marxist project; hence his effort to cross the walls of the academy and reach a wider public sphere both through his books and by participating in tv and radio programs. On the jacket of Eagleton' s *Trouble with Strangers*, Slavoj Žižek comments: "this book may achieve the unthinkable; bridging the gap between academic High Thought and popular philosophy manuals." Eagleton took a step further and supplemented *Trouble* with *The Meaning of Life*, a book dedicated to his young son "Oliver who found the whole idea deeply embarrassing".

His vocation of crossing boundaries led Eagleton to traverse the troubled waters of the Channel. For a Marxist, the German tradition is a must, but French structuralist and post-structuralist theory made the Paris tour indispensable. The traditional distance between European abstraction and the English empirical mindset was a challenge. One main point of disagreement with the Parisian school is precisely the division between high theory and common sense, a problem that Eagleton relates to the division between the extraordinary and the ordinary.

Crossing boundaries is also reflected in his interest in religion, an interest that he shares with Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou. In contrast to the University, the religious institutions have traditionally been able to reach common people, which is one of the reasons for which Eagleton admires religion. But such interest – a very early one, reflected in his collaboration with *Slant* – can be *petra scandali* for the left. In the 'Preface' to *Trouble* Eagleton amusingly acknowledges that "[s]ome of my friends and readers will be dismayed to see me wasting my time yet again on theology" (vi) and defends himself by seriously stating that "radical theology… represents one of the few surviving enclaves of materialist thought in these politically patchy times" (*Trouble* vi), a point that he repeats in the "Preface" to *Holy Terror* (vi).

Eagleton's career as a literary critic began in the late sixties when English Studies dominated English literary criticism and post structuralism was spreading its wings in France. This was a time of exceptionally productive mutual influence between philosophy and literature. Despite the British tendency to ignore continental theoretical developments, there was a group of strongly left-wing post-war British thinkers well versed in Marxism that included Richard Hoggart, Stuart Hall, Christopher Hill, Eric Hobsbawm, and Raymond Williams. Eagleton was the disciple of one of these major figures, Raymond Williams. Different as this group was from Leavisism, the two tendencies shared a respect for experience that Eagleton inherited. Members of this group founded *The New Left Review* in 1960 and the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies of the University of Birmingham in 1964; both institutions would be instrumental in the introduction of Continental ideas.

Together with others such as Perry Anderson, who became the editor of *New Left Review* in 1962, Eagleton was decisive in the introduction of the new French ideas in Britain in the late sixties and the early seventies. This was the time of the emergence of the new Left whose members were still optimistic, unaware of the imminent turn to the right (the ensuing disenchantment about the viability of a revolution would lead many to abandon the socialist project, but Eagleton found new seas to go on sailing on the left). This younger generation revisited some of the main tenets of Marxist criticism, rethought the nature and function of criticism, and were active in the transformation of the Humanities in Britain.

Eagleton's style of thought is partly determined by his allergy to absolutist "–isms", i.e., purisms that block the dialectical practice, to fashionable relativist or antirealist ideas, and to any kind of uncritical attachment to schools whether Leavisism, Existentialism, Structuralism, Post-structuralism, Post-modernism, or Marxism. He is particularly prone to destabilizing rigid poses and bringing the high low. But his dialectical frame of mind forbids flat rejections. Eagleton transforms his own discourse by redirecting rather than excluding what others have to say. He has criticised Leavisist middle class ethics and empiricism but shares with Leavisism the interest in moral issues, the importance attributed to experience, and the belief that there are permanent truths about the human condition. He has criticised Heidegger and Lacan, but his interpretation of their notions of death and desire allowed him to veer his project towards an existential analysis without abandoning Marxism; while he attacks Heidegger's existentialism and Lacanian Realist ethics, Eagleton appropriates them to explain Christian charity and propose an idea of the good life. He has decried high culture and its institutions, but he acknowledges their value as spaces for research and enlightened debate. He has launched devastating attacks on the Church, but he has adopted its basic Christian principles.

This collection of essays deals with Eagleton's most important concerns and the most characteristic qualities of his style: ideology, culture and religion, time and history, Marxism, materialism, literary theory and criticism, psychoanalysis, humour, and the good life.

Eagleton's essay "Homage to William Hazlitt" is representative of Eagleton's search for emancipatory possibilities in those spaces belonging to the dominant classes where ideological conflicts emerge; it is not just a question of detecting contradictory ideas but of revealing contradictory political positions that undermine the stable unity of the hegemonic block. His *The Function of Criticism* and *The Rape of Clarissa* are good examples of this part of Eagleton's project. He found in the eighteenth century an influential public sphere formed by the circulation of ideas in newspapers and debates in coffee houses. In the nineteenth century, when a novel by Dickens might provoke a change in legislation, the public sphere was still strong and in the first quarter of the century especially tumultuous.

Hazlitt was a figure unjustly forgotten for a century and Eagleton's essay contributes to its retrieval. Hazlitt is an inspiration for Eagleton. He was man of letters – a figure that Eagleton presents as a kind of moral and political guide – fully involved in the ideological battles of the time. Eagleton defines him "as one of the supreme craftsmen of the English language" at a time when style was inseparable from politics. A romantic, and in contrast to Wordsworth and Coleridge faithful to his radical ideas all his life, Romanticism for Hazlitt, rather than a movement opposed to Enlightenment, was the way to achieve its aims; he defended both the autonomy of reason and the autonomy of art, disinterested reason and imagination against economic interest. He was thus engaged in the politics of the aesthetic to which Eagleton has dedicated so much critical attention.

J. Manuel Barbeito's essay "The Process and the Moment. A Note on Terry Eagleton and Alain Badiou's Notions of Time and History, and their Idea of the Good Life" compares Eagleton and Badiou's notions of the good life and the possibilities that they, in a moment of disenchantment of the left and despite their grim description of the contemporary situation, find for enjoying a full life in the communist faith. This requires the redemption of time from quantitative calculation and of history from the chronological continuum. As Marxist materialists, the good life for Badiou and Eagleton is to be lived in this world and its conditions of possibility must be found here; but, as the event of communism is not at hand, this must take place in another dimension, in another time or world within this world. For such dimension to appear, the ordinary ways of seeing, thinking, living, and being must be interrupted, which results in a strong tension between the good life and ordinary life. The essay examines this interruption in the context of the

complex relation between the ecstatic moment and the ordinary life process in Western culture. Eagleton's and Badiou's solution to the problem and their notion of the good life coincide in their dialectics of transcendence in immanence but diverge on their basis: ontological in Badiou, existential in Eagleton.

Alex Callinicos's "Materialism and Finitude: Terry Eagleton's Marxism" also deals with Eagleton's concern with an ethics and politics of the good life. Eagleton's defence of universal values on a materialist basis opposes protestant dualism, idealist leftism, and postmodernist relativism. The essay highlights the importance of Lacan's notion of the Real for Eagleton – Eagleton invites us to obey Lacan's imperative "do not give up on your desire!" and warns against looking for the satisfaction of our wishes in the market – but focuses on the existential aspect of Eagleton's thought and on his defence of the radical possibilities of Christian values.

Callinicos points out the turn in Eagleton's writings from the 70's faith in class struggle as the motor of history – present in *Criticism and Ideology* (1976) – to the defence of knowledge and the acknowledgement of our creatureliness (e.g., finitude, frailty, and dependence) as the common ground of humanity; announced in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990) the change was confirmed in *Sweet Violence* (2003). In contrast to the fashionable ethical turn, Eagleton's ethics, Callinicos argues, are inseparable from politics. In Eagleton's writings, Marxist faith combined with Christian charity is both the source of strength to resist bourgeois individualism and the basis for the proposal of a new social order based on reciprocity.

Brian Coates' "'I'll go on' – Terry Eagleton, Writer" analyses the themes, the language, and the technique of Eagleton's fiction. Coates sees the link between this and the main body of Eagleton's production as a manifestation of Eagleton's vocation to cross barriers and of his aspiration to create "an inclusive model of expression". Criticism for Eagleton demands as much creative effort as writing fiction because he is not the kind of detached analyst bent on just producing an impartial study of his subject; on the contrary, in all his writings he is passionately engaged in an emancipatory project inseparable from extreme scholar rigour.

The concern with Irish history and politics appears throughout Eagleton's career. In his plays he exposes the violence of colonial institutions at the same time that he deals with moral and political issues, and questions of personal and national identity in the context of colonization. Coates examines the plays' politics of language and humour together with Eagleton's treatment of those questions and issues: the oppression of the British rule and the moral degradation of the agents who mechanically perform the

role that the institutions impose on them is exposed in the tragic end of Oscar Wilde (*Saint Oscar*) and of James Connolly (*The White, the Gold and the Gangrene*), and in the Irish famine (*God's Locusts*). Also in the context of colonization, *Disappearances* deals with the writer's attitude as regards his artistic and political duties. Finally, Coates shows *Saints and Scholars* and the film script *Wittgenstein* as parts of Eagleton's political agenda. The novel suggests a relation between Wittgenstein's interests and Marxist aesthetics, while the script presents the great philosopher as a divided and insecure personality resulting from the clash between the various cultural and personal components that constitute it.

Stephen Connor's "Terry Eagleton's Divine Comedy" focuses on a key aspect of Eagleton's style, humour, a rare quality in serious academic writing. Humour, Connor argues, is not an ornament, but essential to Eagleton's project because it is his way of relating traditionally separated poles, such as Marxism and religion, and mind and body. "Comedy," Connor argues, "has something to do with [the] reparative labour of the negative" and thus momentarily realizes the promise of Marxism and religion. Although laughter does not propel historical progress, it offers a foretaste of utopia, a pill to prevent disenchantment; rather than a means to advance, laughter contributes to enjoy the present moment and the expenditure of time regardless of its quantifiable productive value.

After describing various devices of Eagleton's humour, Connor highlights his extraordinary capacity for synthesis that he often uses to strip high theory of its solemn robes by causing a comical imbalance between the flashlight produced by a few words and the difficult intricate expositions of a theory. But Connor goes further and, against traditional theories of humour that have focused on what makes people laugh, argues that there is a comic impulse in search for occasions to laugh, the very capacity of laughing being one of these. This is characteristic of the earthly temporal human creature capable of enjoying its condition because, tragic though its predicament is, the historical animal has, according to Eagleton, the capacity to go beyond itself; despite our masochistic pleasure in suffering, we enjoy our capacity to suffer and keep going. We laugh, Connor states, "for the pleasure of getting above ourselves", the same reason for which we pray.

José Mª Díaz Lage and Jorge Sacido Romero's essay "Some Aspects of Terry Eagleton's Use of Freudian Psychoanalysis" deals with Eagleton's handling of psychoanalysis to supplement the historical materialist account of the political subject with a materialist account of the moral subject. Díaz and Sacido highlight the points of compatibility between Marxism and Freudian Psychoanalysis relevant for Eagleton. Like Mar-

xism, Psychoanalysis is concerned with those impersonal forces that subdue human beings; both Marxism and Psychoanalysis reveal the structures that underlie individual experience; both explore gaps and contradictions where the psychic or the political unconscious emerge; both concur in the necessity of creating a new relation between law and freedom and of redeeming time from exploitation for the human subject to be free. But Díaz and Sacido also detect tensions in Eagleton's appreciation of psychoanalysis concerning the central themes of work, love, and reason; and they also contrast the faith in the insistent, although soft, voice of reason that Freud declares in *The Future of an Illusion* and Eagleton's appeal to the Christian myth.

Norris's essay "On the Occasion of Terry Eagleton's Honorary Doctorate" explains the intellectual background of the third part of the twentieth century – the age of theory, poststructuralism and postmodernism – when a profound questioning of the project of the Enlightenment and the change in the British academy from English to Cultural Studies took place. Norris presents the main topics of the debate in which Eagleton took an active part: the traditional problems of the Marxist tradition, such as the relation between base and superstructure, ideology, and agency, and other more general philosophical issues, such as the relation between thought and reality, truth, and the universals that were questioned by postmodernism.

Crucial at this time was the introduction of French thought in which Eagleton actively participated. Norris explains that Eagleton is never carried away by fashions, but always maintains a critical distance. Nor does he out of hand reject adversaries or ideas that have gone out of fashion but rethinks and recreates them.

The last chapter of the volume, "A Debate with Eagleton", contains the interview between a group of postgraduates and Terry Eagleton celebrated on occasion of his honoris doctorate by the University of Santiago de Compostela in 1999. The questions cover the most important of Eagleton's concerns to date as reflected in his theory, literary criticism, and plays. The range of issues goes from the subject of the emancipatory project, materialism and subjectivity, Marxism and psychoanalysis, ethics and politics, the Marxist contemporary practice, Marxism and Feminism, ideology, the possibility of critique and the role of criticism, the function of literature, Postmodernism cultural identity, and Eagleton's relation to Ireland, particularly in his plays.

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A HOMAGE TO WILLIAM HAZLITT

UN HOMENAJE A WILLIAM HAZLITT

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Abstract: Hazlitt was a man of letters who developed his career in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century when the public sphere was still strong. Men of letters were a sort of moral guides in times of profound cultural change and political turbulence; they formed public opinion through speaking and writing to a large non-specialized audience about a wide range of issues of public interest including aesthetics, ethics, politics, religion, and science. The stage was divided between conservatives and radicals and, due to the political relevance of the debate and the intense rivalry between the contending parties, there was a violent exchange of ideas. One of the greatest stylists of the English language, Hazlitt was no detached observer but got involved in the defence of his position no matter the cost at a time when not only ideas but matters of style mattered politically. A radical all his life, he combined the ideas of the Enlightenment and Romanticism to defend equality, freedom, autonomy in art and life, and imaginative empathy.

Keywords: Hazlitt; Romanticism; man of letters; imaginative empathy.

Resumen: Hazlitt fue un hombre de letras que desarrolló su carrera profesional a finales del siglo XVIII y principios del XIX, cuando la esfera pública era todavía fuerte. Los hombres de letras eran una especie de guías morales en épocas de profundos cambios culturales y turbulencias políticas; formaban la opinión pública hablando y escribiendo para una gran audiencia no especializada sobre una amplia gama de temas de interés público, como la estética, la ética, la política, la religión y la ciencia. El escenario se dividía entre conservadores y radicales y, debido a la relevancia política del debate y a la intensa rivalidad entre los contrincantes, se producía un violento intercambio de ideas. Hazlitt, uno de los más grandes estilistas de la lengua inglesa, no fue un observador indiferente, sino que se involucró en la defensa de su postura sin importar el precio, en una época en la que no solo las ideas sino también las cuestiones de estilo importaban políticamente. Radical durante toda su vida, combinó las ideas de la Ilustración y el Romanticismo para defender la igualdad, la libertad, la autonomía en el arte y en la vida y la empatía imaginativa.

Palabras clave: Hazlitt; Romanticismo; hombre de letras; empatía imaginativa.

From Samuel Johnson to Christopher Hitchens, a strange, hybrid creature known as the "man of letters" has been an abiding feature of the British literary landscape. There have been some distinguished women of letters, too, not least George Eliot; but the category has been mostly confined to males. To be a kosher man of letters a century or two ago, you had to do more than write poems or novels. You had (for example) to launch a journal, dabble in theatre reviewing, throw off the odd biography, compile a dictionary, deliver public lectures, pen scurrilous essays for periodicals and edit the letters of some political bigwig. The man of letters was a literary jack of all trades, a hand-to-mouth hack who could knock together a popularising account of Darwinism as easily as he could churn out notes on an art exhibition. If he was to keep the wolf from the door, he had to be ready to review anything that came to hand, which meant that he had to be adept at more than one intellectual discipline. In this sense, he was the opposite of the professional academics who would eventually take over from him. He had also to take his political colour from the journals that hired him, if he was to put food on the table. As the reading public and the periodicals market expanded in the nineteenth century, the man of letters found himself able to eat more regularly than ever before. For all its claims to timeless spiritual wisdom, literature was now a full-blooded commercial enterprise.

The man of letters, then, was an intriguing combination of critic, sage, scholar, jour-

nalist and dilettante. He was what we might now call a public intellectual, long before the dreaded word 'intellectual' was coined in 1870s Europe. But he was less aloof and intimidating than the intellectual, since he needed to stay in close touch with the public in order to shape their views. His writing was more ad hoc and hand-to-mouth. He was entrusted with the momentous task of forming public opinion, and was thus, as one Victorian author remarked, part of the "unelected Commons" of the nation. In this period, the critic was still an influential public figure rather than a cloistered university academic. It fell to him to absorb and interpret new ideas, broadcasting them to a non-specialist reading public; and this meant combining the erudite with the popular in a way that intellectuals rarely do. As such new ideas grew more and more alarming in the Victorian era (atheism, evolution, the findings of geology, rumblings of social revolution), the man of letters became a consoler as well as critic, increasingly adopting a soothing bedside manner to quell the anxieties of the middle classes. He was expected to steer a distinctly nervous public through a tempest of social and cultural change. But he also wrote directly for all the people involved in political decision-making, and his voice could weigh heavily with them. It is probable that any important novel or intellectual controversy of the time would have reached a large proportion of the governing class.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the authority of the man of letters had been drastically diminished. What need was there for public critics when the market itself determined what was worth reading? As knowledge grew more specialist and esoteric, could the man of letters be anything more than an embarrassing amateur? In an age riven by social and political conflict, could he any longer be the mouthpiece of a public consensus? Public opinion, it seemed, was now something to be manipulated rather than commonly constructed. The public critic was on the way out, to be replaced by the political technocrat, public relations consultant and university don. An honorable tradition of such public critics would survive, all the way from Edmund Wilson and Susan Sontag to E.P. Thompson and Edward Said. But they would no longer rub shoulders with the powerful, as they did in the eighteenth-century coffee houses of London. On the contrary, power was now their adversary.

For over a century, one of the finest men of letters ever to emerge in England was shamefully neglected. Nor was this some inexplicable oversight. On the contrary, the sidelining of William Hazlitt was entirely predictable. For one thing, he was an ardent supporter of Napoleon, at a time when Britain was at war with France. This would have been rather like championing Bin Laden in the *New York Times* after the destruction of the World Trade Center. Nor did it help that he published a startlingly candid sexual memoir, *Liber Amoris*, which has provoked the wrath of some modern-day feminists,

though Virginia Woolf revered Hazlitt as a man "inspired by the most genuine passion for the rights and liberties of mankind" (Wu 440). A reviewer of the time attacked "this precious record of vulgarity and nastiness" as revealing the author "in all of the nakedness of his conceit, selfishness, slavering sensuality, filthy profligacy, and howling idiotcy" [*sic*] (quoted in Wu 337). But Hazlitt had grown used to this kind of stuff. He once remarked that if your enemies could not find a flaw in your reasoning, they would quickly find one in your reputation.

The true reasons for Hazlitt's unpopularity, however, run deeper. For one thing, he belonged to an age (early nineteenth-century Britain) in which public discourse was too bellicose and abrasive for the well-mannered Victorians who followed in its wake. It was also to prove offensive for a good many genteel critics of our own time. Hazlitt was too foul-mouthed and belligerent to qualify as a proper gent. The periodical press for which he wrote could be dogmatic, vituperative, scurrilous and shamelessly sectarian. Writs flew liberally to and fro. Hazlitt himself sued the Conservative *Blackwood's Magazine* for libel, a journal whose editor was an intellectual thug. The editor of the *London Magazine* was killed in a duel with one of his literary rivals. The editors of the radical *Examiner* were imprisoned for an alleged libel of the Prince Regent, a man whom there was much to be libellous about. *Fraser's Magazine* was an insulting rag crammed with doggerel and brutal burlesque. *Blackwood's* savaged what it sneeringly called the "Cockney school" of literature, a vein of lower-class vulgarity which included Hazlitt and his friend John Keats. Another Tory organ, the *Quarterly Review*, vented its spleen on Hazlitt, Keats, Shelley and Charlotte Bronte. The *Edinburgh Review* denounced the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge as regressive and ridiculous. In all these cases, social and artistic judgements were hard to distinguish.

When it came to abuse, Hazlitt could certainly compete with the best. He once described Conservatives as wallowing like swine in the trough of their senses, which would certainly draw a stern rebuke from the Speaker of the House of Commons today. Because he was unafraid to pronounce unpalatable truths, Hazlitt was vilified by powerful political opponents, found it hard to drum up work as a result and spent much of his life in poverty. If he spoke up for the poor, it was not from a position of patronage.

Hazlitt was an unabashed political radical, which is another reason why he was for so long denied his due as one of the supreme craftsmen of the English language. The modern age expects its critics to be dispassionate, whereas Hazlitt was a full-blooded partisan. In an age of brutal political repression, when Britain was effectively a police state, he was quite right to be so. Any posture of disinterestedness in such conditions would have played straight into the hands of the political autocrats. The ideal, Hazlitt

thought, lay not in some tepid middle ground, but in pushing an idea as far as it would go. He was allergic to the liberal banality that the truth lies somewhere between extremes. There was indeed, he believed, a genuine kind of disinterestedness, but it had nothing to do with some lofty neutrality. It consisted rather of the ability to feel one's way beyond one's own selfish interests into the needs and interests of others. He could, for example, melt his own mind into the mind of a man like Edmund Burke, much as he abhorred Burke's traditionalist politics. Like many others, he found such imaginative empathy in Shakespeare above all; but it also formed the subject of his first book, a philosophical study of human action. It seems ironic, then, that a writer who is often upbraided for his inveterate prejudices began his career by praising the virtue of disinterestedness. But the irony is only apparent. Disinterestedness for Hazlitt meant a selfless sympathy that could surmount vested interests, and this, in the context of his day, was hardly an impartial case.

If the contention between the periodicals of Hazlitt's day was so ferocious, it was largely because it had become well-nigh impossible to distinguish literature and politics, and this at a time of world-shaking political events. If criticism was so vital, it was largely because the political stakes were so high. A certain 'low' species of imagery could suggest dangerously republican sentiments, whereas a relish for the neo-classical might imply support for the authoritarian government in Whitehall. Political battle could be joined over questions of rhyme or diction. Critics as astute as Hazlitt could unpack a whole politics from a rhetorical turn of phrase, and later critics have done much the same with his own scintillating prose.

Literary judgements were also hard to separate from philosophical ones. To speak up for universal reason, like Tom Paine, was to place oneself firmly on the left; to view reason as less crucial than habit or instinct probably meant opposing the French Revolution. Rarely in the annals of British culture have art, politics and philosophy been so densely interwoven. Is William Blake's vision religious, artistic, political, philosophical, or all of these things together? In what sense is Paine's anemic literary style, as opposed to Edmund Burke's gorgeous, impassioned prose, a pointer to where these men stand on the major social issues of their time?

The issues at question were certainly momentous. Hazlitt was born in 1778, only two years after Britain's colony across the Atlantic declared its independence. It was a nation in which he had an early involvement, as we shall see in a moment. When he was 11 years old, the Bastille fell in Paris, and along with it the detested *Ancien Régime* in France. There were mutinies in the British navy when Hazlitt was a young man, along with some vicious anti-trade union legislation from a badly rattled government. The Brit-

ain in which this doughty dissenter grew up was stiff with spies, agents provocateurs, bread riots, police riots, treason trials, machine breaking, rural militancy, prosecutions for sedition and transportation for the starving who stole. Those suspected of political rebellion might live just long enough to see their genitals cut off and their bowels extracted from their half-hanged bodies. In these early years of the Industrial Revolution, more than one in twenty of the population were destitute, while some of those fortunate enough to work were unfortunate enough to be worked to death. The British working class, which would later provide some organized resistance to these horrors, was still in the making; so it fell to the literati–to writers like Blake, Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft, Keats, Byron, Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt–to develop a critique which the militants of the British labour movement would later make their own.

Hazlitt, then, was part of a current of radical Romanticism for which the opposite of oppressive power was the creative imagination. The imagination represented a freedom and spiritual wealth which were not to be found in the dark Satanic mills of early industrial Britain. It was a transformative power, and as such had affinities with revolutionary politics. It was a sign of the human capacity to project beyond the present, and thus foreshadowed utopia. The imagination was boundless, and so was uniquely precious in a civilisation in which everything could be weighed and measured. Art was play, not labour, and so held out a promise of emancipation to the wage-slaves of the first industrial capitalist nation in history. The work of art obeyed no law but its own, and could therefore be seen as a model of human autonomy. It was self-determining, just as peoples and nations ought to be. It had no reason or purpose beyond its own self-delight; and in a utilitarian age which judged things in terms of their practical functions, this glorious uselessness carried with it some subversive implications.

From William Blake to Oscar Wilde, art was an image of what men and women could themselves become in changed political conditions. They, too, could be gloriously pointless; in fact, this was the whole point of human existence, which the grey-bearded puritans and chill-blooded champions of the work ethic had never understood. Human beings resembled works of art in being ends in themselves; and any attempt to use them for goals beyond themselves would violate their true nature. Ironically, then, art for art's sake was not a retreat from politics; it was a politics in itself.

Romanticism was not the only source of Hazlitt's dissent. He was also heir to the radical Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, with its faith in liberty, equality, freedom of inquiry and a rational social order. It was a legacy he inherited from his father, a Unitarian minister from Tipperary who had openly espoused the cause of American independence at a time when it was dangerous to do so in Britain. A newspaper arti-

cle Hazlitt Senior wrote on the British torture of American prisoners of war brought him death threats. In his native Ireland, the radical Enlightenment took the political form of the revolutionary United Irishmen, whose doomed insurrection of 1798 he supported, and with some of whose leaders he had connections. He was also a friend of Benjamin Franklin, and when young William was five he transported the family to the more politically congenial climate of America. Britain seemed to him a den of injustice, while America promised to be a haven of freedom. Writing his first letter at the age of eight, Hazlitt Junior said of America "that it would have been a great deal better if the white people had not found it out" (quoted in Wu 36). "Let the [Indians have] it to themselves for it was made for them" (36), this pocket-sized anti-colonialist went on to insist.

The Hazlitts settled at first–where else?–in Philadelphia; but Hazlitt Sr. failed to secure a clerical post there and moved to Boston, where he won an enthusiastic following among the city's liberal-minded churchgoers. Even here, however, he could find no permanent position. The land of liberty had yet to catch up with his brand of rational dissent. Reluctantly, then, he shipped himself and his family back to benighted Britain, but before doing so left a quiet revolution behind him. It was through his influence that King's Chapel in Boston severed its affiliation with the Episcopal Church and became America's first Unitarian institution. The man who produced one of Britain's finest men of letters also planted a new creed in the New World.

Hazlitt Jr. had been trained up to be a Unitarian minister, and once back in London attended a Unitarian college denounced by the political establishment as a hotbed of heresy and sedition. It was here that he first encountered the philosophers of the French Enlightenment, who set his thought firmly in a republican mould. His religious belief, however, dwindled as his political faith grew, so that by the age of seventeen he had blossomed into what he himself an avowed infidel. "Nothing", he was to write later, "can surely surpass the excesses, the horrors, the refinements in cruelty, and the cold-blooded malignity which have been exercised in the name and under the garb of religion" (*The Life of Napoleon Buonaparte* 203).

When this young God-denier finally launched upon a precarious artistic career, it was not as a writer but as a painter. In fact, he was competent enough to exhibit at the Royal Academy, an institution he would later castigate for its artistic conservatism. What turned him to literature was an encounter with the feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, as well as a fruitful friendship with the poets Wordsworth and Coleridge, both at that time enthusiasts for radical reform. Hazlitt would later pillory the two for their political apostasy, as Wordsworth ended up writing third-rate sonnets in praise of capital punishment and Coleridge clamoured for working men's protests to be violently suppressed. He was

also to rub shoulders with Keats, Shelley and Charles Lamb. He became an increasingly prominent man of letters, one both revered and reviled, with all the typical versatility of the species. In a career of unstinting literary labour, he delivered public lectures on philosophy, Shakespeare, English poetry and English stage comedy, worked at drama and painting, wrote on literature and politics for a range of major journals and published a series of works–*Table Talk, The Spirit of the Age, Political Essays, Lectures on the English Comic Writers*–which in the words of one reviewer of the time established him as "one of the ablest and most eloquent critics of our nation" (quoted in Cook xlvi).

He was also, one should add, one of the most superb stylists. Few British critics can bring a person, a political ideology, or a piece of writing as vividly alive as Hazlitt. Few of them, too, could match his combination of grace and grittiness, subtlety and satiric force. Writing of a contemporary fop who complained of the misfortune that his lame leg was also his favourite one, he finds in this casual shaft of wit "an Horatian ease and elegance–a slippered negligence, a cushioned effeminacy–it would take years of careless study and languid enjoyment to strike out so quant and ingenious a conceit" ("Brumelliana" 160). Or consider this comment on the painter Van Dyke:

> Van Dyke's flesh-colour, though it has great truth and purity, wants gusto. It has not the internal character, the living principle in it. It is a smooth surface, not a warm, moving mass . . . The impression slides off from the eye, and does not, like the tones of Titian's pencil, leave a sting behind in the mind of the spectator. The eye does not acquire a taste or appetite for what it sees ("On Gusto" 267).

Wordsworth's poetry he finds too puritanically hostile to lavishness:

> The decencies of costume, the decorations of vanity are stripped off without mercy as barbarous, idle, and Gothic. The jewels in the crisped hair, the diadem on the polished brow, are thought meretricious, theatrical, vulgar; and nothing contents his fastidious taste beyond a simple garland of flowers . . . by internal evidence one might almost be sure that [his poetry] was written in a mountainous country, from its bareness, its simplicity, its loftiness, and its depth! ("Mr. Wordsworth" 351).

From his attempts to stay out of a debtors' prison to his tempestuous love life, Hazlitt's life was as turbulent as his political wrangling. A friend described him and his wife Sarah as "a worthy couple–they quarrel, fight, make it up over the gin bottle, and get drunk together" (quoted in Wu 193). His reputation has been revived in England of late by a series of editions and critical studies. A Hazlitt Society has been established, and money has been raised for the restoration of the critic's tomb in Soho. Hazlitt was not, as Duncan Wu's subtitle claims, the first modern man. Historians tend to date the modern period from the early seventeenth century, in which case Descartes, Shakespeare or

Copernicus have a far stronger claim to the title. He was, even so, one of the giants of English letters, as well as one of those rare political figures who start out on the left and end up there as well. While others around him turned their coats, feathered their nests and came obsequiously to terms with the insolence of power, he himself never wavered in his faith in the people and his rage at injustice. He died pretty much as hard-up as when he set out. With its usual eye for agreeable coincidences, history ordained that Hazlitt should live for a while in the London house of John Milton, regicide and republican, his great English predecessor in the defense of liberty.

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UN HOMENAJE A WILLIAM HAZLITT

A HOMAGE TO WILLIAM HAZLITT

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Resumen: Hazlitt fue un hombre de letras que desarrolló su carrera profesional a finales del siglo XVIII y principios del XIX, cuando la esfera pública era todavía fuerte. Los hombres de letras eran una especie de guías morales en épocas de profundos cambios culturales y turbulencias políticas; formaban la opinión pública hablando y escribiendo para una gran audiencia no especializada sobre una amplia gama de temas de interés público, como la estética, la ética, la política, la religión y la ciencia. El escenario se dividía entre conservadores y radicales y, debido a la relevancia política del debate y a la intensa rivalidad entre los contrincantes, se producía un violento intercambio de ideas. Hazlitt, uno de los más grandes estilistas de la lengua inglesa, no fue un observador indiferente, sino que se involucró en la defensa de su postura sin importar el precio, en una época en la que no solo las ideas sino también las cuestiones de estilo importaban políticamente. Radical durante toda su vida, combinó las ideas de la Ilustración y el Romanticismo para defender la igualdad, la libertad, la autonomía en el arte y en la vida y la empatía imaginativa.

Palabras clave: Hazlitt; Romanticismo; hombre de letras; empatía imaginativa.

Abstract: Hazlitt was a man of letters who developed his career in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century when the public sphere was still strong. Men of letters were a sort of moral guides in times of profound cultural change and political turbulence; they formed public opinion through speaking and writing to a large non-specialized audience about a wide range of issues of public interest including aesthetics, ethics, politics, religion, and science. The stage was divided between conservatives and radicals and, due to the political relevance of the debate and the intense rivalry between the contending parties, there was a violent exchange of ideas. One of the greatest stylists of the English language, Hazlitt was no detached observer but got involved in the defence of his position no matter the cost at a time when not only ideas but matters of style mattered politically. A radical all his life, he combined the ideas of the Enlightenment and Romanticism to defend equality, freedom, autonomy in art and life, and imaginative empathy.

Keywords: Hazlitt; Romanticism; man of letters; imaginative empathy.

Desde Samuel Johnson hasta Christopher Hitchens, una criatura extraña e híbrida conocida como el hombre de letras ha sido un elemento constante del paisaje literario británico. También han existido algunas mujeres de letras distinguidas, como George Eliot, pero la categoría ha estado limitada principalmente a los hombres. Para ser un legítimo hombre de letras hace uno o dos siglos, había que hacer algo más que escribir poemas o novelas. Se tenía, por ejemplo, que fundar una revista, hacer incursiones en la crítica teatral, lanzarse a escribir alguna que otra biografía, compilar un diccionario, pronunciar conferencias públicas, componer ensayos incendiarios para periódicos y revisar las cartas de algún pez gordo de la política. El hombre de letras era un literato que sabía hacer de todo, un plumífero que vivía al día y podía improvisar un texto divulgativo sobre el darwinismo con la misma facilidad con la que producía en masa apuntes sobre una exposición de arte. Si quería no pasar hambre, tenía que estar dispuesto a revisar todo lo que pasara por sus manos, lo que significaba que tenía que ser experto en más de una disciplina intelectual. En este sentido, era lo opuesto a los académicos profesionales que acabarían sustituyéndole. Tenía, además, que adecuar su línea política a las revistas que le contrataban si quería llevar comida a casa. A medida que el lectorado y el mercado de los periódicos se expandieron a lo largo del siglo XIX, el hombre de letras pudo comer con más regularidad que nunca. A pesar de sus pretensiones de sabiduría espiritual intemporal, la literatura era ahora una empresa comercial en toda regla.

El hombre de letras, por tanto, era una interesante combinación de crítico, sabio, erudito, periodista y diletante. Era lo que hoy podríamos llamar un intelectual público, mucho antes de que se acuñara la temida palabra "intelectual" en la Europa de 1870. Era, no obstante, menos distante e intimidante que el intelectual, ya que necesitaba estar en contacto estrecho con el público para conformar sus opiniones. Su escritura era más cotidiana y *ad hoc*. Se le encomendó la crucial tarea de formar la opinión pública, por lo que formaba parte, como señaló un autor victoriano, de los "Comunes no elegidos" de la nación. En esta época, el crítico seguía siendo una figura pública influyente más que un académico universitario enclaustrado. Le correspondía a él absorber e interpretar las nuevas ideas y transmitirlas a un público lector no especializado, lo que implicaba combinar lo erudito con lo popular de una manera que los intelectuales rara vez llevan a cabo. A medida que esas nuevas ideas se volvían cada vez más alarmantes en la era victoriana (ateísmo, evolución, descubrimientos de la geología, rumores de revolución social), el hombre de letras se convertía en un consolador además de crítico, adoptando una mayor actitud calmada para apaciguar las ansiedades de las clases medias. Se esperaba de él que guiara a un público claramente inquieto a través de una tempestad de cambios sociales y culturales. Pero también escribía directamente para todas aquellas personas implicadas en la toma de decisiones políticas, por lo que su voz podía tener un gran peso. Es probable que cualquier novela o controversia intelectual importante de la época hubiera llegado a una gran parte de la clase dirigente.

Hacia finales del siglo XIX, la autoridad del hombre de letras había decrecido drásticamente. ¿Qué necesidad había de una crítica pública cuando el propio mercado determinaba lo que merecía la pena leer? A medida que el conocimiento se volvía más especializado y esotérico, ¿podía el hombre de letras ser algo más que un vergonzoso aficionado? En una época desgarrada por los conflictos sociales y políticos, ¿podía seguir siendo el portavoz de un consenso público? La opinión pública, al parecer, era ahora algo que podía manipularse en lugar de construirse en común. El crítico público, en vías de desaparición, fue sustituido por el tecnócrata político, el asesor de relaciones públicas y el catedrático universitario. Una honorable tradición de estos críticos públicos subsistiría desde Edmund Wilson y Susan Sontag hasta E.P. Thompson y Edward Said, pero ya no se codearían más con los poderosos, como hacían en los cafés londinenses del siglo XVIII. Por el contrario, el poder era ahora su adversario.

Durante más de un siglo, uno de los hombres de letras más extraordinarios que ha dado Inglaterra fue bochornosamente ignorado. No se trata, sin embargo, de un descuido inexplicable. Al contrario, la marginación de William Hazlitt era totalmente previsible. En primer lugar, fue un ardiente partidario de Napoleón en un momento en que Gran

Bretaña estaba en guerra con Francia. Esto habría sido como defender a Bin Laden en el *New York Times* después del derribo del World Trade Center. Tampoco ayudó el hecho de que publicara sus sorprendentemente sinceras memorias sexuales, *Liber Amoris*, que provocaron la ira de algunas feministas contemporáneas, a pesar de que Virginia Woolf venerara a Hazlitt como un hombre "inspirado por la más genuina pasión por los derechos y las libertades de la humanidad" (Wu 440)[1]. Un crítico de la época atacó "esta preciada crónica de vulgaridad y repulsión" en tanto que revela al autor "en toda la desnudez de su arrogancia, su egoísmo, su sensualidad esclavizante, su libertinaje obsceno y su idiotez clamorosa (sic)" (237). Pero Hazlitt ya se había acostumbrado a este tipo de cosas. En una ocasión comentó que si tus enemigos no podían hallar un defecto en tu razonamiento, lo encontrarían rápidamente en tu reputación.

Sin embargo, las verdaderas razones de la impopularidad de Hazlitt son más profundas. En primer lugar, pertenecía a una época (la Gran Bretaña de principios del siglo XIX) en la que el discurso público era demasiado belicoso y desagradable para los victorianos de buenos modales que siguieron su estela. Resultaría de la misma manera ofensivo para una buena parte de los gentiles críticos de nuestra época. Hazlitt era demasiado malhablado y beligerante para ser considerado un caballero en condiciones. La prensa para la que escribía podía ser dogmática, vituperante, injuriosa y descaradamente sectaria. Una multitud de órdenes judiciales volaba de un lado a otro. El propio Hazlitt demandó por difamación a la revista conservadora *Blackwood's Magazine*, cuyo director era un intelectual agresivo. El director del *London Magazine* murió en un duelo contra uno de sus rivales literarios. Los editores del radical *Examiner* fueron encarcelados por una supuesta difamación del Príncipe Regente, un hombre sobre el que se podía calumniar mucho. El *Fraser's Magazine* era un periodicucho insultante repleto de mala poesía y parodias crueles. *Blackwood's* arremetía salvajemente contra lo que con desprecio llamaba la "escuela Cockney" de la literatura, una guisa de vulgaridad de clase baja que incluía a Hazlitt y a su amigo John Keats. Otro portavoz tory, la *Quarterly Review*, descargó su bilis contra Hazlitt, Keats, Shelley y Charlotte Bronte. La *Edinburgh Review* condenó la poesía de Wordsworth y Coleridge como regresiva y ridícula. En todos estos casos, era difícil distinguir los juicios sociales de los artísticos.

En lo que concierne a los insultos, Hazlitt podía, en efecto, competir con los mejores. Una vez dijo de los conservadores que se revolcaban como puercos en el abrevadero de sus sentidos, lo que con toda certeza provocaría una severa reprimenda del Presidente de la Cámara de los Comunes hoy en día. Como no temía pronunciar ver-

1 Nota del traductor: todas las citas del texto son traducciones propias.

dades desagradables, Hazlitt fue vilipendiado por sus poderosos adversarios políticos, tuvo en consecuencia dificultades para conseguir trabajo y pasó gran parte de su vida en la pobreza. Si habló en favor de los pobres, no fue desde una posición de patrocinio.

Hazlitt era un extremista político sin complejos, otra de las razones por la que durante mucho tiempo se le negó poder ser uno de los supremos artesanos de la lengua inglesa. Mientras que en la era moderna se espera que los críticos sean desapasionados, Hazlitt era un partidario de pura sangre. En una época de brutal represión política, en la que Gran Bretaña era efectivamente un estado policial, tenía mucha razón en serlo. Cualquier postura de desinterés en tales condiciones habría jugado directamente a favor de los autócratas políticos. El ideal, pensaba Hazlitt, no estriba en un tibio término medio, sino en llevar una idea tan lejos como sea posible. Era alérgico a la banalidad liberal que dicta que la verdad se encuentra en algún punto entre los extremos. En su opinión, existe *de facto* un auténtico tipo de imparcialidad, que nada tiene que ver con una neutralidad grandilocuente. Consistía más bien en avanzar a tientas, más allá de los propios intereses egoístas, hacia las necesidades e intereses de los demás. Podía, por ejemplo, moldear su propia mente a la semejanza de la de un hombre como Edmund Burke, por mucho que aborreciera su política tradicionalista. Como muchos otros, encontró esa empatía imaginativa en Shakespeare por encima de todos, y fue además el tema de su primer libro, un estudio filosófico de la acción humana. Parece irónico, pues, que un escritor al que a menudo se le reprochan sus prejuicios inveterados comenzara su carrera alabando la virtud del desinterés. Pero la ironía es solo aparente: para Hazlitt, la imparcialidad conllevaba una simpatía desinteresada que podía superar los intereses personales, lo que, en el contexto de su época, era un caso difícilmente imparcial.

Si la disputa entre los periódicos de la época de Hazlitt era tan feroz, se debía en buena medida a que se había vuelto casi imposible distinguir la literatura de la política, y esto sucedía en una época de acontecimientos políticos que sacudían el mundo. Si la crítica era tan vital, se debía en gran parte a que lo que estaba en juego era muy importante. Una suerte de "baja" imaginería podía sugerir sentimientos peligrosamente republicanos, mientras que el gusto por lo neoclásico implicaría el apoyo al gobierno autoritario de Whitehall. La batalla política podía aunarse por cuestiones de rima o dicción. Críticos tan astutos como Hazlitt podían desentrañar toda una política a partir de un giro retórico. Críticos posteriores han hecho lo mismo con su brillante prosa.

Los juicios literarios también eran difíciles de separar de los filosóficos. Defender la razón universal, como Tom Paine, conllevaba situarse firmemente a la izquierda; considerar que la razón era menos crucial que la costumbre o el instinto significaba

probablemente oponerse a la Revolución Francesa. Rara vez en los anales de la cultura británica el arte, la política y la filosofía han estado tan estrechamente entrelazados. ¿Es la visión de William Blake religiosa, artística, política, filosófica o todo ello a la vez? ¿En qué sentido el anémico estilo literario de Paine, en contraposición a la magnífica y apasionada prosa de Edmund Burke, es un indicador de la posición de estos hombres respecto a las principales cuestiones sociales de su tiempo?

Los asuntos en cuestión eran, sin duda alguna, cruciales. Hazlitt nació en 1778, solo dos años después de que la colonia británica al otro lado del Atlántico declarara su independencia. Fue una nación en la que se involucró muy pronto, como veremos en un momento. A la edad de once años, la Bastilla cayó en París, y con ella el detestado *ancien régime* de Francia. Cuando Hazlitt era joven, se produjeron amotinamientos en la marina británica y un gobierno gravemente desconcertado promulgó una serie de despiadadas leyes antisindicales. La Gran Bretaña en la que creció este valiente disidente estaba repleta de espías, agentes provocadores, motines por falta de pan, disturbios policiales, juicios por traición, rotura de máquinas, militancia rural, procesos por sedición y encarcelamiento para los robaban porque estaban hambrientos. Aquellos sospechosos de rebelión política podían vivir lo suficiente para ver cómo se les cortaban los genitales y se les extraían los intestinos de sus cuerpos medio colgados. En estos primeros años de la Revolución Industrial, más de uno de cada veinte habitantes se encontraba desamparado, mientras que algunos de los afortunados que trabajaban tenían la desgracia de morir haciéndolo. La clase obrera británica, que más tarde ofrecería cierta resistencia organizada a estos horrores, se hallaba todavía en proceso. Correspondió a los literatos –a escritores como Blake, Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft, Keats, Byron, Hazlitt y Leigh Hunt– desarrollar una crítica que los militantes del movimiento obrero británico harían suya más tarde.

Hazlitt, por tanto, formaba parte de una corriente del Romanticismo radical para la que lo contrario al poder opresivo era la imaginación creativa. La imaginación representaba una libertad y una riqueza espiritual que no se encontraban en las oscuras fábricas diabólicas de la Gran Bretaña industrial temprana. Este era un poder transformador que, como tal, tenía afinidades con la política revolucionaria. Era un indicio de la capacidad humana para proyectarse más allá del presente y, por consiguiente, presagiaba una utopía. La imaginación no tenía límites, por lo que era un valor único en una civilización en la que todo podía ser sopesado y medido. El arte era un juego, no un oficio, y de esta manera ofrecía una promesa de emancipación a los esclavos asalariados de la primera nación capitalista industrial de la historia. La obra de arte no obedece más que a su propia ley, por lo que puede considerarse un modelo de autonomía humana. Era autodeterminante, como deben

serlo los pueblos y las naciones. No poseía razón o propósito alguno más allá de su propio deleite y, en una época utilitaria que juzgaba las cosas en términos de sus funciones prácticas, esta gloriosa inutilidad acarreaba algunas implicaciones subversivas.

Desde William Blake hasta Oscar Wilde, el arte era una imagen de lo que los hombres y mujeres podían llegar a ser en condiciones políticas distintas. Ellos también podían ser gloriosamente inútiles; de hecho, este era el sentido de la existencia humana, que los puritanos de barba grisácea y los defensores a ultranza de la ética del trabajo jamás habían entendido. Los seres humanos se asemejan a las obras de arte por ser fines en sí mismos; cualquier intento de utilizarlos para metas que se dilatan más allá de ellos mismos violaría su verdadera naturaleza. Irónicamente, pues, el arte por el arte no era una retirada de la política, sino una política en sí misma.

El Romanticismo no fue la única fuente de desavenencia de Hazlitt. También fue heredero de la Ilustración radical del siglo XVIII, con su fe en la libertad, la igualdad, la libertad de investigación y un orden social racional. Fue un legado que heredó de su padre, un ministro unitario de Tipperary que había apoyado abiertamente la causa de la independencia de Estados Unidos en una época en la que era peligroso hacerlo en Gran Bretaña. Un artículo de prensa sobre la tortura británica de los prisioneros de guerra estadounidenses que Hazlitt padre escribió le valió amenazas de muerte. En su Irlanda natal, la Ilustración radical adoptó la forma política de los revolucionarios Irlandeses Unidos, cuya insurrección de 1798 destinada al fracaso apoyó y con algunos de cuyos líderes estableció vínculos. Fue también amigo de Benjamin Franklin y, cuando el pequeño William tenía cinco años, trasladó a la familia al clima políticamente más agradable de los Estados Unidos. Gran Bretaña le parecía un antro de injusticia, mientras que los Estados Unidos prometían ser un remanso de libertad. En la primera carta que escribió a la edad de ocho años, Hazlitt hijo dijo de América "que habría sido mucho mejor si los blancos no la hubiesen descubierto" (Wu 36). Este pequeño anticolonialista insistió en que "hay que dejar que (los indios) se queden con ella, porque ha sido hecha para ellos" (36).

Los Hazlitt se establecieron al principio –¿dónde si no?– en Filadelfia, pero Hazlitt padre no consiguió un puesto clerical allí, por lo que se trasladó a Boston, donde se ganó un seguimiento entusiasta entre los feligreses de mentalidad liberal de la ciudad. Sin embargo, ni siquiera aquí pudo encontrar un cargo permanente. La tierra de la libertad aún no se había puesto al día con su estilo de disidencia racional. Así que, a regañadientes, se embarcó con su familia de vuelta a la ignorante Gran Bretaña, pero antes de hacerlo dejó una revolución silenciosa tras de sí. Gracias a su influencia, la capilla King's de Boston rompió su afiliación con la Iglesia Episcopal y se convirtió en

la primera institución unitaria de los Estados Unidos. El hombre que engendró a uno de los mejores hombres de letras de Gran Bretaña también implantó un nuevo credo en el Nuevo Mundo.

Hazlitt hijo se había formado para ser ministro unitario y, una vez de vuelta en Londres, asistió a un colegio unitario condenado por la clase política por ser un foco de herejía y sedición. Fue allí donde encontró por primera vez a los filósofos de la Ilustración francesa, que situaron con firmeza su pensamiento en una matriz republicana. Sin embargo, sus creencias religiosas fueron disminuyendo a medida que crecía su fe política, de modo que a los diecisiete años ya se había transformado en un infiel declarado. "Nada" –escribiría más tarde– "puede seguramente superar los excesos, los horrores, las formas más refinadas de la crueldad y la malignidad a sangre fría que se han ejercido en nombre y bajo el abrigo de la religión" (Cook 95).

Cuando este joven, que negaba la existencia de Dios, se lanzó finalmente a una precaria carrera artística, no fue como escritor sino como pintor. De hecho, fue lo suficientemente competente para exponer en la Royal Academy, institución a la que más tarde fustigaría por su conservadurismo artístico. Lo que le llevó a la literatura fue un encuentro con la feminista Mary Wollstonecraft, así como una fructífera amistad con los poetas Wordsworth y Coleridge, ambos por aquel entonces entusiastas de la reforma radical. Hazlitt pondría más tarde en ridículo a ambos por su apostasía política, puesto que Wordsworth acabó escribiendo sonetos de tercera categoría en alabanza de la pena capital y Coleridge reivindicó que se sofocaran violentamente las protestas de los trabajadores. También se codeó con Keats, Shelley y Charles Lamb. Se convirtió en un hombre de letras cada vez más prominente, venerado y vilipendiado a la vez, con toda la versatilidad típica de su especie. En una carrera de pródigo trabajo literario, pronunció conferencias públicas sobre filosofía, Shakespeare, poesía inglesa y comedia escénica inglesa, trabajó en el teatro y la pintura, escribió sobre literatura y política para un abanico de revistas importantes y publicó una serie de obras (*Table Talk, The Spirit of the Age, Political Essays, Lectures on the English Comic Writers*) que, en palabras de un crítico de la época, le consagraron como "uno de los críticos más hábiles y elocuentes de nuestra nación" (Cook xlvi).

Asimismo fue, debemos añadir, uno de los más espléndidos estilistas. Pocos críticos británicos pueden dar vida a una persona, a una ideología política o a un escrito de forma tan vívida como hizo Hazlitt. Son pocos, además, los que pueden igualar su combinación de elegancia y crudeza, de sutileza y fuerza satírica. Al escribir sobre un petimetre contemporáneo que se lamentaba de la desgracia de que su pierna coja era también su favorita, encontró en este eje casual de ingenio "una facilidad y elegancia horacianas . . . una negligencia resbaladiza, un afeminamiento amortiguado . . . se ne-

cesitarían años de estudio descuidado y de disfrute lánguido para dar con un concepto tan evocador e ingenioso . . .” (160). Consideremos también este comentario acerca del pintor Van Dyke:

> “El color de la carne de Van Dyke, aunque tiene una gran verdad y pureza, carece de entusiasmo. No posee el carácter interno, el principio vivo en él. Es una superficie lisa, no una masa cálida y conmovedora . . . La impresión se desliza desde el ojo, y no deja, como los tonos del lápiz de Tiziano, una punción en la mente del espectador. El ojo no adquiere un sabor o apetito por lo que ve” (267).

La poesía de Wordsworth le parece demasiado puritana y hostil para la suntuosidad:

> “Los adornos de los trajes, las decoraciones de la vanidad son despojados sin piedad como bárbaros, holgazanes y góticos. Las joyas en los rizos, la diadema en la frente despejada, se consideran rimbombantes, teatrales, vulgares, y nada satisface su gusto quisquilloso más allá de una simple guirnalda de flores (…). ¡Por la evidencia interna uno casi podría estar seguro de que (su poesía) fue escrita en una región montañosa, por su desnudez, su simplicidad, su altanería y su profundidad!” (251).

Desde sus intentos de mantenerse lejos de una prisión de deudores hasta su tempestuosa vida amorosa, la vida de Hazlitt fue tan turbulenta como sus disputas políticas. Un amigo le describió a él y a su esposa Sarah como “una pareja respetable: discuten, se pelean, se reconcilian con una botella de ginebra de por medio y se emborrachan juntos” (Wu 193). Su reputación se ha recuperado recientemente en Inglaterra gracias a una serie de ediciones y estudios críticos. Se ha creado una Sociedad Hazlitt y recaudado dinero para la restauración de la tumba del crítico en el Soho. Hazlitt no fue, como afirma el subtítulo de Duncan Wu, el primer hombre moderno. Los historiadores tienden a fechar la época moderna a partir de principios del siglo XVII, en cuyo caso Descartes, Shakespeare o Copérnico tienen un mayor derecho a este título. Aun así, fue uno de los gigantes de las letras inglesas, así como una de esas raras figuras políticas que empiezan en la izquierda y acaban también en ella. Mientras otros a su alrededor cambiaban de chaqueta, barrían hacia adentro y asumían servilmente la insolencia del poder, él nunca vaciló en su fe en el pueblo y en su rabia ante la injusticia. Murió como vivió: sin tener casi un duro. Con su habitual ojo para las gratas coincidencias, la historia decretó que Hazlitt viviera durante un tiempo en el domicilio londinense de John Milton, regicida y republicano, su gran predecesor inglés en la defensa de la libertad.

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THE PROCESS AND THE MOMENT. A NOTE ON TERRY EAGLETON AND ALAIN BADIOU'S NOTIONS OF TIME AND HISTORY, AND THEIR IDEA OF THE GOOD LIFE[1]

EL PROCESO Y EL MOMENTO. UNA NOTA SOBRE LAS NOCIONES DE TIEMPO E HISTORIA Y LA IDEA DE VIDA BUENA EN LA OBRA DE TERRY EAGLETON Y ALAIN BADIOU

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Abstract: Commenting on Alain Badiou's *Ethics*, Terry Eagleton states that Badiou is "as much caught in a sort of antithesis between the ordinary and epiphanic as Derrida". The opposition between process and moment is inherent to various key oppositions in Western culture: ascesis vs. ecstasy, works vs. faith, observation vs. contemplation, perception vs. vision, reason vs. imagination, discourse and calculation vs. intuition, finitude vs. infinity, time vs. eternity, life vs. death, ordinary vs. authentic life. This essay focuses on Eagleton's and Badiou's dialectical treatment of these oppositions and its bearing on their notions of time and history and their proposal of an idea of the good life on a materialist basis.

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In the first part of the essay, I will briefly look at the question in the Western tradition. In a first step, I will consider various aspects of the relation between the process and the moment as they appear in a few well-known poems in English; in a second step, I will examine Peter Osborne's discussion of the relevance of the moment for the temporalization of (chronological) time and history in his book *The Politics of Time*. In the second part of the essay, I will contrast Eagleton's and Badiou's competing solutions to the problem by analysing their points of convergence and divergence and exploring their causes.

Keywords: Terry Eagleton; Alain Badiou; Marxism; materialism; time; history; ethics; the good life.

Resumen: Al comentar la *Ética* de Alain Badiou, Terry Eagleton afirma que Badiou está "tan atrapado como Derrida en una especie de antítesis entre lo ordinario y lo epifánico". La oposición entre proceso y momento es inherente a varias oposiciones clave en la tradición occidental: ascesis vs. éxtasis, obras vs. fe, observación vs. contemplación, percepción vs. visión, razón vs. imaginación, discurso y cálculo vs. intuición, finitud vs. infinito, tiempo vs. eternidad, vida vs. muerte, vida ordinaria vs. vida auténtica. Este artículo se centra en el tratamiento dialéctico de estas oposiciones por parte de Eagleton y Badiou y el efecto de tal tratamiento en sus nociones de tiempo e historia y en su propuesta de una idea de la vida buena sobre una base materialista que supera dichas oposiciones.

En la primera parte del ensayo examinaré brevemente esta cuestión en la tradición occidental. En primer lugar, consideraré varios aspectos de la relación entre el proceso y el momento tal y como aparecen en algunos poemas bien conocidos en inglés; en una segunda etapa, examinaré el enfoque de Peter Osborne, particularmente en lo que respecta a la relevancia del momento para la temporalización del tiempo (cronológico) y la historia, en su libro *The Politics of Time*. En la segunda parte del ensayo, contrastaré las soluciones que Eagleton y Badiou dan al problema, analizaré sus puntos de convergencia y divergencia y examinaré sus causas.

Palabras clave: Terry Eagleton; Alain Badiou; marxismo; materialismo; tiempo; historia; ética; vida buena.

I. The process and the moment

According to Martin Buber, any experience of plenitude is a moment of eternity: "each moment that is lived staking the whole existence in it" has a "content of eternity" that makes possible the rare knowledge "of an eternity that sustains and devours all time" (Buber 120; translation mine). The momentary experience of another dimension has been considered crucial for human life in the Western tradition and, after Romanticism, the contact with another dimension of reality was sought in the little things of this world. According to Octavio Paz, "[t]rue life is the perception of *alterity's lightening* in any of our acts, without excluding even the most trivial" (Paz 266; translation and emphasis mine).

According to Robert Langbaum, the epiphanic moment is central to modern literature and Wordsworth's treatment of this moment makes him the founder of modern poetry (Langbaum, "The Epiphanic Mode"). For Wordsworth, "Our destiny, our nature, and our home / Is with infinitude, and only there" (*The Prelude* VI, 539) and this destiny is anticipated in an ecstatic moment. In this moment, ordinary life is suspended, and a kind of death is lived: "the breath of this corporeal frame / And even the motion of our human blood / [is] Almost suspended" ("Tintern Abbey" ll. 43-45).

I.1. Notes on the problem in the Western tradition

The gap between ascetic process and ecstatic moment can be detected both in high culture–from a discourse by Plato to a poem by Christopher Norris–and in a Steven Spielberg film.

In Plato's *Symposium*, Socrates reproduces Diotima's account of the moment of change from one dimension to the other:

> Anyone who has been guided to this point in the study of love and has been contemplating beautiful things in the correct way and in the right sequence, will suddenly perceive, as he now approaches the end of his study, a beauty that is marvellous in its nature–the very thing, Socrates, for the sake of which all the earlier labours were undertaken (210e).

Led by his guide, the initiated ascends with effort the ladder of degrees of beautiful things, but the ascesis takes him "almost in reach of the goal" (211b), not to the goal itself; the vision of the form of beauty comes only "suddenly". Diotima states that contemplation is the good life: "a human being should live, in the contemplation of beauty itself'' (211d). Socrates agrees.

In Norris's "Interludes" the moment suspends the lovers' normal life course: "Whatever brought / Us two to this odd pass, the moment blurred / All sense of normal time-

scales" (*The Matter* 223-224). And in "Variables" a Beethoven variation can "in a moment, port / Us beyond reach of custom's aide-memoire" (325).

When in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, after all his troubles and travels Harrison Ford reaches the end of the quest, he must still face the abyss that separates him from the cave of the Grail and that no prodigious jump can cross; only a leap of faith will do to reach his goal and give sense to his previous adventures.

The other dimension can be transcendent, as in the religious tradition (e.g., the dimension of Milton's "Heavenly Muse"), or immanent, as in the secular tradition (the dimension of Wordsworth's "gentle breeze"); if immanent, it can be pantheistic, as in Wordsworth, or materialist: "flesh forgives division as it makes / Another's moment of consent its own" (Auden 115).

The ecstatic moment always suspends the process. In the second stanza of Yeats's "The Wild Swans at Coole", the speaker remembers how the swans, "suddenly" mounting, interrupted his process of counting nineteen years ago. The rhyme "count"–"mount" connects the opposites:

> The nineteenth autumn has come upon me
> Since I first made my count;
> I saw, before I had well finished,
> All suddenly mount
> And scatter wheeling in great broken rings (*Poems* 72).

As the metonymic link between the last line of the first stanza and the first line of the second, along with the beginning and the end of the whole syntactic sequence with "upon", makes plain, it is the counting by which human time is engendered as a series that determines this speaker's experience of time and separates him from the swans: "Upon the brimming water among the stones / Are nine-and-fifty swans // The nineteenth autumn has come upon me."

If the vision can interrupt chronological time, time may also represent the real that interrupts the imaginary harmony of a kiss or a dance. Thus, the clocks in Auden's "As I Walked Out One Evening" warn: "Time watches from the shadow / And coughs when you would kiss . . . time breaks the threaded dances / And the diver's brilliant bow" (134).

The interruption can be abrupt or gentle: while in Wordsworth's "There was a Boy" the protagonist experiences "[a] gentle shock of mild surprise", in Yeats's "Leda and the Swan" there is a violent "sudden blow" (247). The consequences of the ecstatic experience are normally positive, as in Wordsworth (see, for instance "Tintern Abbey" and "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud"), but can also be negative, as the speaker states in the third stanza of "The Wild Swans at Coole": "I have looked upon those brilliant creatures,

/ And now my heart is sore" (*Poems* 72). At a historical level, the consequences of the encounter can be apocalyptic, as in Yeats's system (*A Vision*; see also, for instance, "Leda and the Swan" and "No Second Coming") or redemptive, as in the Christian myth. In any case, the moment is decisive: "*[c]e premier moment* [of the encounter between the 18-years-old Jean-Jacques and the 28-years-old Mme de Warens] *décida de moi pour toute ma vie, et produisit par un enchaînement inévitable le destin du reste de mes jours*" (Rousseau 113).

The problematic relation between the ascetic and the ecstatic dimensions has plagued Western history and culture with all kinds of problems. The split, which has pre-Christian roots in Orphism, as Paul Ricœur has shown (for the Orphists, the true nature of the soul, veiled in ordinary existence, was revealed in moments of trance)[2], has left its trace in the problematic relation between body and soul and faith and works. On the one hand, according to Paul, works without faith are dead (Heb. 6.1) and can only "bring forth fruit unto death" (*King James Version*, Rom. 7.5); on the other hand, according to James, faith is either incarnated in works or dead (Jas. 2.14-16).

Effort is often considered worth it only if ecstasy is achieved, as in Yeats's "Adam's Curse": "I said, 'A line will take us hours maybe; / Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought, / Our stitching and unstitching has been naught'" (*Poems* 72). Although this is true of *Paradise Lost* too, in Milton's poem, perhaps surprisingly, the linguistic and temporal processes that entail the possibility of the fall are also a condition–the material condition–of salvation. Heavenly creatures communicate intuitively and have no need of articulate language; consequently, there is no temporal gap between their intentions and their actions as Sin makes clear when she reminds Satan of the moment of his fall (II.747-758). In contrast to Satan, the human couple did not suddenly fall for ever into utter despair. To the process of temptation in which the serpent entangled Eve corresponds a process of redemption. Although the divine grace is the theological precondition of salvation, it comes second in the dramatic presentation of repentance. And this necessarily so: human beings are redeemable because imperfect, temporal.

I.2. Peter Osborne. The moment and the totalization of time and history.

In *The Politics of Time*, Osborne comments on the main twentieth century contributions to the ideas of time and history, while pointing out the shortcomings of each theory's attempt at articulating the relation between the moment and the process for a politics of time.

2 See *Finitude et Culpabilité* part II, chapter 4.

Osborne relies on Ricœur 's magnum opus *Time and Narrative*, but for him Ricœur remains at the level of transcendental narrativity and is thus unable to counter the dehistorisation caused by modern information, fashion, mechanised work, and the commodity. Osborne invites us to find ways of resisting this in the cultural forms of modernity and in "the existential modality of everydayness".

Against the modern fragmentation of time, Osborne defends the totalization of history. Heidegger made it possible to conceive the totality of Dasein's existence, but this applied only to the individual. To think the totalization of history it is necessary to rethink Benjamin's notion of the moment.

By inserting difference into the present (retentions and protentions are living parts of the present), Husserl's Phenomenology offered an alternative to the Aristotelian reduction of the present to an abstract point without duration between an instant before and an instant after[3]. Phenomenology is indispensable to resist the fragmentation of human experience caused by the dominant quantification of time in modernity but, as Osborne points out, Husserl could not connect the individual consciousness of time to history.

The anticipant resolution makes the Dasein's totalization of time possible, but Heidegger could not relate being-for-death and being-with-others. In contrast to Hegel, he was unable think the temporal process of recognition and, in contrast to Marx, he was unable to conceive self-fulfilment as the fulfilment of all. Thus impaired, Heidegger could not connect the existential and the social levels. In *Being and time*, authentic time is purely individual and unhistorical; ordinary time is inauthentic and historical time a degradation of historicity (Ricœur, *Tems et récit* III 90-144)..

Heidegger's only alternative to prevent historical fragmentation was the repetition of a newly created past, the myth of a people that has never existed (Osborne 170) but that appears "in a 'moment of vision'" (169). The nightmare of Nazism was the materialisation of such vision[4]: the anticipant resolution becomes the resolution to immolate oneself to this myth. In terms of politics and history, the future to which existential time opens is closed by this myth of the past (173-174).

Levinas' notion of "the time of the other" connects personal and historical time. In contrast to Dasein's being-for-death, the time of the other includes a future after-my-death and entails the responsibility of the living towards future generations. But Levinas' other is absolute. Therefore, not only does it exclude the possibility of recognition, as

3 For the Aristotelian notion of time, see *Temps et récit* III, 22ff.

4 For a frontal attack on the politics implicit in Heidegger's thought, see Norris's "Setting Accounts".

Derrida has shown, but the exclusive relation with it renders mutual recognition irrelevant. The time of the other thus relates the present and the future at the cost of ignoring the process of intersubjective recognition in the present.

Jacques Lacan described the drama of misrecognition in the mirror stage, but the other is absent from it and no temporal process exists in this scene, according to Osborne. It was Jean Laplanche who temporalized recognition by introducing the process of interpretation in the life of the child. The whole thing begins in a linguistic moment when the child is faced with an enigmatic signifier, a question or demand coming from the other that the child is unable to answer and represses thus generating the unconscious. The moment engenders the temporal process of interpretation of this demand, but time and history remain separate because this intersubjective encounter remains a private affair.

Like Heidegger, Benjamin opposed both the modern fragmentation of time and the historicist attempt to mend it. Both in Heidegger and Benjamin there is "some notion of the ecstatic to disrupt any straightforward narrative continuity" as conceived by Historicism (Osborne 175).

For Benjamin, true history is "the site for those momentary glimpses of the truth of time which are condensed into the experience of his 'now'" (Osborne 176); the experience of the *Jetztheit* is the true experience of history. It is in these moments, when the messianic image irrupts announcing the future, that "the illusion of … continuity with the past" established by the history of the winners is interrupted (179). When this occurs, the emancipatory past events acquire "a higher degree of actuality" than they had when they empirically took place (Benjamin, quoted in Osborne 144). Eagleton and Badiou are inspired by this idea.

Benjamin's aim was "the refiguration of the everyday through interruption" (Osborne 185). The danger of this, Osborne argues, is that the moment should only interrupt the present, suspend succession with no positive historical effect. To avoid this, according to Osborne, the "*Jetztheit*" must be seen "as an integral moment within a new, non-traditional, future-oriented, and internally disrupted form of narrativity (158-59). Only if integrated in a historical narrative, Osborne argues, can the messianic image engender futurity (152).

Unlike Heidegger, Benjamin did not spurn everydayness. On the contrary, for him the dehistorised time of capitalism could not totally colonize the quotidian; even in the commodities there is a remainder of another dimension. What Surrealism did, for Benjamin, Osborne explains, was to liberate the "psychic energy trapped in the autonomous

work of art" and theorize "this as a liberation of historical energy, trapped in the commodity form, the social form of autonomous art" (183).

The amnesiac time of mechanised work, the masses, fashion, the commodity, information, and consumption may deeply affect contemporary lives —"events are consumed as images, independently of each other, and without narrative connection" (Osborne 197)—, but phenomenological time and everydayness, Osborne argues, are irreducible to chronological time and commodification, and cultural practices incessantly offer new narrative compositions that recue ecstatic moments from insignificance.

II. Eagleton vs Badiou.

According to Charles Taylor, the contemplation of the good is the source of moral strength and essential to prevent the moral corruption caused by the imposition of high standards (516). There is a kind of superego ethics of Kantian lineage, Eagleton points out, in which "obligation lies at the core of ethical argument", an ethics "about remorse, self-reproach and absolute responsibility" (Eagleton, *Trouble* 309). If the moral law is to be compatible with freedom the moral imperative must express the idea of the good that one desires. But a major problem characteristic of modernity is its incapacity to answer the question about the good, about the meaning of life (Taylor 9). Eagleton and Badiou try to answer this question.

Some, such as Burke, Dostoevsky, and Taylor would say that moral values must be rooted in the tradition so that they can be spontaneously practiced (this does not necessarily entail relativism; as Taylor argues, traditional values should not be directly accepted but criticized in a context of rational interlocution). Although the Christian tradition is highly important for both Eagleton and Badiou they do not appeal to tradition in this way. Their Marxism leads them to lay the foundations of their universalism somewhere else, on what Marx termed the "species being".

In Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, we can find the parameters of the debate on the relation between the good life and contemplation. Aristotle distinguishes between two kinds of good life: a life of "virtuous actions, the political and warlike" and the life of "contemplative activity". Only the latter achieves plenitude: "this activity would constitute the complete happiness of a human being. Provided, that is, that it goes together with a complete span of life, for there is nothing incomplete in what belongs to happiness" (1177b).

The opposition between common ordinary life and the good life is implicit in Aristotle's argument, but not worth mentioning because for him, as Taylor explains, common

ordinary life was only the infrastructure of "'the good life' of contemplation and one's action as citizen". Only with the "Reformation, we find a modern, Christian-inspired sense that ordinary life [which includes family life] was … the very centre of the good life" (Taylor 13). Nor is there an opposition between action and contemplation, on the contrary, intellectual activity and contemplation are inseparable for Aristotle; as Eagleton states, "[f]or Aristotle, human happiness is an activity, not in the first place a state of mind" (*Trouble* 303). The contrast is between two kinds of virtuous activities, one practical, the other theoretical. Although the political and warlike virtues "are preeminent in nobility and greatness" they are not complete in themselves because they are in the service of another good. Contemplation, on the contrary, is an end in itself. Unexpectedly, another dimension pops up here: such completeness "exceed[s] what is human" (Aristotle 1177b). There is another dimension of the human, one of divine perfection.

Aristotle reserves the qualification of plenitude to contemplation, but in Eagleton's reading it applies to all kinds of virtuous life: Aristotle's is "an ethics for which the good consists in a high-spirited abundance of life" (*Trouble* 302). Enjoying one's behaviour is inseparable from doing good; any kind of virtue is an end in itself. Nonetheless, Eagleton's caveats regarding Aristotelian virtue ethics introduce tensions in his argument. On the one hand, the advantage of Aristotle's ethics is that, unlike Lacanian desire, desire for Aristotle can be fulfilled (302). On the other hand, Aristotle's ethics "belongs wholly to the symbolic order" and therefore ignores that "there is that within our everyday desires which tends to play havoc with them" (303-304); in other words, Aristotle's empiricism ignores the metaphysics of desire that prevents the achievement of fulfilment. The way out of this contradiction for Eagleton is the Christian "allegory of an ethics of the Real" (290).

Badiou focuses precisely on the distinction that Eagleton passes over: "But a life of this sort would exceed what is human" (Aristotle 1177b). He admires Aristotle's instruction not to think "only about human things because one is a human being, nor only about mortal things because one is mortal, but rather to make oneself immortal" (1177b). The good life for Badiou, like Aristotle's contemplative life, "would exceed what is human". This excess, though, entails infinity for Badiou, something Aristotle could not think because perfection necessarily entailed limits for the Greeks.

II.1. Finitude and infinity

Eagleton and Badiou seem totally opposed on the question of time and the good life because, while Eagleton defends the possibility of the good life in a finite ordinary dimen-

sion, Badiou argues that the possibility of the good life lies beyond the limits of ordinary life in the dimension of infinity.

The series of oppositions in which, according to Eagleton, Badiou is caught begins with "truth (or faith) versus knowledge" and culminates in "eternity as against time" (*Trouble* 265). Eagleton introduces an important qualification to this judgement by stating that, rather than a blunt opposition of eternity vs. time, Badiou's version of "[t]he event inaugurates its own peculiar time" (264). Nonetheless, this "peculiar time" has little to do with human time as it "raises us above our creatureliness" (264). In Badiou's view, Eagleton argues, human time "belongs to the menial sphere of our species being" (269); "menial" because he "does not accept that the infinite … may be encountered only by a tragic confrontation with one's finitude" (269).

The happiness of the subject for Badiou certainly depends on "*sa découverte, à l'intérieur de lui-même de sa capacité à faire quelque chose dont il ne se savait pas capable*" and so on passing "*outre la limite . . . En ce sens, tout bonheur est une victoire contre la finitude*" (*Métaphysique* 53). For Badiou, as for Wordsworth, "Our destiny, our nature, and our home / Is with infinitude, and only there" (*The Prelude*, VI, 539-40). But if we are to believe Badiou, for him "[t]he most simple ethical rule [is] to find the point where we must affirm that the infinite exists in new dialectics with the finite"; hence, the imperative "find[s] in existence . . . a new relationship between finitude and the infinite" ("The Ontology of Multiplicity" I). And if, according to Eagleton, "the infinite . . . may be encountered only by a tragic confrontation with one's finitude", then neither Eagleton nor Badiou rejects either finitude or infinity; on the contrary, both agree on the need to establish a dialectical relation between them.

There is a bad and a good infinite to which two dimensions of time correspond. For both Badiou and Eagleton it is a question of engaging in the good infinite and avoiding falling prey to the bad infinite of desire and its deadly conjunction with the commodity in a consumerist world.

Badiou explains the opposition between the good and a bad infinity in mathematical terms. Endless succession is the essence of finitude, a kind of bad infinity from which true infinity must be released. A number is placed between the finite quantity of predecessors and infinite successors, but the good infinite does not succeed. On the contrary, in terms of set theory, Ω (the first infinite cardinal, the set of integers) interrupts the repetition of the rule of succession, i.e., the still one more[5]. This is decisive because Ω is the mathematical expression of the event: "ω is a cut which opens something

5 For a full treatment of this see Badiou's *Number and Numbers*, particularly chapters 9-11.

new . . . We can say it is an image . . . for the event" ("Ontology of Multiplicity" II). It is the event that interrupts succession and introduces the true dimension of the good infinite; we must therefore engage in "[t]he search for ω … inside the finite" ("The ontology of multiplicity" I). Eagleton associates the bad infinity to Lacanian desire and to the endless pursuit of successive satisfactions; for him it is the acceptance of finitude that interrupts bad infinity.

Infinite succession, whether of numbers or desire, is what turns infinity bad. Badiou and Eagleton agree that the quantifiable succession of instants is the bad dimension of time. For Badiou, the bad infinity is interrupted by the event and the infinity of the process of truth opened by the event must substitute infinite succession. For Eagleton, in a world where desires are generated by the market, the Lacanian imperative "do not give up on desire" becomes a moral imperative (*Trouble* 325) but must be reoriented. As desire is infinite, nothing commodities can offer will satisfy it. To avoid endless unsatisfaction the infinity of desire must be substituted by the infinity of love: "[i]t is charity which is most importantly limitless, not desire" (*Trouble* 289). In the Christian's love of a loving God "the good is somehow already enjoyed" and the infinity of desire "gives way to an eternity of abundant life" (289).

Eagleton explains the equation that Marx established between the bad sublime and the bad infinity of commodity exchange. Living time disappears in the commodity; the essence of the commodity's "monstrous sublimity" is the abstract quantitative nature of time that it encapsulates "confounding … all specific qualities into one indeterminate, purely quantitative process", which allows its autonomous functioning as regards its producers (*The Ideology* 212). Emptied out of any specific quality and without any personal involvement of the protagonists engaged in the act, commodity exchange fragments time into an infinite series of discrete instances (*Walter Benjamin* 29). For Marx, what must be done, Eagleton explains, is to liberate the good infinite, "the true sublime … that infinite, inexhaustible heterogeneity of use-value" ("The ideology" 30). Communism is the "liberation of a multiplicity of particular use-values" from the abstraction of the "exchange-value" of the commodity (*The ideology* 215)[6]. It is the communist interruption, which brings about the workers' appropriation of their time, that initiates true history.

6 Cf. Spivak who in "Ghostwriting", where she criticises Derrida's reading of Marx, argues that, rather than liberation of use-values, Marx proposes the workers' appropriation of the time of the commodity.

II.2 The need for a new orientation and radical change

The communist event is not at hand; still, an idea of a just world and a good life can be offered and enjoyed or at least foretasted in the present. Badiou and Eagleton agree on the need for a new orientation and both of them offer it. This orientation involves a radical change.

Badiou states that "in ordinary life there is no true orientation" ("Philosophy and Time") and that "the most important goal is to propose [one] to individual life". Such orientation consists in "a new relationship between truth and justice" ("Eternity in Time") that would institutionalise equality because before truth we are all equal[7]. Equality is the stumbling block of capitalism. Truth, like grace, is "a possibility to change our life, to go from a disoriented life to a life with strong meaning" ("Philosophy and Time").

For Eagleton, the universals of equality and justice receive their blood from solidarity that opposes the capitalist instrumentalization of human lives. Solidarity is, one could say, the enactment of equality. The good life for Eagleton is "a form of life which is completely pointless [and] needs no justification beyond its own existence" (*The Meaning* 174-75). This echoes Aristotle's life of contemplation; but for Eagleton, as for Kant, this means that everyone's life is end in itself, which entails the universals of equality and justice.

The lighthouse for both Badiou and Eagleton is the communist idea. There are two radically opposite kinds of materialism: The materialism of those who live "completely convinced that the law of the world is the price" ("The Ontology of Multiplicity" II) and the materialism of those who live by faith in communism. The good life is illumined by this faith. Consequently, neither Badiou nor Eagleton can be happy with mere social reform; for both, a radical transformation is necessary. For Eagleton, the reason why a radical change should be necessary is the institutionalisation of selfishness in the capitalist system (*On Evil* 143). For Badiou, it is necessary because corruption is pervading; everything has a price, which systematically corrupts the world.

What real change, different from the continuous change that characterises the capitalist world, is possible if no revolutionary transformation is feasible? What can Marxists mean by radical change in times when an alternative to the capitalist economic system does not seem viable? When the revolution is not possible, the good life can only be lived in another dimension that must be carved out in the current situation. But what makes this possible?

7 In his introduction to *Being and Event*, Badiou expresses his "hope" of "mathematically inferring justice" (15).

According to Historical Materialism moral progress accompanies material progress. The ideals of the Enlightenment were not ethereal. Trade needed freedom from feudal boundaries; if to be a proletarian is better than to be a slave or a serve, it is because, as Marx explains in *Capital*, the former must be free to sell his time. It is true that time is thereby quantified, subject to the laws of the market, and alienated, but the freedom of common people now finds a material foundation in the economic base. If time makes human beings redeemable, as in *Paradise Lost*, history is the process of redemption. But the time when history did things for us is over and, although Badiou acknowledges the advantages of scientific development, he does not pay much attention to their moral consequences. Eagleton's idea of history is perhaps more optimistic. He conceives history and the human being in similar terms: "history itself is a process of self-transcendence. The historical animal is one who is constantly able to go beyond itself" (*On Evil* 16-17). To compensate for the crisis of Historical Materialism, both Eagleton and Badiou, as we shall see, recur to Benjamin's idea of history.

Marxism teaches that ordinary experience is alienated and that only the appropriation of the means of production and the dissolution of private property that generates inequality can create the conditions for human beings to be free, deploy their potencies, and so enjoy a full life. But this must wait and meanwhile desire is manipulated by the market. Although the situation seems desperate, neither Badiou nor Eagleton have been conquered by dismay or given up on their desire of communism. That we live in a materialist world dominated by price from which we cannot escape and that there is little prospect of the realization of the idea of communism by a general transformation of the system does not mean that there is no way of realizing it.

Badiou's and Eagleton's grim picture of the contemporary world may coincide, but for the latter corruption is not absolute, it cannot colonize all the spheres of everydayness; if it did, transformation would be impossible[8]. Badiou invites precisely to be heroic and do the impossible (*Logics* 514). The problem that Eagleton finds with Badiou is not so much the opposition between chronological time and the time opened by the "momentous rupture" of the event, as the elitism he sees in this invitation because it shows little respect, for "the common people", for the "heroism . . . of the anti-heroic masses", for "the common life" (*Trouble* 293), an attitude he considers characteristic of

8 Eagleton's attention to the notions of ideology, culture, and everydayness is revealing in this regard (See, for instance, *Ideology*, *Trouble with Strangers*, and *The Idea of Culture*). Ideology cannot be reduced to bad conscience; it includes ways of seeing, thinking, and living, which brings it very close to culture in its anthropological sense. Both ideology and culture are ways of determining human life from within; for those who consider culture homogeneous and absolute, there is no escape from language games. Eagleton does not share this opinion, but the notion of everydayness has the advantage of adding personal idiosyncrasy and non-conventional unpredictable experiences, and of highlighting intersubjective relations.

the Parisian school. But for Eagleton too the impossible must be done, something that Christianity achieves: "Christianity brings together the impossible and the everyday, transcendence and immanence" (300).

As Eagleton states, "[c]lassical Marxism adheres to the 'Real' of revolution" (*Trouble* 293). Both Eagleton and Badiou agree on the need of reformulating the Marxist classical moment of interruption of the situation by the emergence of the Real. For both Badiou and Eagleton something impossible within the situation must be done without abandoning it, and for both this entails a kind of dying to one life and resurrecting to another. For Eagleton, the impossible is overcoming the opposites of the sublime and the common place, which is accomplished by an "ethics as love": common acts of renunciation perform the ritual of death to selfishness and resurrection to love, a "new kind of solidarity" (*Trouble* 299). For Badiou, the impossible is the event that interrupts the situation and opens the dimension of truth to which the individual must incorporate and in which the faithful subject must repeat the interruption.

II.3. The extraordinary and the everyday. Eagleton's criticism of Badiou's ethics.

The possibility of achieving plenitude in this world is, for Badiou, opened by the event's sudden interruption of the situation, ascetically realized in a process of truth, and experienced in moments of ecstasy that repeat the interruption. For Eagleton, as for Matthew, salvation has little ecstatic about it; on the contrary, it is "an embarrassingly prosaic affair something which a lot of decent people do anyway, with scarcely a thought" (*The Meaning* 164-165).

Commenting on Badiou's *Ethics* in his *Figures of Dissent*[9], Eagleton highly praises Badiou for putting the "notions of truth and universality back on the agenda" and for his radical "assessment of the sorry ideological mess into which ethical thought has lapsed in its haste to confiscate the political" (253). But he finds problems regarding the discontinuity between the epiphanic moment and ordinary life. Badiou, Eagleton argues, is "as much caught in a sort of antithesis between the ordinary and epiphanic as Derrida" (250). Eagleton acknowledges that Badiou "sees the need for truth and politics to be

9 Eagleton's first criticism of Badiou appeared in a commentary on Badiou's *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (2001) published in the *New Left Review* 9 (2001) and later included as "Alain Badiou" in *Figures of Dissent*. At the time of the appearance of *Ethics* in French (*L'Étique*, 1993), Badiou was redirecting his project to connect the mathematical ontology of *Being and Event* (*L'Être et l'événement*, 1988) to the phenomenology that was to be developed in *Logics of Worlds* (*Logiques des mondes. L'Être et l'événement 2*, 2009). The classic logic of the ontology governed by the principle of non-contradiction and the exclusion of the middle term had to be supplemented with a modal logic that admitted degrees of appearance. If the imperative of the international "we are nothing, let's be all" could be taken as the motto in *Being and Event*; in *Logic of Worlds* the affirmation of being ("we are…") is maintained, but the opposition is no longer between existence and nonexistence; there are degrees of existence.

immanent" but argues that "he does not trust the quotidian world sufficiently to believe" that there is anything in it worth salvaging; one might say that, as the speaker of Shakespeare's sonnet XLIII states, "all the day they [Badiou's eyes] view things unrespected". Despite his efforts, Eagleton argues, Badiou fails to overcome the opposition between the moment and the process (268) because the time of the processes of truth is not the time of the symbolic order in which common life processes take place (268).

Eagleton is inclined to a virtue ethics of an Aristotelian rather than to one of a Realist Lacanian lineage. For him, "[v]irtue ethics can remind us that the good is a common-or-garden matter . . . rather than a more imposing, epiphanic affair" (*Figures* 251) and he questions "an ethics for which morality, in the sense of everyday estimations of right and wrong, is scathingly dismissed" (*Trouble* 263). There is no necessary discontinuity between ecstasy and ordinary life because *areté* "both brings that of which it is the *areté* into a good condition and causes the work belonging to that thing to be done well" (Aristotle 1106a); as Bartlett and Collins explain, areté "is the chief characteristic of a given type of thing at its peak that also permits or promotes that peak" (xvi).

"Ordinary process" and "epiphanic moment", like the finite and the infinite, seem to separate Eagleton and Badiou as the issue of works and faith once split Christendom. But, being a materialist, Badiou must not only find the transcendent in the immanent, as the Romantics did, but also connect the ordinary and the epiphanic dimensions. Eagleton acknowledges the effort: "For Badiou, to be sure, ethics is not identical with the revelation of truth; it is rather the business of striving to remain loyal to it, and thus a practical form of life rather than a lonely epiphany" (*Figures* 250).

Nonetheless, for Eagleton, Badiou "inherits the dubious avant-garde doctrine that the human subject is authentic only when audaciously staking its existence in extremis, Truth is a matter of all or nothing" (*Trouble* 262). Hence, Badiou's mistake "to imagine that a just society must remain in perpetual thrall to its moment of foundation" (301). It is difficult to see, though, how without fidelity to the moment of the Christian foundation of love Eagleton's community can be built. And if the "full-blooded transformation" required "to establish such unheroic, workaday virtues of justice and equality on a universal scale" (301) would also be required at the individual level, then the choice that the Christian subject must make to be faithful, rather than accommodating to little bourgeois comfort, seems indeed extreme. This seems to be the case, because love (loving ourselves as we love our neighbour) involves seeing oneself in the mirror and acknowledging there, as Oedipus did at Colonus, "a loathsome outcast . . . this thing of darkness [desire]", which requires an "immeasurable power" (271).

The requirement of fidelity also suggests that, despite Eagleton's rejection of the opposition between knowledge and truth (the first of the series mentioned above which, according to Eagleton, negatively affect Badiou's thought), his concept of truth corresponds to Badiou's. As he states in the conclusion to *Trouble with Strangers*, "nothing in this study takes the truth [of Christianity] for granted" (*Trouble* 323). Truth in Eagleton's Christian-based ethics consists, therefore, in the idea of fidelity to the event, rather than to the agreement between concept and fact.

The fidelity to the event connects the moment and the process, the ascesis and the ecstasy. According to Badiou, the event flares up in a moment and goes out leaving a trace that must be followed in the process of truth[10]; in the repetition of the interruption, maximum existence (which can happen when reading a poem, listening to a piece of music, or understanding a theory, not only when inventing a new literary form, classic music, set theory, or quantum mechanics) is achieved. There are moments of maximum and minimum existence; in between, there are degrees. And there are subjects who are faithful to the event by totally breaking with the logics of the world and there are those who are faithful by negotiating with the situation; they do not belong to different spheres. The opposition between extraordinary and ordinary is thus overcome.

The ordinary, though, is not the everyday. Eagleton rejects Badiou's definition of the world "as chronically unregenerate" (*Trouble* 265) because it divides "[t]he exceptional and the everyday" (292). He agrees that not only a "transformation of the system is necessary", as he states in the interview "A Debate with Eagleton" included in this special issue (209); "a root-to-branch transformation of the self" is also needed (*Trouble* 289). But for him the system is not the everyday and the exceptional belongs to the quotidian. While for Badiou it is being that cannot be subsumed, for Eagleton it is the quotidian that cannot be totally colonized by the philosophy of capitalism.

Badiou's ethics is too sublime and disembodied for Eagleton: "An ethics of the mortal body is too unheroic for Badiou" (270). If, on the one hand, in Badiou "the symbolic order is given its proper due, as liberty, equality and universality are acknowledged as precious political goals", on the other, quoting Peter Hallward, Eagleton affirms that in Badiou "'subjectivation is essentially indifferent to the business and requirements of life as such' . . . a strange kind of ethics which regards the business of life as of minor importance" (265).

10 "Moment" is not to be understood as an instant with no duration, rather, as one in which chronological quantification does not matter.

II.4. Love and the communist hypothesis

For both Eagleton and Badiou love is an encounter in the Real. According to Hallward, the sublime in Badiou opens an entirely new dimension of "the Real of a radical fraternity" (quoted in *Trouble* 269). Although the sublime for Eagleton interrupts the ordinary ways of seeing, thinking and being, for him it is not the opposite of ordinary life because the others around us "are the bearers of a sublime strangeness" that we also bear; this provides "the solid ground on which human beings may meet" because "loving oneself . . . [involves] an acceptance of the disfiguring Real at the core of one's own identity" (291).

How can desire and love, death and life, the real and the symbolic be reconciled? Eagleton and Badiou coincide that this is achieved by the death of the flesh and resurrection in a new body; but for Eagleton this means death to narcissistic selfishness and resurrection to solidarity while for Badiou it means death to the law of the world and incorporation to the process of truth.

Eagleton finds in Christianity "an allegory of the ethics of the Real" and a model of the relation between the sublime and ordinary life based on a new relation between love and desire and between finitude and infinity; this is possible because "[t]here is . . . a form of the Real [the God of love] which desires our welfare rather than disrupts it" (290). In contrast to Lacanian desire, Christian love does not begin with lack but with fullness; and the love-object does not indefinitely flee, because "the Real of divine love may be routinely encountered" by those who believe that what they do to their neighbour they do to Jesus (291). Again, although Eagleton may criticise Badiou's aspiration to infinity and eternity, he advocates both the Real, as an "excess or infinity" that disrupts the stability of the symbolic order, and the infinity of Christian charity as a source of joy and a way of sharing in eternal life (320).

The crucial point is that for Eagleton there is no "hard-and-fast distinction . . . between the ethical-Real and the political-symbolic" (321). On the contrary, the symbolic–not taken here in its sense of a set of rules or values of a given society but as "abstract exchangeability of individuals"–makes the practice of charity to any human being possible (320). The symbolic and the Real meet in the sublime absurdity (320-321) of the readiness to die for or instead of another (e.g., by substituting him in the queue to the gas chamber): "this unthinkable Real is no more than the exchangeability of the symbolic order pressed to an extreme" (321). At this point, Eagleton's ethics is no less extreme than Badiou's.

Love for Badiou (one of the four truth procedures: love, science, politics, art) makes it possible for anyone to become a subject and achieve plenitude. Love realises the

dialectics of finitude and infinity, eternity and time, ascesis and ecstasy. The event of love is the encounter between the lovers, and the process of truth incorporates them to a dimension of eternity in time: love is "*une déclaration d'éternité qui doit se réaliser ou se déployer comme elle peut dans le temps. Une descente de l'éternité dans le temps*" and *"[t]out le problème . . . est d'inscrire cette éternité dans le temps* (Éloge 53-54). The surrealists (Breton, Nadja), Badiou explains, were devoted to the moment of the encounter, but they were not interested in duration (83). For Badiou, on the contrary, the ascetic process and ecstatic moment are necessarily intertwined in love for love is "*le laborieux devenir d'une vérité construite point par point . . . Il y a un travail de l'amour, et non pas seulement un miracle*"; plenitude is "*la récompense immanente du labeur*" (83-84). We thus go from ecstasy to ascesis and back to moments of ecstasy.

For both Badiou and Eagleton love serves as a model and an instance of realization of communism, which simply affirms, says Badiou, the aim or future of all emancipatory politics, which "*devront s'inscrire dans un résurrection . . . de . . . l'idée d'un monde que n'est pas livré aux appétits de la propriété privée, d'un monde de l'association libre de l'égalité*" (75). Love is communist–the lovers are the "minimum communism"–in the sense that "*le vrai sujet d'un amour est le devenir du couple et non la satisfaction des individus que le composent*" (91).

For Eagleton, as much as for Badiou, the condition of love is an encounter with the other. For Eagleton, this is the encounter with the Real in oneself and in others. For Badiou, it is the encounter with the other who plays the opposite (e.g., sexual) role in the couple. Nor do Badiou and Eagleton differ in the definition of the dimension of love as eternal and infinite or in the discontinuity that exists between this dimension and the dimension of ordinary life colonized by be market. Where they do differ, apart from their evaluation of the quotidian, is on the definition of the basic unit of the community of love: while for Eagleton it is the individual split subject, for Badiou it is the two. The cause of this divergence on the basic unit is the starting point of their analysis: ontological or existential.

For Badiou, love is not what two individuals experience but the experience of being two; the individuals are incorporated into the subject of love. This two is for Badiou the ontological unit (the two in set theory is not the result of the sum of 1 + 1[11]; it is constituted by the void set + the void set counted as one {0, {0}}). Eagleton takes from psychoanalysis the idea that the individual subject is intimately constituted by a strange other, an idea that can also be found in Augustine.

11 It is essential to bear in mind that in Badiou's mathematical ontology there are only multiples of multiples; the one is the result of the count-as-one. This is the basic thesis of *Being and Event*.

II.5. Hope. The affirmation of being–the affirmation of nothing

Despite this difference there is something, even more basic, before any count begins, where Eagleton and Badiou meet: the Marxist version of the Real, the species being.

If change is possible, it is because, multiplicity, whether of being or of everydayness, is irreducible for both Eagleton and Badiou; there is a remainder, impossible to be subsumed by the system, that must be acknowledged and affirmed. For Eagleton, this is human creatureliness and he localizes it in everyday life; for Badiou, it is the nothing and he localises in the site, a set that is counted but whose elements are not counted (e.g., the *sans papiers*), do not count in the situation (*Being and Event* 173ff). According to Eagleton, hope for redemption lies in the acceptance of human "creatureliness"–bodily needs, dependence, imperfection, temporality, the battling forces of the human psyche, and death. According to Badiou, hope lies in the affirmation of the nothing that is in the site.

Eagleton and Badiou agree that "[o]nly those who count as nothing in the eyes of the current power system are sufficiently askew to it to inaugurate a radically new dispensation" (*Trouble* 271). Both Badiou and Eagleton propose a subject faithful to the momentary event when the species being, the generic, flared for a moment and interrupted the situation. This event opens a new dimension and fidelity to it is the condition to build and live in another dimension of time.

Both Eagleton and Badiou affirm "what there is for being" (Auden 589), what Marx, in his *Economical and Philosophical Manuscripts*, calls the "species being", the "shit of the earth" (Saint Paul), "the total loss" (Marx); what does not count in the situation but will become the corner stone that the architects threw away. Commenting on *Oedipus at Colonus* (his favourite Greek hero), Eagleton blends St Paul, Marx and Badiou:

> In becoming nothing but the scum and refuse of the polis–the 'shit of the earth', as St Paul racily describes the followers of Jesus, or the 'total loss of humanity' which Marx portrays as the proletariat–Oedipus is divested of his identity and authority and so can offer his lacerated body as the cornerstone of a new social order (*Trouble* 271).

Such descent to hell, Eagleton states, is more than "Badiou's more affirmative ethics can accommodate" (*Trouble* 271).

But Badiou's defence of the affirmative against the post-Hegelian triumph of the negative consists precisely in the affirmation of the generic being that counts as nothing. So, it is not this that distances Eagleton from Badiou, but the embodiment of the nothing and the political associations it grounds. For Eagleton, it is creatureliness, the "intolerable signifier of our shared mortality and fragility" (271); sharing in this "inhuman" dimension creates "a durable human community" (272). Rather than an existential

nothing, Badiou looks for those points that the system cannot count and where radical political action can be developed. While creatureliness is ineluctable, these points are not permanent, they change according to historical circumstances; once it was the proletariat, today the *sans papiers*, for instance.

There is a crucial point here: while Badiou talks of the need for incorporation of individuals to a body that is the bearer of a truth (*Logics* 451), Eagleton sticks to the individual body as the essential element of the species being ("the degree zero of humanity", *Trouble* 320); his notion of creatureliness is inseparable from the individual body.

While Badiou's demystifies Heidegger's notion of being (*Being and Event*), Eagleton reinterprets Heidegger's notion of death. Death, for the Badiou of *Logics of Worlds*, is merely a minimum of existence (see book III, section 4). For Eagleton, death is the essence of our creatureliness.

For Eagleton, Heidegger's notion of the anticipant resolution to accept death takes bodies beyond their biological definition. The problem with Heidegger is, as Osborne pointed out, that "he largely dissociates being-towards-death and being-with-others" (Eagleton, *Sweet Violence* 306). Eagleton agrees with Osborne in this, but he finds Osborne's solution insufficient because "he passes over the ethical link between them [being-towards-death and being-with-others], evident in the Pauline sense of the self-giving as a proleptic dying" (307). This, in a nutshell, is Eagleton's way of salvaging Heidegger for radical politics.

It may be difficult to imagine how either Heidegger or the founder of Christian theology can be associated with radical politics. Eagleton is perfectly aware of the difficulty, but he does imagine the service that a proper blend of both can pay. He acknowledges that the "Heideggerian doctrine [of being-for-death] was to find some sinister resonances in the death cult of fascism"; nonetheless, he sustains that "its fidelity to lack and finitude, along with its sense of death as a detotalizing force, could also foster an altogether more radical politics" provided that "every one of Dasein's instants" is interpreted as "one of the several meanings of St Paul's 'we die every moment'" (*Sweet Violence* 116).

The Heideggerian anticipant resolution must be realized in solidarity. Renouncing oneself is a kind of little death: by "we die every moment" Saint Paul means, according to Eagleton, "we rehearse and prefigure that final self-abnegation which is death" (*The Meaning* 158). But renunciation is only a previous negative step to "live well by buckling the self to the needs of others" (158); ascesis leads to the plenitude, because solidarity "provides the context for each self to flourish", which means "to love" (160). This is the very opposite to Kirillov's suicide in Dostoevsky's *Demons*. Possessed by the demon of

nihilism, Kirillov wants to flaunt human power over life and death in an act of rivalry with God. Kirillov's is an affirmation of individualism. The humble little death of self-renunciation is, on the contrary, an affirmation of solidarity.

II.6. The discipline of freedom and the exercise of virtue

On the one hand, Badiou underscores discipline while Eagleton emphasises spontaneous behaviour; on the other hand, Badiou underscores grace while Eagleton emphasises works. Materialism forces both to combine grace and works, ecstasy and ascesis.

For Badiou full life entails hard discipline: "*l'essence véritable de la liberté, condition essentielle du bonheur réel, est la discipline*" and "*[un]sujet existe au point où il est impossible de distinguer entre discipline et liberté*" (*Métaphysique* 52). This is because freedom does not consist in doing what you wish but "*ce qui est prescrit par le réel*" (51), which is extremely difficult. For Eagleton, common people practice solidarity in their ordinary life with no effort: "To live the life of grace is to acquire the spontaneous habit of goodness in the manner of Aristotle's virtue, rather as a graceful dancer is one who performs without effort" (*Trouble* 307). Nonetheless, to get the habit of nonchalantly performing virtuous actions requires hard training. And as wickedness is institutional, the struggle against it entails nothing less than detaching oneself from the conventional ways of seeing, thinking, and living, which is also extremely difficult.

Badiou appropriates religious language to emphasise the need of grace "to go from a disoriented life to a life with strong meaning . . . beyond the determination by the world as it is", a movement that amounts to "something like redemption" ("Philosophy and Time"). Eagleton sees a puritan bias in this emphasis on grace and defends the practice of good deeds that will lead us to achieve a gracious performance of them. But Eagleton also appeals to the grace of love as the living spirit of solidarity which makes redemption possible.

II.7. Another time, another history

The worker has lost possession of part of his time that belongs to the employer who has purchased it at market price. The time of work, the abstract value of which is fixed by cold calculation, is thus split from the rest of the worker's life. For both Badiou and Eagleton the redemption of time is a condition of the good life. In Badiou's words, "*être maître de son temps*" is "*une condition du bonheur*" (*Métaphysique* 26).

The fragmentation of time became generalised with consumerism. Both Badiou and Eagleton reject the pursuit of satisfaction in an infinite succession of discrete moments that characterizes capitalist lifestyle. For Badiou, satisfaction is "*une forme de mort subjective*" because it renders the human animal incapable of becoming "*le sujet générique qu'il est capable d'être*" (53). Succession must be interrupted by a moment of plenitude that redeems time from bad infinity. In contrast to an abstract point between the instant before and the instant after, the present of the good life is an image of eternity. Echoing Benjamin, Eagleton states: "It is the present moment which is an image of eternity, not an infinite succession of such moments" (*The Meaning* 175).

Recalling Wittgenstein, Eagleton says that "if there is such a thing as eternal life, it must be here and now" (*The Meaning* 175) and Badiou affirms that "philosophy is oriented by the idea of the existence of eternity in time" ("Philosophy and Time"). Another world coexists with this–"an exception to the determination" of the dominant system– and anticipates the future: "everybody is equal in front of the truth. And if the truth is social . . . political truth, everybody is equal in the world as it is, maybe not immediately but as a project, as a possibility" ("Philosophy and Time"). Although a systematic transformation of the world is not expected, "the present of humanity can realize a certain form of relationship between truth and justice" ("Philosophy and Time"). The realisation of this future in the present counteracts the fixation in each successive moment, the current obedience to the imperative "carpe diem", a deadly instruction to live every day "like there's no tomorrow" (*The Meaning* 158).

Benjamin's idea of resurrection has inspired both Eagleton and Badiou. Redemption consists in the subtraction of time and history from abstract quantification and infinite succession by gathering in constellations evental moments that have suddenly flared in the past but have been buried by the winners' history. According to Badiou, the first philosophical directive is "Interrogate the flashes!" (*Logics* 507). In *Métaphysique du réel perdu*, commenting Pasolini's lament in his 1954 poem on Gramsci that the idea of emancipatory history had been reduced to ashes, Badiou insists on an idea of history that would thread the points of interruption of the historical continuum, from Spartacus to May 1968.

II.8. Flashes in dark times.

To look reality in the face and maintain the flame of hope burning is difficult and when the colonization of desire by the market is so widespread, the possibility of another life must be envisioned in the crevices of the system where glimpses of transcendence,

intimations of eternity, can be caught. In his poem "Ectopiques" (*The Winnowing Fan*), Norris echoes Eagleton's and Badiou's attempt to overcome oppositions in a materialist idea of the good life. The poet finds ways of doing this in the matter of language that poetry transubstantiates. In the preamble of the poem, Norris warns against grandiose historical projects because they lead to "reactive (dystopian) despair" and defends "'ectopic' departures from the . . . norm" that offer "some workable solution". The speaker of the poem commands to "seek small transcendences in everyday Events". Although this may be a

> momentary lapse
> In our coordinates of time and space
> That gives us the first inkling of a chink
> Through which we might just glimpse another place (*The Winnowing* 33)

such glimpse leaves a trace, "lingers as a sense of zones unmapped". It is in those "New worlds … [that] figure nowhere on the maps" where "a *vita nuova*" can be led. These worlds are not far distant places; on the contrary, "This autre-monde" is "not so far apart/ From monde quotidienne"; in fact, it shares "With the old one … a common sky / And history enough to make it theirs". Ectopic events may take place, for instance, in the materiality of language, whose irreducible multiplicity is constitutive of our spiritual essence. See, for example, the conjunction of the beautiful (the harmonious regulated order represented by "rhyme") and the sublime (that disrupts stable structures and reveals something unexpected beyond regulations):

> rhyme
> Is just the kind of opportune event
>
> In language, as in thought, that makes 'sublime'
> An adjective quite fittingly deployed
> For serendipity of verbal chime (*The Winnowing* 56)

Minor changes of the normal ways of seeing things reveal "suddenly . . . a new world beneath the common sky" and ways of living a full life.

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MATERIALISM AND FINITUDE: TERRY EAGLETON'S MARXISM

MATERIALISMO Y FINITUD: EL MARXISMO DE TERRY EAGLETON

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Abstract: This essay focuses on the change of emphasis–already announced in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1997) and evident in *Sweet Violence* (2003)–that took place in Eagleton's writing at the turn of the century: from showing a historicist scepticism about universals to advocating acknowledgement of human creatureliness (frailty, suffering, death) without which any political project would fail. This change coincided with an approach to a Thomist version of the the Christian religion that reflected the influence on Eagleton of his friend the Dominican Herbert McCabe and with a profound interest in Jacques Lacan. The article argues that this change did not affect Eagleton's Marxist faith or imply shunning political action. Rather, the turn concerned the materialist basis of Eagleton's proposal of a just life. The appeal to existential forces entailed, on the one hand, a critique of left historicism and of the postmodern cult of culture and relativism and, on the other, an attempt to reinforce a Marxist critique of capitalism and the resistance against fundamentalism, Nihilism, and consumerism. To propose his idea of the

just life Eagleton appropriates both the notion of Christian charity–the idea of self-realization through love and solidarity–together with the Thomist conception of morality rooted on the body, and Lacan's imperative "do not give up on desire".

Keywords: Eagleton; Materialism; Finitude; Marxism; Herbert McCabe; Lacan.

Resumen: Este ensayo se centra en el cambio de énfasis –ya anunciado en *La estética como ideología* (1997) y evidente en *Dulce violencia* (2003)– que se produjo en la escritura de Eagleton en el cambio de siglo: de mostrar un escepticismo historicista acerca de los universales a abogar por el reconocimiento de la criatura humana (la fragilidad, el sufrimiento, la muerte) sin la cual cualquier proyecto político fracasaría. Este cambio coincidió con un acercamiento a una versión tomista de la religión cristiana que reflejaba la influencia en Eagleton de su amigo el dominico Herbert McCabe y con un profundo interés por Jacques Lacan. El artículo argumenta que este cambio no afectó a la fe marxista de Eagleton ni implicó rehuir la acción política. Más bien, el giro afectó a la base materialista de la propuesta de Eagleton de una vida justa. La apelación a las fuerzas existenciales supuso, por un lado, una crítica a la una crítica al historicismo de izquierdas y al culto posmoderno de la cultura y el relativismo y, por otro, un intento de reforzar la crítica marxista al capitalismo y la resistencia contra el fundamentalismo, el nihilismo y el consumismo. Para proponer su idea de la vida justa, Eagleton se apropia tanto de la noción de caridad cristiana -la idea de autorrealización a través del amor y la solidaridad-, junto con la concepción tomista de la moral arraigada en el cuerpo, y el imperativo de Lacan de "no renunciar al deseo".

Palabras clave: Eagleton; Materialismo; Finitud; Marxismo; Herbert McCabe; Lacan.

Terry Eagleton is a Marxist. Any slight doubt about this would have been banished when he responded to the Global Financial Crisis by explaining with tremendous wit and panache *Why Marx Was Right*. This is no small thing at a time when the radical academy tends to identify itself as Post-Marxist (Callinicos, Kouvelakis and Pradella). It also is the basis of the connection between us. We first met in the early 1970s at Terry's famous seminar on Marxism and Literary Criticism in his rooms at Wadham College Oxford. We both joined the International Socialists, despite our comrades' suspicions of our heretical interest in Althusser. I still have somewhere the postcard in which Terry kindly praised my first book, *Althusser's Marxism*. I was happy to repay the debt more recently by reading and commenting on *Why Marx Was Right* in draft.

We also have the common bond of a Catholic heritage–though I'm afraid mine stems from the recusant gentry, very different from the Irish working-class Catholicism Terry evokes so well in *The Gatekeeper*. But the Dominican house Blackfriars in Oxford–where Terry's great friend Herbert McCabe was based and where my father's funeral took place–matters to both of us. So it's appropriate that both Marx and God figure prominently in what follows (though I'm more enthusiastic about one than the other).

"We die anyway": the materialism of human frailty

But what kind of Marxist is Eagleton? In his early work there are some key reference points–Althusser and Macherey, Trotsky and Benjamin. There has, however, been a distinctively different tone in his more recent writings (by which I mean those of the past 20 years). I want to bring this out by considering the discussion in Eagleton's most Althusserian book, *Criticism and Ideology* (1976), of Trotsky's "Class and Art", a speech he gave in the early 1920s. Eagleton homes in on Trotsky's defence (against the class-reductionist approach of the Proletkult movement, which counterposed "proletarian" and "bourgeois" art) of the universal value of Dante's *Divine Comedy*:

> How is it thinkable that there should be not a historical but a directly aesthetic relationship between us and a mediaeval Italian book? This is explained by the fact that in class society, in spite of all its changeability, there are certain common features. Works of art developed in a mediaeval Italian city can, we find, affect us too. What does this require? A small thing: it requires that these feelings and moods shall have received such broad, intense, powerful expression as to have raised them above the limitations of the life of those days. Dante was, of course, the product of a certain social milieu. But Dante was a genius. He raised the experience of his epoch to a tremendous artistic height. And if we, while today approaching other works of mediaeval literature merely as objects of study, approach *The Divine Comedy* as a source of artistic perception, this happens not because Dante was a Florentine petty bourgeois of the thirteenth century but, to a considerable extent, in spite of that circumstance.
>
> Let us take, for instance, such an elementary psychological feeling as fear of death. This feeling is characteristic not only of man but also of animals. In man it first found simple articulate expression, and later also artistic perception. In different ages, in different social milieus, this expression has changed, that is to say, men have feared death in different ways. And nevertheless what was said on this score not only by Shakespeare, Byron, Goethe, but also the Psalmist, can move us (Trotsky 67-68).

In *Criticism and Ideology* Eagleton sympathizes with Trotsky's posing of the problem of aesthetic value but criticizes his solution. Commenting on the above passage, he writes:

> The final part of the statement partly retracts what the first part has offered: historical transcendence is seen first as an intensive universalizing of historically specific experience, then as almost wholly independent of such experience . . . Uncertain of its notion of the "historically universal", the argument then shifts to the biological universal of death (173)[1].

Compare the "Introduction" to *Sweet Violence*:

> Tragedy deals in the cut-and-thrust of historical conjunctures, but since there are aspects of suffering which are also rooted in our species-being, it also has an eye to these more natural material facts of human nature. As the Italian philosopher Sebastiano Timpanaro points out, phenomena such as love, ageing, disease, fear of one's own death and sorrow for the death of others, the brevity and frailty of human existence, the contrast between the weakness of humanity and the apparent infinity of the cosmos: these are recurrent features of human cultures, however variously they may be represented. However left historicism may suspect that universals are governing-class conspiracies, the fact is that we die anyway. It is, to be sure, a consoling thought for pluralists that we meet our end in such a richly diverse series of ways, that our modes of exiting from existence are so splendidly heterogeneous, that there is no drearily essentialist "death" but a diffuse range of cultural styles of expiring. Indeed, perhaps we should speak of death as a way of being "challenged", a mode of being which is neither inferior nor superior to breathing or love-making, simply different. Perhaps the dead are not really dead, just differently capacitated. But we die anyway (xiii)[2].

So, where the younger Eagleton criticized Trotsky for tying aesthetic value to "the biological universal of death", now he joins Trotsky in making just this move. No doubt there are various sources of this shift. One of these seems to reflect his doubts about what is often described as Marx's Promethean conception of human beings in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* as inventive social producers who realize themselves through their labour. These seem first to have been expressed in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990), but are very succinctly stated in his first book on Marx. Here he says (entirely accurately from an interpretive point of view):

> As a historicist thinker, Marx is out to rescue human institutions from the false eternality with which metaphysical thought has endowed them; what was historically created can always be historically changed. But he is also, somewhat paradoxically, a sort of Aristotelian essentialist, who holds that there is a human nature or essence, and that the just society would be one in which this nature was allowed to come into its own (*Marx and Freedom* 17).

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1 It is perhaps worth stressing that this scepticism about human universals would be common both to many versions of Marxism and to the deconstructionism with which Eagleton coquetted for a while, most notably in his hugely influential *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. He now stresses Marx's own commitment to a theory of human nature: notably in *Why Marx Was Right* (chapter 4).

2 See also Sebastiano Timpanaro, *On Materialism*.

Eagleton goes on to express doubts about what he calls Marx's "Romantic notion of a nature whose self-development is an end in itself" (17):

> One might find a rather too relentless activism about the doctrine, which undervalues what Wordsworth called "wise passiveness" or Keats "negative capability". Are we to realize *all* of our powers and capacities? What about those which seem morbid or destructive? Perhaps Marx considers that our powers become destructive only by virtue of being constrained, in which case he is surely mistaken. And how are we to discriminate between our more positive and negative capacities, if we have no criteria beyond this historically relative process itself by which to do so? "All-round" development may seem to some inferior to the cultivation of a single creative talent, just as self-denial may appear to some more commendable than self-expression (25)[3].

The specific form taken by Eagleton's rediscovery of the transhistorical is, it seems to me, partly intended as a corrective to Marx's "Romantic expressivism" (*The Ideology of the Aesthetic* 223). Thus, his recent writing stresses not the active conquest of nature but toil, passivity, suffering, death as human universals:

> It is true that there is much about our species-being which is passive, constrained and inert. But this may be a source of radical politics, not an obstacle to it. Our passivity, for example, is closely bound up with our frailty and vulnerability, in which any authentic politics must be anchored. Tragedy can be among other things a symbolic coming to terms with our finitude and fragility, without which any political project is likely to founder. But this weakness is also a source of power, since it is where our needs take root. If these needs are rebuffed, then they have behind them a force rather more intractable than the purely cultural (*Sweet Violence* xv).

But Eagleton's concern here is not simply to correct Marx, but to reinforce a Marxist critique of capitalism. One of the main polemical targets of his recent writing is "left historicism", of which postmodernism is the most important example. The problem with left historicism is to that it develops a critique of essentialism and foundationalism that values the very qualities promoted by capitalism: "They do not seem to have noticed that difference, diversity and destabilization are the *dernier cri* of the transnational corporations" (*Sweet Violence* xvi). Or again:

> Those who insist with suspicious stridency on the malleability of things, and for whom "dynamic" is as unequivocally positive a term as "static" is unambiguously negative, tend to forget that there are kinds of change which are deeply unpleasant and undesirable, just as there are forms of permanence and continuity which are to be affirmed and admired. Capitalism may be upbraided for many defects, but lack of dynamism is hardly one of them. One thinks of Walter Benjamin's wise dictum that revolution is not a runaway train but the application of an emergency brake. It is capitalism which is anarchic, extra-

3 See also Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* 217-26.

> vagant, out of hand, and socialism which is temperate, earth-bound and realistic. This is at least one reason why an anarchic, extravagant poststructuralism has been rather wary of it (xi).[4]

As these passages make clear, and Eagleton develops at length in *After Theory*, this stress on human invariance and finitude are thus not a retreat into Heideggerian *Gelassenheit* but a means of grounding a more effective resistance to capitalism. They constitute not an abandonment of politics for the contemplation of Being but a means of practising politics more effectively.

The same balance is struck in Eagleton's references to religion. He takes "the political left" to task for its "silence about religion" and insists that, for all the crimes of organized religion, "there are theological ideas which can be politically illuminating" (*Sweet Violence* xvii, 39-40). *Sweet Violence* is dedicated to his friend, the great left Thomist Herbert McCabe OP, whose influence, Eagleton says in *After Theory*, "is so pervasive on my argument that it is impossible to localize" (ix). If one were going to try, however, I think one would see McCabe's influence most clearly at work in the two chapters where Eagleton seeks to rescue the virtues and morality for the left, which resonate very strongly with McCabe's vindication of a version of Catholic orthodoxy that dismantles such dualisms as fact and value, subjective and objective, or linguistic and biological.

It seems to me, as they say, no accident that there are more references to Aristotle than to Marx or Derrida in *After Theory*, for at the centre of Eagleton's vindication of morality against, not just postmodernism, but another great Marxist critic, Frederic Jameson[5], is a restatement of Aristotle's morality of well-being that seeks to "universalize the idea of self-realization", in particular through incorporating the Judaeo-Christian notion of love, where "we become the occasion for each other's self-realization. It is only through being the means of your self-fulfilment that I can attain my own, and vice versa" (*After Theory* 122)[6].

But there is nothing ethereal or other-worldly about this appropriation of Christian charity. Typically Eagleton makes the New Testament his source for the claim that "morality is basically a biological affair"–i.e., "like everything else about us, it is rooted ultimately in the body . . . It is the mortal, fragile, suffering, ecstatic, needy, dependent, desirous, compassionate body which furnishes the basis of all moral thought. Moral

4 Compare Luc Boltanski's and Eve Chiapello's fascinating study (*The New Spirit of Capitalism*) of how contemporary "network capitalism" has appropriated the "aesthetic critique" of capitalism for denying individual creativity that was central to the movements of 1968.

5 For example in "Jameson and Form".

6 See also, on love, Eagleton, *Sweet Violence* 165-168.

thought puts the body back into our discourse" (*After Theory* 155). The ellipsis in this passage is a quotation from another contemporary Thomist, the ex-Marxist Alasdair MacIntyre, whose *Dependent Rational Animals* also explores the moral and political implications of our bodily and animal nature.

More recently, Eagleton himself recruits Aquinas to the materialist camp:

> Thomas Aquinas rejects the Platonic prejudice that the less our actions involve the body, the more admirable they are. In his view, our bodies are constitutive of all our activities, however "spiritual" or high-minded they may be. For Aquinas, we are animals all the way through, not just from the neck down. We are, to be sure, social, rational and historical beings as well, but the materialist point is that we are these things in a peculiarly animal way. They are not alternatives to our animality, or accessories to it. History, culture and society are specific modes of creatureliness, not ways of transcending it. Animal bodies are inherently self-transcendent (*Materialism* 44-45).

Theology and revolution

No wonder that what Eagleton calls "the metaphysical or theological turn (or full circle) which my work seems to have taken in recent years" has called some spluttering in liberal-left quarters (*Holy Terror* vi)[7]. Reviewing Eagleton's powerful critique of the "new atheism" of Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens (rebaptized as the two-headed beast "Ditchkins"), *Reason, Faith, and Revolution* (2009), James Wood sarcastically comments:

> His Catholicism used to be obscured by his Marxism, but, as he has aged, his religiousness, like a limp, has become more pronounced. Some might say that to be committed to not one but two questionable orthodoxies is to be symmetrically hobbled, but Eagleton's Marxism is vividly cogent, while his Christianity is militantly opaque ("God in the Quad").

One can imagine what fine work Eagleton could make of Wood's offensive reduction of religious faith to what used to be called a handicap. But Wood has a point. Eagleton seeks to demolish Ditchkins while bracketing the question of whether or not God exists. He has two arguments for this strategy. The first is that Ditchkins wrongly treat belief in God as if it were a rival scientific hypothesis to, say, the theory of evolution by natural selection and God himself as if he were an entity in the world. The reasons Eagleton gives for why this is wrong are developed at more length by McCabe, who writes: "for St Thomas, when we speak of God we do not know what we are talking about" (*God Still Matters* 27). And again:

7 For example, see the splenetic reaction in the letters pages of the *London Review of Books* to Eagleton's demolition of Richard Dawkins's *The God Delusion*, "Lunging, Flailing, Mispunching".

> If God is whatever answers our question, how come everything? then evidently he is not included amongst everything. God cannot be a thing, an existent among others. It is not possible that God and the universe should make up two. Again, if we are to speak of God as causing the existence of everything, it is clear that we must not mean he makes the universe out of anything (6)[8].

This negative theology allows Eagleton (here again following McCabe) to argue that there is no conflict between religious faith and scientific research, and this is fair enough. But I don't see that this gets rid of the question of the existence of God. Saying that "God is the reason why there is something rather than nothing", not "any sort of entity himself" isn't a sufficient answer (Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, and Revolution* 7). If existence isn't a predicate, as Kant and Frege argue, but the instantiation of a concept, then the nature of existence will in each case depend on the nature of the concept instantiated. So how God exists will be different from how a star or a table or a person exists, but it doesn't follow that his existence is a null question. It surely makes some kind of difference to how the world is whether or not God really is "the reason why there is something rather than nothing", even though this is a metaphysical and not a scientific question.

Secondly, Eagleton argues, Ditchkins fail to understand that faith or love–a commitment irreducible to propositional truth–gives us access to truths more effectively than can the liberal rationalist pretending to adopt the view from nowhere. Now I agree that adopting a partial perspective can be a precondition of attaining objectivity: this is, after all, what Georg Lukács argues in *History and Class Consciousness*, developing an intuition of Marx's. Althusser argued something similar in the 1970s with respect to Marx himself:

> it is no surprise that the adoption of a proletarian philosophical position (even "in germ") is essential to the foundation of a science of History, that is, to an analysis of the mechanisms of class exploitation and domination. In every class society these mechanisms are covered-up-masked-mystified by an enormous coating of ideological representations, of which the philosophies of History, etc., are the theoretical form. For the mechanisms to become visible, it is necessary to leave these ideologies, that is, to "settle accounts" with the philosophical consciousness which is the basic theoretical expression of these ideologies. It is therefore necessary to abandon the theoretical position of the ruling classes, and take up a position from which these mechanisms can become visible: the proletarian standpoint. It is not enough to adopt a proletarian political position. This political position must be worked out into a theoretical (philosophical) position so that the causes and mechanisms of what is visible from the proletarian standpoint may be grasped and understood. Without this displacement, the science of History is unthinkable and impossible (*Essays* 160-161).

8 Compare Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, and Revolution* 6-9, which repeats the formula "God and the universe do not make two".

But how far this dialectic of the particular and the universal can be prudently generalized is another matter. Eagleton appeals to Alain Badiou's notion of truth-events in his support, but he seems to realize he's skating on thin ice here (*Reason, Faith, and Revolution* 116-119)[9]. However perspectival knowledge may be, it can't be the case that any old faith or love gives us access to the truth–unless we give up on the common or garden realist conception of truth according to which sentences are true or false in virtue of how the world is. In the passage just cited from Althusser the point is clear: the construction of "the science of History" presupposes "a proletarian political position" but must be "worked out", developed into an articulated theory answerable to whatever protocols govern scientific practice.

I have great sympathy with what Eagleton is doing in his critique of Ditchkins. I agree that it's a rationalistic error of major proportions to reduce the question of religious faith to the truth or falsehood of what it affirms. Indeed, I take this to be Marxist ABC, starting from Marx's 1843 Introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, where he moves beyond the Enlightenment critique of religion reaffirmed by the Young Hegelians to treat religious faith as a symptom of a world out of joint: "Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and also the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions" (175). It is important to reaffirm this approach in the present era of Islamophobia.

But Marx can bracket the question of truth because he takes for granted the falsehood of belief in God. The same text begins: "For Germany the criticism of religion is in the main complete, and criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism" (175). Marx starts from the Enlightenment critique but thinks it's inadequate for explaining why people believe. What connects the issue of truth with that of social explanation is what Max Weber argues is common to all religions, i.e. the problem of theodicy: why is there suffering and injustice in the world? Here I must apologize for being simple-minded, but there just seems to me to be a stark inconsistency between (i) 'God is the reason why there is something rather than nothing', who created the world (literally) gratuitously; (ii) God is love and this love is particularly directed towards the suffering and the outcast; and (iii) there is suffering and injustice in the world. (i) and (ii) are McCabe's and Eagleton's version of the orthodox Christian conception of God as the omniscient, omnipotent, and benevolent creator (however figuratively, McCabe argues, we may have to understand

9 See Badiou, *Being and the Event* and my critique of this book in *The Resources of Critique*, §3.2.

this description). These propositions just don't square with one another. That there is suffering and injustice in the world may be critical to understanding why people believe in God, but it at the same time refutes this belief. I take it that Eagleton would disagree but it would be better if he owned up to his faith (as it seems he now does) rather than duck and dive in the way he does in *Reason, Faith, and Revolution*.

But despite Eagleton's debt to McCabe, their positions are not identical. This is indicated by what they say about death. For McCabe death and resurrection represent the point at which Marxism and Christianity part company:

> If the marxist is right and there is no God who raised Jesus from the dead then the christian preoccupation with death as the ultimate revolutionary act is a diversion from the real demands of history; if the christian is right then the marxist is dealing with revolution only at a relatively superficial level, he has not touched the ultimate alienation involved in death itself, and for this reason his revolution will betray itself; the liberation will erect a new idol. Not that the christian church is not in any position to cast the first stone at people who betray their own revolutionary purpose (*Law, Love* 135-136).

Consequently, the stance the Christian must take towards political revolution is almost literally that of the fellow-traveller:

> It seems to me that the first thing a christian will want to say about his moral position is that he belongs with this revolution. I say "belongs with it" rather than "belongs to it" because the christian revolution goes in and through this kind of revolution into something deeper, to the ultimate alienation of man which is sin and the ultimate transformation which is death and resurrection (166-167).

Or again,

> the community whose mission it is to transform the world is the community of *faith* which implies a dispossession of oneself which goes beyond even poverty and means, in the end, an acceptance of death. This means that the christian's relation to the revolution can never be a simple one, he needs to be constantly critical of the political revolution lest it should become a substitute for the final transformation of the world (168).

Now Eagleton too advocates "an acceptance of death", as the ultimate in the lesson in human finitude that is at the heart of his materialism. Thus: "Death shows us the ultimate unmasterability of our lives, and therefore something of the bogusness of trying to master the lives of others" (*After Theory* 213). Similarly, he interprets Lacan's slogan "Do not give up on your desire!" as a "tragic imperative, exhorting the subject to an affirmation which can arise only from embracing its own finitude": for, "[s]ince desire for psychoanalytic thought is always bound up with death, a death which the lack at the heart of desire prefigures, not to give up on one's desire means to maintain, Heidegger-like, a

constant relation to death, confronting the lack of being that one is" (*Sweet Violence* 233).

Nihilism, fundamentalism, and consumerism all represent ways of evading this truth. But recognition of our finitude serves to direct our attention back to the transformation of this world. Thus, at the end of *Sweet Violence*, Eagleton returns to Lacan's injunction. He first reminds us:

> The astonishing fact about global capitalism is that it is the *majority* who are dispossessed… In this context, Lacan's "Do not give up on your desire!" becomes a political injunction. It means "Be steadfast for death": don't be fooled by "life" as we have it, refuse to make do with the bogus and second-best, don't settle for that set of shabby fantasies known as reality, but cling to your faith that the deathly emptiness of the dispossessed is the only source from which a more jubilant, self-delighting existence can ultimately spring (296).

Like Slavoj Žižek, then, Eagleton counterposes to "that set of shabby fantasies known as reality" the Real–the Lacanian order where the death drive reigns as the limit and ruin of the coherence of the Symbolic, "the terrifyingly inhuman installed at the core of the other and oneself, for which one name is the death drive" (165). But, where for Žižek the Real functions both as ontological principle and as tool of *Ideologiekritik*, revealing the antagonism at work in contemporary social and cultural forms, for Eagleton it serves rather as the ethical invitation to find ways of living that acknowledge our liability to death and suffering and our need for reciprocity. Thus he talks about "a new social order, one based this time on the Real, on a mutual confession of finitude and frailty, rather than on [left historicist] fantasies of self-fashioning and endless pliability" (287-288)[10].

In a very recent, and explicitly Christian text, Eagleton maintains this emphasis on transformative agency when asking; "When Will Christ Come Again?" God might indeed intervene in history to fend off catastrophe, but this can can't be counterposed to human efforts to free themselves:

> The Second Coming is most intelligible not as an arbitrary arrest of history but as an act of mercy in circumstances which cry out for it . . . It is reasonable, then, to believe that only when we are in truly desperate straits will God stretch out his arm for a final time.
>
> Yet since God respects our freedom, being the source of it himself, he will presumably give us every opportunity to build as much of the New Jerusalem as possible with our own hands. Only when it is clear that this project lies utterly in ruins is he likely to act. And whether we have failed or not is to be judged not simply by the state at which we finally arrive, but also by every historical struggle for justice and friendship weighed

10 See my discussion of Žižek in *The Resources of Critique*, §3.3.

> against every squalid betrayal of it. In this sense, then, the coming of Christ has not been deferred . . . But that return involves free human agency, not simply the faith that history is even now washed up had we but eyes to see it (320-21).

Conclusion

There is much in this that is very original. It is not that no other Marxist has drawn attention to the nature-imposed limits to human achievement, to the mortality and finitude arising from our physical and dependent nature. Apart from the example of Timpanaro cited by Eagleton himself, one can think of Engels predicting the death of the universe in *Dialectics of Nature* and Adorno in *Negative Dialectics* seeking to rein in the megalomaniac ambitions of German idealism, and thereby to open a space in which intimations of a reconciled nature could make themselves felt. Indeed, recent Marxist scholarship has greatly qualified Eagleton's critique of Marx's alleged Prometheanism by documenting the latter's preoccupation with humans' dependence on and interaction with a nature that capitalism is relentlessly destroying[11].

But it is not unfair to say that these earlier exercises have often tended to remind us of the limits to what any form of political action can achieve. In Eagleton's case, however, invoking the Real as an invitation to a social order based on the reciprocity needed by the finite, dependent animals that we are pushes us towards rather than away from political action. Thus he says that "the true paradigm of objectivity is not epistemological but ethical. The model of objectivity is a self-less attention to another's needs" (Sweet Violence 289). But ethics, thus understood in a way that recalls Lévinas and Derrida as openness to the other, leads us back to politics:

> Objectivity, the self-for-others, is only a basis for freedom and well-being if it happens all round. If it is not reciprocal then is simply the dismal condition we have now, in which some squander their lives in the name of pampering others. Only by a mutual recognition of finitude, frailty and material needs can such objectivity become the basis of an emancipated world . . . To transform the subject involves not wishing objectivity away, but pressing its implications all the way through. It is in this sense that there is an internal bond between virtue and materialism (*Sweet Violence* 289).

It is hard to get critical distance from a position when one agrees with it as much as I do with the substantive content of Eagleton's Marxism. Let me conclude with one suggestion and three observations on the significance of his strategy. The suggestion is that taking seriously the injunction to "universalize the idea of self-realization" requires us to

11 See Foster, *Marx's Ecology;* Foster, *The Return of Nature*; Burkett, *Marx and Nature;* and Saito, *Karl Marx's Ecosocialism.*

go beyond Aristotelian *eudaimonia* and Christian *caritas* and engage with liberal political philosophy–not just with the egalitarian liberalism of Rawls and the like but also even with something as unpalatable as utilitarianism. Such an approach isn't inconsistent with anything Eagleton says–indeed, he has often stressed the complex relationship between Marxism and liberalism–but it goes beyond anything he has written[12].

The three observations I want to make are these. First, the attraction of Eagleton's strategy is that it offers a way of going beyond postmodernism that doesn't relapse back into any notion of constitutive subjectivity. The interest of his demarche is that he invites us to attend to the nature-imposed limits to our subjectivity not as brute inert matter, but as active and morally commanding, as the source of the demands that we would make on each other were we to fight our way through capitalism to a just society. To repeat, for Eagleton, "[i]t is the mortal, fragile, suffering, ecstatic, needy, dependent, desirous, compassionate body which furnishes the basis of all moral thought", and also of radical politics. Or again: "The aim of socialism, in contrast [to the terrorist], is not to destroy the flesh but to recall us to our creatureliness" (*Holy Terror* 105).

Secondly, there is the question of what is it about the world that has prompted the reorientation indicated by my opening contrast between *Criticism and Ideology* and *Sweet Violence*. Maybe it has something to do with the fact that the dynamic force that has driven history onward in the past few decades has proved to be liberal capitalism, and not the proletariat, contrary to the hopes that Terry and I shared when we leafleted the car factories of Oxford in the mid-1970s. This is not, to repeat, to imply that the perennial and the transhistorical have become a refuge from history for Eagleton, but rather to suggest that, when every corner of life is penetrated by rampant neoliberalism, then it might make sense to quarry the deep continuities of human existence for sources of resistance.

Thirdly, it should be clear that what we find taking shape in Eagleton's recent writing is an ontology. This is interesting both because ontology is a form of philosophizing much frowned on by Althusserian Marxism and Derridean deconstruction alike and because the most ambitious contemporary radical thinkers–Badiou, Negri, and Žižek–are all cheerful ontologizers. Eagleton is close to Badiou and Žižek in the importance that he attaches to the Lacanian conception of the Real, though, as I have tried to show, he gives it a somewhat different content. This reflects the fact that the deep sources of his thought lie elsewhere, in the diverse traditions of Marxism, and also in certain persistent

12 See Callinicos, *Equality*; *The Resources of Critique*, chapter 7; and "Two Cheers for Enlightenment Universalism".

presences that predate his embrace of Marxism–Aristotle, Aquinas, and Wittgenstein[13]. The four thinkers Eagleton highlights in *Materialism*–Marx, Aquinas, Nietzsche (perhaps in tribute to his more deconstructionist days), and Wittgenstein–are emblematic. But, of course, no interesting thinker is the sum of the influences on them. Terry Eagleton has taken inspiration from many, but what he has made of them is wholly his own.

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13 Two major discussions of Wittgenstein (about whom Eagleton also wrote a screenplay)–"Wittgenstein's Friends", and *Materialism*, chapter. 5–illustrate the continuities and shifts in Eagleton's thought. In both he stresses the value of Wittgenstein's later understanding of language as constituted by socially and naturally shaped "forms of life", defending him from the accusations of unreflecting conservatism made against him notably by Perry Anderson (see especially "Components of the National Culture" 21-25), but the preoccupation with comparing Wittgenstein and Derrida that pervades the earlier (very rich) text is entirely absent from the later one.

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THEORYNOW
JOURNAL OF LITERATURE, CRITIQUE, AND THOUGHT

"I'LL GO ON" – TERRY EAGLETON, WRITER

"SEGUIRÉ": TERRY EAGLETON, ESCRITOR

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Abstract: This essay seeks to link Terry Eagleton's work as a novelist and playwright with his work over many years in theory, philosophy and literary criticism. The several pieces discussed here shimmer with raw energy, innovative technique and a deep grasp of the tangled histories of England and Ireland. The ability to work in both critical and creative modes is rare and the constantly shifting boundaries of the work considered here indicates Eagleton's desire to carve out a genre that incorporates an inclusive model of expression. The issue of Irish history and politics is an abiding concern for Eagleton; the painful and violent struggle for Irish independence is a constant theme in his work and makes a connection with his own Irish background. Ireland is also a shelter to Wittgenstein in *Saints and Scholars*, a work that shows Eagleton as also able to cut philosophy and narrative with a ready and effective humour.

Keywords: Humour; Ireland; Terry Eagleton's novels; Terry Eagleton's theater plays.

Resumen: El presente trabajo trata de vincular la obra novelística y teatral de Terry Eagleton a su trabajo teórico, filosófico y crítico. Las obras analizadas brillan gracias a su desbordante energía, su innovadora técnica y una profunda comprensión de las

historias entretejidas de Inglaterra e Irlanda. La capacidad de operar tanto de modo crítico como creativo es poco habitual, y el constante cruce de fronteras de las obras analizadas son indicativas del deseo de Eagleton por delimitar un género que incorpora un modelo inclusivo de expresión. La cuestión de la historia y la política de Irlanda es una preocupación constante de Eagleton, mientras que la dolorosa y violenta lucha por la independencia de Irlanda constituye un tema constante en su obra, conectando así con sus propios orígenes irlandeses. Irlanda es también un refugio para Wittgenstein en *Saints and Scholars*, una obra que muestra a Eagleton también es capaz de penetrar en la filosofía y en la narrativa a través de su humor agudo y efectivo.

Palabras clave: Humor; Irlanda; obra novelística de Terry Eagleton; obra teatral de Terry Eagleton.

A founding moment of colonisation lies in the realisation of oppressed classes that they are subjected in language, in the ruler's tongue, even if, like Caliban, they scream in anguished rage, "The red plague rid you / For learning me your language" (Shakespeare 366-367).

It might be suggested that Irish writing in English is a lengthy, elaborate, creative and celebratory extension of this sentiment. Poetry might "make nothing happen" but "nothing" can, as in the case of Cordelia's response to Lear or the soundlessness of that Baskerville hound, testify to the power of those self-sacrificial, liberating agencies that lurk within established narratives of power.

The turn (re-turn) to Ireland in the work of Terry Eagleton is most clearly crystallised in his moves in the game of *écriture*, excavations in the shifting sands of criticism and creation, grammar and rhetoric, that mark a radical change in style. In this sense the novel, plays and film script that Eagleton has produced can be interpreted in a number of ways: as a summation of a certain ideological tendency that can be read back through his prose writing (a Hegelian reading); as a thing apart, a sportive sublime set at a distance from the grim sense-making conceptualising discourse of the academy (a Kantian reading); a series of games, tropes, figures and jokes that reveal the insubstantiality of all discourse (a Nietzschean reading). There is a further reading that seems to me more apposite. And it is found in Eagleton's book on Benjamin where a discussion of comedy is contextualised within a political agenda—"the catharsis of laughter is, inseparably, the birth of a new form of discourse" (*Walter Benjamin* 150).

Eagleton in *Saint Oscar* and *Saints and Scholars* harnesses the punning word-play characteristic of Irish writing, that "intense verbal self-consciousness" (*Saint Oscar* 3) to

the articulation of a dialectic that seeks to draw out the complex relation of Irish identities to the English language, a language which "as so often in Irish history, compensates for a history in which you are more determined than determining, more object than agent" ("Oscar and George" 333). Beside the "theatre of ideas" genre which this motif suggests, there is a strong personal pressure present in these texts which Eagleton discusses in his Introduction to *Saint Oscar*: "Writing *Saint Oscar* was an attempt to rediscover something of my own suppressed voice . . . something bred in the bone, as though what I had been trying for some time to do in theory had finally to culminate logically in art" (4).

Saint Oscar, first performed by Field Day Theatre Company in the Guildhall, Derry, on 25 September 1989, possesses what Seamus Heaney has termed a "ventriloquistic inventiveness" (86). In this respect Eagleton's play is a high-risk script; aphorisms, witticisms and droll exchanges pile up on the stage. The staginess is a central part of the act; we witness the presentation of a recession of Wildes like a nest of matryoshka dolls as Eagleton essays the task of "reinventing him without, with a sole exception, actually quoting him" (*Saint Oscar* 3).

Saint Oscar, like *The White, the Gold and the Gangrene*, opens with a choric ballad, the sentiments of which emphasise what Eagleton also refers to as the surrealistic nature of the setting of the dramas:

> The moral of our tale it is plain for you to tell:
> Unnatural practices land you in hell
> If you're quare and you're Irish and wear a daft hat
> Don't go screwing the son of an aristocrat (16).

Through song, epitome and epigram, the play draws upon the Brechtian tradition of epic theatre. Brecht's combination of music/text works very well in both this text and in *The White, the Gold and the Gangrene*. Here the Chorus begins the play and marks the end of each Act; the *Song of the Rent Boys* breaks up Act Two at a particularly tense moment. Brecht notes:

> A good way of judging a piece of music with a text is to try out the different attitudes or gests with which the performer ought to deliver the individual sections: . . . For this the most suitable gests are as common, vulgar and banal as possible. In this way one can judge the political value of the musical score (105).

The fatuous bawdiness of the Rent Boys accomplishes these aims; anarchy and law are near 'bedfellows' as the Judge makes an appointment to meet these lads later at the close of their song.

Eagleton gives us the play in epitome following through another Brechtian axiom that, "subject-matter in itself is in a sense somewhat banal, featureless, empty and

self-sufficient. Only the social gest—criticism, craftiness, irony, propaganda, etc.—that breathes humanity into it" (Brecht 105). Dramatic means produce a moral lesson; entertainment and edification, the shape of both now known, will be presented in a genre that allows for the alienation necessary to make the whole enterprise worth doing.

From the outset the action is dominated by Oscar who uses Speranza, Lady Wilde, Edward Carson and Richard Wallace as sounding boards for demonstrations of his verbal wit and agility, an agility harnessed, particularly in Act Two, to an angry denunciation of authority. What begins as music-hall comedy shifts into the political register: the one-line laughter of this, for instance,

> LADY WILDE. (Melodramatically) My son!
>
> WILDE. She always had an excellent memory (19).

prefaces the "matter of Ireland":

> WILDE. The body of my country! Countries have bogs and bridges, mother, not bodies. They're made up of the same people living in the same place—or in the case of Ireland the same people trying to get out of the same place (24).

The arch frivolity of these exchanges is played off against a range of sincere socialist commitments that leak out, often indirectly, through the surface glitter. As Wilde comments,

> I subvert their forms by obeying them so faithfully (31).

In "Oscar and George*"* Eagleton discusses this aesthetic paradox in political terms and provides a useful parallel reading of the dramatic form:

> Wilde adopts an idealist language of authenticity, while being mightily suspicious of the whole idea. It is, in part, a conflict between the European Romanticism to which he was heir, and the self-ironizing consciousness of the colonial mimic man, for whom truth can only mean the wry knowledge of one's fictionality (337).

Elsewhere, Eagleton speaks of Wilde's "curious anticipation of some present-day theory" (*Saint Oscar* 3). The impossibility of self-evident presence, the premise of both deconstruction and postmodernism (albeit from very different perspectives) provides yet another point of linkage between Eagleton's theoretical interests and their imaginative presentation. Rather than remaining silent about the unspeakable (*pace* Wittgenstein), Wilde is garrulous, self-mocking, opinionated, highly politicised, a sophisticated comedian; the dedication of this play is to Trevor Griffiths (the play's first director) who has also written of the non-comic comic, the spotlit isolate who evokes a muffled, muted and uneasy laughter from a hackneyed phrase-making turn; the "catharsis of laughter" is also a peripeteia, a realization of the absurdity of existence. The Enlightenment belief

in progress is in our day upheld by Krapp sitting alone in his room talking us through the passages of a nondescript life, a comically absurd history that is deeply disturbing. And it is this darkly comic pirouette of philosophic hope, verbal dexterity, the authorities of inarticulate and pitiless, mechanized institutions, corporate greed and a vain yet all-too-knowing selfhood that is dramatised in *Saint Oscar*.

The fit of these themes with the Irish experience of British rule is made explicit in Wilde's long impassioned attack on Carson, the judge, and upon the frozen nature of Enlightenment reasoning in Act Two. Wilde's trial is here seen as symptomatic of judicial hypocrisy, inflexible thought and the thuggish brutality of the ruling-class: "You subjugate whole races, you condemn the mass of your own people to wretched toil, you have reduced my own nation to misery and despair, and all you can think about is which sexual organ goes in where" (46).

Wilde is sentenced and a rapid elision in the script allows us to pass directly to the chorus of prisoners and the visitation by Lord Alfred Douglas, "Bosie". The betrayal of Wilde shifts on to a personal humiliation and abandonment:

> BOSIE. Get your hands off me! Do you think I'm going to spend the rest of my life tied to an old scumbag like you? You're finished, Oscar, washed up, can't you see? (53).

The drama moves on—a street scene in Paris, Richard Wallace who had reminded Wilde earlier that, "your cause and the workers' struggle are the same" (29) reappears—smarter in appearance, his politics now trimmed:

> WILDE. And what about this alliance between the intellectuals and the working class?
>
> WALLACE. I think you and your rent boys just about summed it up. The most we can hope for is a rather more humane form of capitalism (56).

The play concludes in a "carnivalesque" song and dance evocative of the Bakhtinian universe where all roles are reversed, an "as-if" world where anything could happen. It is pertinent to apply one of Eagleton's earlier insights to this moment in the text: "Through this crude cackling of an ambivalently destructive and liberatory laughter emerges the shape of an equally negative and positive phenomenon: utopia" (*Walter Benjamin* 145).

Utopia here truly "cackles" in a caricatured presentation of an ideal "united Ireland", an imaginative space where the laughter flows freely to the rhythms of a loping ballad: "In Maidenhead and Margate the kiddies in their school / Are taught to speak the Irish and learn Churchill was a fool" (63).

The White, the Gold and the Gangrene, performed in West Belfast in 1993, picks up the issues of identity and role that the Irish homosexual Wilde, aristocrat, dissident, nationalist and empire loyalist has deconstructed. The last days and execution of James

Connolly provide the scaffolding for a dark satire on bureaucratic inflexibility, the rationality of Enlightenment thinking raised to a terrifying and absurd *terminus ad quem*. Eagleton reminds us of the vivid historical moment that sparks such pained realisation: "Unable to stand for his execution, he was shot sitting in a chair" (66). The ballad is used again here to mark off the overt and flamboyant theatricality of the invention. The chorus patter out their tale in the style of the American folk ballad: "Big Jim, big Jim, big bold Jim". As the spoken song finishes, a penny whistle "pipes up chirpily with the first two lines of 'The Red Flag' moving directly into a quavering, tentative rendering of the first five notes of "The Soldier's Song" (70). Elsewhere Eagleton has spoken of nationalism as "the site of a class struggle" ("The Archaic Avant-Garde" 289). The linkage in *Saint Oscar* of Wilde's personal torment with the subjugation of his country is analogised and deepened here: Connolly's torture, the cause of Ireland and international socialism are sounded in harmony by the thin whistle. Later in the play, Connolly recalls a sound "pure and unfractured" (112) and talks of a space beyond language where we "go all the way through it and come out somewhere on the other side" (113).

The dramatic force of such scenes provides a further clue to Eagleton's use of the stage. For it is at such moments that the texture of sensory experience reminds us that the point of meaning-making is not point-scoring through a series of competitive language-games but a recognition that the human inhabits being, that choice and determination can live on common ground. The self-conscious split of Mind and Matter that taints post-Cartesian Western culture has spawned its Other, a supposedly carefree and irresponsible postmodernism. These plays suggest that Nietzsche's prison-house of language (the incarcerations of Wilde and Connolly acting as powerful aide-mémoires of the physicality of all metaphor) can also act as a liberating agent leading to "the other side". Writing "play"/playwriting is one way of showing this. Eagleton's referencing of Vladimir's and Estragon's respective closing phrases in *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett, "Yes, let's go" (*They do not move*) (54, 94) at the end of *The White, the Gold and the Gangrene* associates the play with the often tortuous post-existential, post-structuralist discussions of such matters.

The casual brutality of the guards, McDaid and Mather, bears a direct relation in the text to their inability to function as individuals. As mechanisms in the machinery of Empire, they witlessly parrot rules, blur into one another, sing from the same songbook. Eagleton's drama opens up the nightmarish horror of a world lacking moral anchorage; where philosophic discourse ponders the issue of whether dismemberment renders suspect the integrity of the subject in law. By provoking the hollow laughter of the absurdist tradition in theatre, the author reminds the audience

of their complicity, the all too human desire to complacently witness the turn of history into farce:

> McDAID. A donkey's potentially dead but you can still ride it. A woman's potentially dust and ashes but you can still take her to the pictures.
>
> MATHER. That doesn't follow.
>
> McDAID. A baby's a potential wife but I wouldn't walk one down the aisle (75).

This element in the play is highlighted effectively by the entrance of Liam, the ventriloquist's dummy, towards the end of the play. Liam's stage Irish set-pieces spoof the Irish Revival style of J.M. Synge and his contemporaries. The bog and mountain mists and myths of Ancient Erin emerge as full-blown puffs for a Celtic carts and coaches tour:

> LIAM. [A]nd him keening and pining for the sight of a heron in the harsh skies and the sweet talk of a woman and wouldn't he be giving a mountainy ram and a load of dung to be squatting by his own hearth (109-110).

The knockabout humour of these scenes heightens the grimness of Connolly's imprisonment. His one major speech (quoted from earlier) sets in context the sadism of the guards. Their constant urge to provoke a response demonstrates their unease in his presence; the word games they play indicate a frightening level of frustration. They are as Irish as Connolly but Irish identity is for them no more than a series of labels of the kind of which Liam the dummy possesses a plentiful abundance. For Connolly, there is a language outside the repetitive jargon of the other characters: "You just have to inflect it differently—find a way of speaking it which will get you beyond it" (113).

This motif reappears in *Disappearances*, produced at Salisbury Playhouse in 1997, a foray into the post-colonial legacy of civil war, corruption, "sellout", set in an unnamed country in Africa. Kaman, a cynical well-off exiled poet dominates the play which explores issues of personal and political morality, of passivity and action, of the role of art in the class struggle and of the peculiar sadness of the imagination in exile:

> KAMAN. They cart me from hotel room to dinner party like a sack of spuds. There are times I'm not even sure what hemisphere I'm in. Not that it matters much: anywhere is everywhere these days (136).

A major contrast in the play concerns the lyrical strength of Kaman's poems (taken from *Selected Poems of Sŏ Chŏngju*) and his cynical self-interested rants: Kaman is a torn and tormented human being; it is left to his estranged wife, Mara, to explain his decline from hero of the radical front to clapped-out drunkard: "Mara . . . You turned yourself into words, and that's sad, but they're wonderful words, and they're what will survive you. You'll have left your mark" (156).

The echo of Auden's *In Memory of W. B. Yeats'* in this speech provides an ironic counterpoint in that Kaman keeps vainly trying to separate off his own cocooned world from the conflict present in his country. The revolutionary, Raan, and Kaman's daughter, Yana, press him to return. His poetry is famous; he could act as a figurehead for the opposition who are seeking to overthrow the dictator, Janda: *Raan*: The people worship you, Kaman. They'd strike against Janda for *you*; for us, well, we can't be sure (153).

Kaman's agent, Richard, boastful of his northern working-class credentials, and Blackwell, an ex-college acquaintance with MI6, press Kaman to avoid involvement. Blackwell indirectly suggests that Yana's prospects of a scholarship could be affected; Richard fears the Nobel Prize committee would be disenchanted.

Unsurprisingly Kaman does not go, though by the end of the play he is a changed man. The interaction and argument with those about him including his encounters with a tenderly regretful Mara alert him once more to those sounds 'beyond' which Connolly once heard:

> KAMAN. [S]ome murmur of another world—something you could savour on your tongue like wine . . . There's a hunger to find it—a terrible remorseless hunger. And all we know of it again and again is our failure to pronounce it . . . sometimes I think I won't rest till it's settled on my tongue. Till it breaks upon us like a burst of sunlight (167).

God's Locusts, a play performed on BBC Radio 3 in 1995 has harsh points to make about the origin and administration of the Irish Famine or "The Distress" as the administrators prefer to term it. The rich metaphorical texture of the other plays is partly exchanged here for an angry and impassioned denunciation of a cruel self-deluding regime though that strong interest in unseating narrative through rhetorical playfulness is still present. While Eagleton's response to the Famine does utilize the same surreal banter and wit seen in the previous plays in order to get its points across, *God's Locusts* is grounded in the contrasting perspectives that the records of the day reveal. Or, as he comments in the "Introduction" to *Saint Oscar*, "the astounding shambles and callous inhumanity of key aspects of the British relief project" (9).

Hamish McClintock is the central character, "a transformed version of Sir Charles Trevelyan" (*Saint Oscar* 8). His sadistic administration is powered by a crude sexual appetite that is accompanied by declamations from the Old Testament. Battle-scenes, prohibitions and prophecy all appear to heighten his sexual desire for Molly Byrne, the Irish prostitute (who, true to Irish typecasting, has chosen that life instead of that of a nun). McClintock, the servant of Empire, a pathetic, inadequate yet dangerously divided character, unleashes suffering and destruction upon the Irish population as if to expiate a private guilt, a response all the more terrifying for its arbitrariness.

The Irish deputation of William Smith O'Brien, John Mitchel and Jane Elgee flounder in their cause (as the old Irish joke goes, "the first item on the agenda is the split") as a series of cynical and casuistical strategies emanate from the Civil Service office:

> O'BRIEN. We are most concerned that the public works are not paying a living wage.
>
> CREIGHTON. Ah, yes, the public works. Well, perhaps I can spare us some superfluous argument here. The public works are to be closed (205).

The play re-articulates arguments about the Famine that, in Eagleton's view, have not been heard sufficiently. The scapegoats of "food shortage" or "overpopulation" are firmly rebutted by John Mitchel. Even the old warhorse of market forces is shown to be a straw man position as British subsidies to regions in the North of England are quoted. Eagleton has to incorporate a number of didactic sequences into the text to deal with these arguments. At the same time he is presenting the psycho-sexual pathology of McClintock and a sub-plot in which Dainton, the Irish sympathiser working in the office is shown to be in love with Jane Elgee, Anglo-Irish nationalist.

The historical framework of the play presents a series of arguments that seek to redress the conventional explanatory narratives of the Famine. Ambitious and information-rich in this respect alone, the play takes on much other material. The character and relationship studies mentioned; a sly reference as in the Connolly play to Beckett; a surreal word-play of catchphrases from different decades mainly designed to illustrate the shallowness of the officials designated to deal with Ireland; and a spirited verbal energy that offsets the pointed moral that the play generates.

McClintock's elaborate speech (from which the play's title is taken) in Act Two is a case in point. The belief in predestination, in the Famine as an act of God, is one of the darkest moments of the play yet one embodied in a vivid and moving poetry: "The sword, the pestilence and famine are instruments of his discipline, the canker worm and the locust are his armies. Famine, my friend, is the last, the most dreadful of Nature's resources. It is, so to speak, God's locusts at work on the body itself. The vices of mankind often finish the work of depopulation themselves" (210-211). The same paradox that informs John Arden's *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* is present here. The devil, incarnated as a dangerously lucid paranoic, sings all the best tunes.

Ten years earlier, Eagleton experimented with the form of the novel. *Saints and Scholars* (1987), develops an interest which Eagleton raises in a previous article, "Wittgenstein's Friends" (1982). In "Wittgenstein's Friends" Eagleton discusses the odd conjunction and close friendship of Nikolai Bakhtin and Ludwig Wittgenstein in some detail.

Wittgenstein made few friends in England, but apparently enjoyed a close personal and professional relationship with this extraordinary Russian. Eagleton suggests, on the strength of Nikolai and Mikhail Bakhtin's shared "literary and intellectual context" (113) as children and as figures in the Petersburg University milieu that Wittgenstein's interest in material particularity is "indirectly related to the mainstream of Marxist aesthetics" (114).

In *Saints and Scholars*, Eagleton places this bizarre meeting in a context that does justice to its oddity. Fantasy, satire and parody rub up against the harshness of James Connolly's execution and the terrors of the First World War. A fluid energy spins through the text: events pile up, plot-lines appear like characters in a pop-up book animated for the moment by a linguistic conjuror. Nabokov is one reference as for example in the perpetual deferment of Connolly's execution: "Let us arrest those bullets in mid air, prise open a space in those close-packed events through which Jimmy may scamper, blast him out of the dreary continuum of history into a different place altogether" (*Saints and Scholars* 10).

This vanishing-trick (reprised at the end of *The White, the Gold and the Gangrene*) is, in a tradition which runs from Sterne to Salman Rushdie, a "baring of the device". As Eagleton suggests in another context, "One might define fiction as the kind of writing in which it is impossible to tell the truth and very hard to make a mistake" ("In the Company of Confrères" 31). The very dead Connolly remains alive on the page, and, more importantly, inscribed in the narrative of the emancipation of Ireland. In fiction, you really can have it both ways. There is also a sly dig at Derridean *différance*. Connolly is able to leap out as significant presence in the pages and plot of this novel because he is absent. In death is life, the oldest trope in the book and one that Connolly himself refers to later: "At the centre of the Christian faith is indeed a dead body, but one whose failure heralds resurrection . . . Comedy is what comes in the end" (*Saints and Scholars* 101).

The novel crackles along as Bakhtin and Wittgenstein shift home from Cambridge to the West of Ireland, an episode loosely connected to Wittgenstein's real-life retreat in the 1940s to a cottage at Rosro, Connemara. Both philosophy and "Irishness" are the butts of an extended series of knowing, jokey word-plays; snippets of Wittgenstein are appropriated for the comedy that undermine the lean puritanical aperçus and aphorisms familiar from other Eagleton works. A sub-plot concerns Donal Tierney, the larger-than-life Irish publican and villager whose chequered background is deftly inserted into the novel. His self-conscious use of the English stage coding of Irish vernacular is not rumbled until Connolly enters the scene. The contrived colour of his speech register conceals a shrewdness that enables him to turn a few bob from the legacy of Wittgenstein's sojourn a few years later.

Wittgenstein, haunted and "hunted" by the image of "dons", painfully trying to stop writing "rigid with the effort . . . like a monk struggling to contain his seed" (*Saints and Scholars* 75), is obsessed with the imperfections of real-life language usage. His own aphorism finds its way into the text: "He had forgotten about friction. Back to the rough ground!" (42). This issue surfaces in serious discussion (though a missing "s" must qualify this judgment) later on when Wittgenstein takes on Connolly:

> "Bollock," said Wittgenstein. "The people live on in the simple self-evidence of their lives. It's philosophers like yourself who would pitch them into a state of emergency".
>
> Connolly counters:
>
> "An oppressed people knows that every moment is a state of emergency" (100).

The second main character, Bakhtin, also a philosopher, lectures on Hegel to the local pub crowd; between gargantuan feats of eating and drinking—"He took them briskly through subject and object, the negation of negation, the identity of identity and non-identity" (78). The tussle between fat Hegelian and emaciated mathematical logician is told through a series of hilarious vignettes brought to a climax by the appearance at the door of the "escaped" Connolly. Eagleton introduces him by way of a condensed account of the Easter Rising. On this account, the Rising is a shambolic, uncoordinated series of events most appropriately symbolised by its taking place, "not on the pure ice of the Winter Palace but on the rough ground of Jacob's biscuit factory and Noblett's sweet shop at 34 O'Connell Street" (89). Wittgenstein's gnomic comment indicating the wavering balance of a mind caught between mathematics and materialism makes another appearance here—the rough ground turns out to be a place where history happens, whereas Auden put it, "dogs go on with their doggy life" (79). A further insight, after skirmishes with Connolly and confusion brought about by the sudden appearance of Leopold Bloom, bears direct connection with the Irish setting of the novel: as Wittgenstein and Bakhtin are taken away by a military car, Wittgenstein muses on Connolly's responses:

> What if he is right that crisis is common? The people will deride this folly, live on in the innocent self-evidence of their gestures. There is no resurrecting the dead. If the dead rise I am done for. I thought I had touched rough ground but there may be bog beneath (*Saints and Scholars* 145).

Connolly is brought to the execution chair with the last agonisingly optimistic words of Beckett's *The Unnamable* (382) on his lips as if to confirm Wittgenstein's doubt—"You must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on" (Eagleton, *Saints and Scholars* 145).

The bog beneath the rough ground reappears in the film script, *Wittgenstein*, writ-

ten in conjunction with Derek Jarman, commissioned originally by Tariq Ali for Channel 4. Wittgenstein responds to Melling, the don who has come to take him back to Cambridge from the Austrian monastery where he toils as a gardener:

> You see this flowerbed?
>
> …
>
> It's just soil all the way down. You can't feel rockbottom. I thought I'd touched rockbottom (Jarman and Eagleton 19).

The tension between the rough ground where things are "battered and tarnished and ambiguous" (55) and a "world purged of imperfection and indeterminacy, like countless acres of gleaming ice" (55) (lines retained in Jarman's script), is encapsulated in a series of dramatic scenes that draw out the strange contradictions of this "monk, mystic and mechanic" (Eagleton, "Introduction" 7).

Eagleton suggests, in a thoughtful introduction, that the contrasting versions of Wittgenstein that emerge from his script and that of Derek Jarman present a composite image of a deeply divided man: a driven personality whose peculiar combination of strictness and insecurity testifies to "the clash of cultures, histories, sensibilities and styles of thought" (13) that mark out his distance from fellow-Viennese scholar, Freud.

The body of work discussed in this article does not lend itself to summary generalisation: continuing motifs such as rough ground/pure ice, the matter of Ireland, the play of personal and political and the pattern of accident, chance and meaning that inform movements of liberation can be found throughout. More significantly, the work offers its own inter-textual dimensions. Eagleton is too impassioned a critic not to keep up that watchful commitment to an open and just society which has been the central direction of his literary criticism and philosophic discussions. Discourse turns back on its own meta-linguistic ambitions in these texts; jokes leaven the pomposity and bombast of rhetorical gesturing; a critique of Wittgenstein turns into a tender affection; narrative twists and turns avoid the schematisation of generic demands. To effect a linkage with the great body of Eagleton's work as a critic would form the basis of another book, an epic text whose author would be wise to listen to Frank Eden's warning about Eagleton's criticism: "I'd like to cherish every line and dwell on each insight / But if I sang about the lot I'd have to sing all night" (209).

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THEORY NOW
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TERRY EAGLETON'S DIVINE COMEDY

LA DIVINA COMEDIA DE TERRY EAGLETON

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Abstract: This essay reflects on the links between comedy and religion in Terry Eagleton's writing since 2000. It proposes that religious thought provides the same kind of occasion and imperative to take comedy seriously as Marxist theory had done earlier in Eagleton's career. The essay argues that the connecting principle between Marxism, Catholicism, criticism and comedy is the body, especially in its conjoining of absurdity and abasement. It proposes that comedy is best regarded as the enactment of the fantasy of cognitive omnipotence, or the abstract will-to-enjoyment in constant search for occasions. We therefore likely joke for the same reason as we pray, for the pleasure of getting above ourselves, which includes the gratifying prospect of seeing ourselves tumbling off the ladder, which might be a slapstick translation of the *felix culpa*, or fortunate fall. If Eagleton's critical comedy is officially offered as a salutory foretaste of the pleasure of redemption, its gratifications seem always also to lie down where all the ladders start, in suffering and finitude.

Keywords: Comedy; religion; the body; suffering; politics.

Resumen: Este ensayo reflexiona acerca de los vínculos entre la comedia y la religión en los escritos de Terry Eagleton desde el año 2000 y plantea que el pensamiento religioso provee el mismo tipo de ocasión e imperativo para tomarse la comedia en serio que la teoría marxista había brindado previamente a la carrera profesional de Eagleton. En este artículo argumentamos que el principio de conexión entre el marxismo, el catolicismo, la crítica y la comedia es el cuerpo, especialmente en su conjunción de absurdo y abajamiento. Sugerimos que la mejor manera de considerar la comedia es como puesta en escena de la fantasía de la omnipotencia cognitiva o como voluntad abstracta de disfrute en constante búsqueda de ocasiones. Por lo tanto, es probable que bromeemos por la misma razón que rezamos: por el placer de creernos más importantes de lo que somos. Esto incluye la grata posibilidad de vernos caer de la escalera, lo cual podría ser considerado una traducción bufonesca de la *felix culpa* o caída afortunada. Si la comedia crítica de Eagleton se presenta oficialmente como un anticipo salutífero del placer de la redención, sus gratificaciones parecen encontrarse siempre también allá donde empiezan todas las escaleras: en el sufrimiento y la finitud.

Palabras clave: Comedia; religión; cuerpo; sufrimiento; política.

In an earlier essay on Terry Eagleton, written for a conference in Oxford in 1998 to mark his work, at which he remarked how surprisingly agreeable it felt to be, like Tim Finnegan, at once in attendance and posthumous, I took the pleasurable opportunity to reflect on Eagleton's negotiation in his writing of the oxymoronic tensions between art, revolutionary Marxism and comedy. Now, almost a quarter of a century on, with as much "late Eagleton" having accumulated as "late capitalism", and in the sure and almost certain knowledge that another quadricentennial retrospective opportunity is unlikely to come round, I mean to reflect on what has emerged as another area of generative and indeed defining feature of Eagleton's thought, namely the striking consubstantiality of questions of comedy and religion in it.

The return, like a long-overdue library book, of religious preoccupations to Eagleton's work dates, appropriately enough, more or less from the turn of the millennium, and was mediated by a series of books on different aspects of tragic violence: *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (2002), *Holy Terror* (2005), *On Evil* (2010) and *Radical Sacrifice* (2018), interleaved with two books that more explicitly consider the relation between religious and critical thought, *Reason, Faith and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* (2009) and *Culture and the Death of God* (2014). This might suggest

that religion is allied closely to dark and tragic matters, but, as always, and, in his book *Humour* (2019) explicitly, comedy has something to do with this reparative labour of the negative.

None of this represents a penitent return to the skirts of Mother Church. Eagleton asserts, in the introduction to *Sweet Violence*, that "religion today represents one of the most odious forms of political reaction on the planet, a blight on human freedom, and a buttress of the rich and powerful" (xvii). He begins *Reason, Faith and Revolution*, perhaps his most vehemently explicit defence of religious thinking, with the similarly round assertion "Religion has wrought untold misery in human affairs. For the most part, it has been a squalid tale of bigotry, superstition, wishful thinking, and oppressive ideology" (xi). In his writings on religion through the last couple of decades, Eagleton has proved himself no more an apologist for established religion than he is for the forms of twentieth-century official state socialism: he once tipped off his first-year English undergraduates in Wadham College, I was one, that he was off to China to lecture, as the CPC had expressed "a guarded interest in hearing about Marxism". But he does seem to feel that, in the cases both of Marxism and Christianity, there is, splashing about in the murky, turgid bathwater of history, a babe too bonny of aspect to swirl away with it down the plughole.

The religious hand I myself was dealt (soggy south-eastern public-school Anglican-ecumenical) had a different character from that dealt to Terry Eagleton in his youth (Salford Christian-Brother Catholic-brutalist). But I find that we are both in our different ways more inclined in our seniority (and the older we both get, the closer we must come to seeming coeval to the generations treading us down) to draw from this hand. In my case this is largely because of the benefits of an education which involved a great deal of religious observance, musical, linguistic, and amateur-dramatic, followed by a life-long interest, much of it, to my continuing astonishment, salaried, in subjects like literary criticism and philosophy, from which in those days it was almost inevitable that one would acquire, if only by rumour or on the rebound, a pretty tidy working knowledge of Christian ideas and writings. This was a time when the word *sacramental* was as familiar in English departments as the term *eduroam* is today. Nowadays this kind of familiarity only seems to be possessed by students I feel I should really be turning in to the Prevent programme. How else was one to make sense of the fact that a tenth of the population of England might in the seventeenth century alone have been reduced to sewage over an abstruse question of semiotics (body of Christ, or token thereof) and those who rallied to either side of the fraught signifier/signified dichotomy. Such sensitivities may not have completely vanished. I was once about to take part in a radio discussion on

metaphor when a production assistant came up and murmured that they had a regular correspondent who got volubly inflamed by any mention by the national broadcaster of transubstantiation, so would I perhaps mind steering clear of the topic? "But the word is never off my lips!" I protested. Similarly, I found myself a few years ago at a dinner in a Cambridge college in which a discussion arose as to the desirability of adding a fourth person (female, those were the days) to the Trinity. I was able, I compliment myself, to hold my own in the sparkling repartee that developed between the chaplain and a fellow in engineering, the latter seeing the issue primarily in terms of tetrahedral as opposed to tripodal symmetry. My easy commerce between physics and metaphysics, Mariolatry and milking-stools (and I must surely have thrown in Joyce's joke about the puns in *Finnegans Wake* not being trivial, but at least quadrivial), has something to do with the fact that, though I have never felt at home in religious thought, I have felt able to make it into my element.

The examples just given might make it easy to say why, for it will surely seem irritatingly obvious to some that my impostor insiderliness with regard to religious, or strictly speaking Christian, idiom and argument comes from the fact that I feel no pressure to take an iota of it at all seriously. I hope I could nevertheless defend myself against the charge of not taking seriously the seriousness of other people's religious commitments. In any case, I will try to wonder in this essay whether the question of religious comedy, which seems to set the seriousness of religious commitment aside, is itself a serious question. My suggestion is going to have to be that joking and the libido of laughter have become for Eagleton not just a style or, as we have been saying for the last fifty years, a strategy, but something like a necessity, even, increasingly, a kind of compulsion, to resort to the word we use for a comically unnecessary necessity.

Category Mistakes

Eagleton begins *Humour* with a dismissal of the conventional complaint that to analyse humour is to destroy it, arguing that analysis and laughter can coexist perfectly well since they are in fact wholly autonomous and non-interfering operations. Cracking jokes is simply a different thing from explicating them. I remember him ringing the changes in tutorials on this particular category of category-mistake, one of the most surprising being his sage observation that an ability to play or even have played football well is not in fact a necessary qualification for being a successful football coach. This is a self-instancing instance, since I could not imagine that Eagleton's knowledge of this principle could have been obtained empirically, either on the field or the bench.

However, his own practice seems to illustrate an opposite principle, or at least an opposite reason for believing that analysis and interpretation do not compromise comedy, and that comedy does not scotch analysis and interpretation. This, to be quick about it, is the idea that analysis and interpretation are essentially comic procedures. Comedy need not be funny and one might even articulate it as an aggressive principle of anything we find funny that not everyone will. An argument in favour of this unlikely-sounding association between analysis and comedy might proceed in part via the widely-accepted association between comedy and incongruity. Comedy often arises when things do not seem to agree or add up, when things seem, as we may say, "funny", which is coincidentally just the kind of circumstance which might prompt the act of rational enquiry aimed at interpretative explanation. Comedy requires interpretation, most particularly in the case of jokes, which require us to "get" them, in a way that is perhaps not as far away as it might seem from grasping an argument, but also in the case of absurd situations, which require that we "read" them aright. Perhaps comedy does not always arise in such circumstances, but when it does, it often looks as though some kind of incongruity that calls for a remedial straightening out.

In any case, the incurious conviction of the refractoriness of comedy to analysis is productive of one of the most venerable of comic routines, which plays out the pleasingly chiasmic logic that analysing comedy is never itself funny, except when it is done with such leaden solemnity, as the case of the "jokes" offered for analysis by Kant and Schopenhauer for example, as to seem itself absurd. Bergson's theory of laughter, along with the comedy of inflexible eccentricity that gives us the word "humour", depends on this principle that laughter is sparked by people who do not realise how ludicrously mechanical they must seem. Comedy may feel more like feeling than thinking, but always seems to involve at the very least feelings about thinking.

Can we then say that interpretation necessarily requires or produces comedy? Well, probably not, but it may nevertheless be that the solution of difficulties or unravelling of riddles which is characteristic of the act of interpretation parallels the dissolution of psychic tensions at which Freud's account of laughter points (riddles, remember, tend to be wisecracks as well as conundrums). I do not pretend that the abstract-conceptual nature of comedy, especially as it relates to the question of embodiment, is any kind of mystery to Eagleton, who points out that "Laughter is a form of utterance that springs straight from the body's libidinal depths, but there is a cognitive dimension to it as well", meaning that children are "strangers to the kind of comedy that depends upon deviating from established norms, since they have as yet no grasp of them" (*Humour* 19). So I think there is enough to go on here to suggest that Eagleton's well-recognised comic turns have a more than ornamental function in his thinking, and the wording of it.

Anatomy

Indeed, the red thread or connective tissue running for Eagleton between Marxism, Catholicism, criticism and comedy is the body. He quotes with approval Simon Critchley's judgement that "What is funny, finally, is the fact of having a body" (Critchley, *On Humour* 62; quoted Eagleton, *Humour* 21). Actually, as he immediately observes, the funny thing is not just the fact of having a body, otherwise we might expect more in the way of spontaneous merriment among alligators and elephants, but the fact of having a body as well as being one. This is to say that the fact of having a body is also the fate of having a body, and, even more specifically, remembering that *fatum* is the past participle of *fari* to speak, the fate of having, or being able–in fact, to mince words to their maximum, having to have been able–to speak of the body as well as with it, phew. "A poem should not mean / But be" rules Archibald MacLeish (51), as the conclusion of a poem which it thereby seems conclusively to rule out as a poem. Bums are not *eo ipso* nearly as funny as their designation with the word "bum" rather than some more stylishly polysyllabic bit of Latin. Gorillas' bodies are not funny, except when they can be mistaken for people in gorilla suits. George Herbert invites us to see the act of prayer as "the soul in paraphrase" (45): but elsewhere, in speaking of himself as "A wonder tortured in the space / Betwixt this world and that of grace" (82), he seems to suggest that it might be the crucified body, or the body as itself a kind of crucifixion, that forms the space of that paraphrase. Torment and tomfoolery consort handy-dandy and arsy-versy in Eagleton's writing. It is the tension between sign and substance, or soma and seeming, that makes possible comic play, and makes it hard for the most earnest metaphysics to keep a straight face. This is a matter not just of the matter of Eagleton's thought, but of its manner, not just of the soul of wit, but of what Wyndham Lewis called the "brain-body's snort of exultation" (152).

This tension animates if not every word, then a sizeable proportion of all the sentences in Eagleton's writing. It may account for his frequent recourse to traditions of what might be called the Hiberno-Cartesian grotesque, in Swift, Sterne, Wilde, Joyce, and, perhaps most favoured at all when it comes to the politics of the body as incarnational humiliation, Beckett. Perhaps the tradition of learned wit on which Eagleton draws is epitomised in the observation in Samuel Beckett's *Malone Dies* that "sticklers have been met with who had no peace until they knew for certain whether their carcinoma was of the pylorus or whether on the contrary it was not rather of the duodenum" (*Three Novels* 236), a sentence in which the intestinal windings of syntax seem perfectly to simulate the alternation between the immediacy of pain and the medicating mediations of discourse. It also represents a rejoinder to Eagleton's enjoyable, but actually ques-

tionable observation that "An anatomical acquaintance with the large intestine is no obstacle to enjoying a meal" (*Humour* x). Beckett was at pains in his later writing and in his productions of plays written earlier in his career, to try to mute or ruin the itch to quippery, even if the hamstringing could sometimes act as a kind of intensifier, as when the inquisitor in *What Where* gravely enquires of his associate in damnation "Are you free?" (*Complete Dramatic Works* 473), daring its respectfully solemn audience to let out the snigger it seems both to stifle and to extort. One sometimes senses in Eagleton the same uneasiness about the fascination of what comes so easily, since the point of comedy seems to be to point us to the reputedly serious matters, of redemption or revolution, which it intimates. So his striving for comedy is also similarly a kind of striving against it–as in Frankie Howerd's lugubrious mock-reproof "No, missus, *don't*".

If the intestinal sentence just quoted is not so much a joke as *the* joke in Beckett's writing, its reflexive convolution is also powerfully evidenced in what is known as the Irish bull, which operates on the principle of what I unluckily elected in an earlier essay on the subject to call body-illogic (Connor, "Art Criticism and Laughter"), as exemplified in the story of the Kilkenny cats, here rendered in the form of a stretched limerick:

> There once were two cats of Kilkenny;
> Each thought that was one cat too many;
> So they fought and fit,
> And they scratched and they bit,
> Till excepting their nails,
> And the tips of their tails,
> Instead of two cats, there weren't any (Jerrold 28).

Absurdity is also close to bodily abasement in Christian narrative, and Eagleton is often drawn to the holy-fool cavortings of Christianity, frequently focussed in the carnivalesque image of Christ riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. (One should note that animals, as comic shorthand for the degraded or unsouled body, doing their baffled best to get their inexistent heads round things, are as abundant in Eagleton's oeuvre as in Eddie Izzard's.) Eagleton's system of comic belief draws a great deal from the tradition attributed to Tertullian, who is reputed to have declared robustly *Credo quia absurdum*, I believe because it is crazy. In fact his actual words, in his *De Carne Christi* were slightly different:

> et mortuus est dei filius: prorsus credibile est, quia ineptum est. et sepultus resurrexit: certum est, quia impossibile.
>
> and the Son of God died; it is utterly credible, because it is unfitting; and he was buried and rose again; it is certain, because it is impossible (Tertullian 18).

As James Moffatt suggested more than a century ago, *ineptus* is maybe closer to funny-peculiar than to funny-haha, since, in the strait-laced Aristotelian tradition which Tertullian in many respects is still following, what is objectionable about laughter and the absurd is not so much that it is undignified as that it is discordant or out of tune with the cosmic. So Tertullian perhaps meant, not that the story of Christ's resurrection is ridiculous, though this was certainly the line taken by some pagan objectors to the story, but rather that it is so improbable as to be likely to be true, on the principle that you couldn't make it up (Moffatt), always remembering that this is what is said about things that are exactly the sort of stuff that gets made up.

Soul in Paraphrase

At the heart of Eagleton's practice, and the source of his poise and potency as a writer, is his superb capacity for refractive paraphrase, which seems able to concentrate in a few choice words, like a genie captured in a bottle, the gist of arguments that would otherwise need many hours of readerly slog to construe for oneself. It is not that Eagleton necessarily sells these arguments short, or misrepresents them, for his paraphrases are often once-heard-never-forgotten miracles of salty compression. But the effect of the compression is in a broad sense comic, for much of their yield comes from the sense of the saving of cognitive expenditure they offer, in a striking parallel with the Freudian "economics of humour", to which Eagleton regularly adverts (*Humour* 11). That is, in form as well as content, Eagleton's arguments by paraphrase enact an oscillation of scales, as elaborate processes of ratiocination are cut down to size, in a way that is at once efficient, and, in an odd kind of way, exhibitionist. This abridgement seems to offer to the grateful reader a Hobbesian sense of "*Sudden Glory* . . . the passion which maketh those *Grimaces* called LAUGHTER" (Hobbes, *Leviathan* 2.48), since, as Hobbes explains in *Human Nature*, "the passion of laughter proceeds from the *sudden* imagination of our own odds and eminency: for what is else the recommending of ourselves to our own good opinion, by comparison with another man's infirmity or absurdity?" (*The English Works* 46). In Eagleton's judgement that Hobbes's "superiority theory", as it has become known, is "not only implausible but actually rather funny" (*Humour* 39), the condescending manner of his *mot* contrives to lend a certain credence to what it slaps down.

Eagleton is also adept at bathetic autocommentary, all the time reaching for cartoon objective correlatives for his more abstract arguments, like the graphic artists who can be hired to sketch real-time visualisations of seminar discussions: glossing Fichte's

idea of subjectivity, for example, we are told "It is as though in perverse style this supremely self-assured entrepreneur fashions stumbling blocks to its own freedom, simply in order to flex its muscles against them and relish its own powers" (*Culture and the Death of God* 55).

An allied form of comedy which Eagleton relishes is the clashing of linguistic register, as in the following example from *Culture and the Death of God*:

> If religion is feeling, as it is for Rousseau and Schleiermacher, passionate inward conviction, as it is for Lessing, Hamann and Kierkegaard, or essentially a form of symbolic practice, as it is for Emile Durkheim, it is hard to see how it can be argued against, any more than one can argue against arthritis or a hurricane (38-39).

The casual throwaway at the end ("arthritis or a hurricane") is both finely-worked and charitable to its reader, inviting them (as usual, I probably mean just me) to try out for themselves other homologous pairings which might serve the turn almost as well and in the process disclose the design principles of the original. What about "any more than one can argue with psoriasis or a sandstorm" for example? Or, with a touch more gravity, "any more than one can argue with old age or magnetism"? Once the heavy lifting has been done by Eagleton's nicely-engineered dying fall, the light-fingered reader can easily keep the shuttlecock aloft.

Actually, though, the apparent readiness-to-hand of the clincher provided by this clause tossed off at the stately sentence's end is a sleight of hand, since there are all kinds of ways in which religion, even in the form of passionate inward conviction, and perhaps especially in this form, can be argued against. Come to think of it, there are also all kinds of ways in which one might argue against simple submission either to the ills which flesh is heir to or to acts of God (in the latter case by suggesting they are unlikely to be any such thing, for example). You can't argue with arthritis, to be sure, but the tradition of theodicy is evidence of a long and stubbornly renewed argument about it, or wrangling with and against God for allowing or devising it.

The conjuring trick pulled off here is no better or worse than many others, and I am responsive to it no doubt because it is of a kind that infests my own writing, by what feels like a kind of amicable contagion. Still, one might want to register the fact that the joke seems to want to put beyond argument the unarguability it is trying to evoke, and therefore might subtly, to swipe a favourite idiom of Eagleton's, give itself the slip in the process. This is not to mention something that the sentence itself does not see fit to, the fact that feeling is not in any case the opposite of reason (the opposite of reason is unreason), meaning that there is really nothing particularly outlandish about the idea of arguing with feelings ("I wouldn't be so sure"; "you should calm down"; "what are you

grinning at?"; "cheer up, it may never happen"). Perhaps then I am here performing just that operation of arguing with feeling that is said to be countermanded, in taking mild issue with this smartly and enjoyably contrived sentence, insofar as the joke seems to offer the trumping force of comic feeling to seal its argument. If I get the joke, it seems, the preceding argument it seems to consummate must have got at me. A comic punch-line even in the form of a by-blow like this, might be seen as a sort of pseudo-argument, or brute-force form of QED. Like many jokes, it exercises, so to speak, the force of form, the force of the pure facticity of form that seems to break and enter into every after-the-fact kind of formality. Do I feel tricked or betrayed by this ruse, or think anybody else ought to be? Not a bit of it. The clinching afterthought, with its pesky provocations to demur, is very much to the point of what is going on in the sentence, and elsewhere in Eagleton's writing.

Omnipotence

Those who have set themselves to writing about comedy have often striven to find some essential thing that comedy is, or some essential and recurrent function that all instances of it may be held to perform. So successful have writers on laughter-phenomena been in this ambition that they have actually narrowed the range of options drastically, such that commentators struggle (or in fact, don't much) to avoid falling back into one of the well-established theories of the comic, of which there seem to be no more than three: they are the relief theory, the incongruity theory and the superiority theory. This is indeed the curriculum that Eagleton follows in his book *Humour*. The relief theory proposes that we laugh in order to reduce or discharge some kind of tension, cognitive or emotional. The incongruity theory proposes that we laugh at things that do not seem logical, rational, or properly aligned with the categories through which we see the world. The superiority theory (the least in favour among theorists who want to argue that laughter performs serious and therefore valuable work) is that we laugh at something we regard as defective or inferior, as in Thomas Hobbes's crisply quotable formulae duly quoted above. I have long suspected that there are really only two and a half explanations in this list, since what laughter affords relief from (or to), seems ultimately to be kinds of complexity or incongruity that without the catharsis of laughter might be intolerable, or just unpleasantly irritating. In fact, a determined be-all-and-end-aller might well want to claim that Hobbes's glory principle swallows both of the other goldfish in the bowl, since in discharging complexity one achieves a gratifying triumph over the difficulty it seems to propose, or at least the conception of that comfortable eminency.

All of these theories depend on the assumption that there is actually something funny (peculiar) about laughter that calls for explanation, and that explaining will not mean, as the word seems to promise it might, an unrolling, or spreading out, but rather a stripping back of laughter to the fulfilment or expression of some other necessity, that would be both essential to the laughter, yet also extrinsic to it, and so simpler and more primary than it. This is explanation by cancelling down, or the "*nothing-buttery*" that Peter Medawar sees as "always part of the minor symptomatology of the bogus" (Medawar 100). But the unlikelihood of getting any kind of story straight about comedy is suggested by the fact that, in his book *Humour*, Eagleton can sternly lay down the law that "The opposite of comedy is destiny" (55), having promised with equal certainty only a couple of pages before that "Comedy and fatalism are . . . in collusion" (50).

Eagleton's work in the last twenty years has tended to make religious redemption the zero-degree prospect of reconciling body and spirit, with all other programmes of thought and belief–art, nationalism, culture, even Marxist politics are all in the frame–acting as substitutes or understudies for it. The surrogate metaphor does a great deal of work in *Culture and the Death of God*, the persuasive argument of which is that religion is a kind of Urtext of which other systems of thought are corrupted versions or imperfect trench-whisper transcriptions. This is perhaps a restaging of the brilliant act of conceptual lasso-work involved in *Literary Theory*, which managed both to provide handy travel-pack explanations of the various brands of literary theory that were at that time proving so gnawingly time-consuming both for students and their teachers, and also to guide its reader quietly, pleasantly and as it seemed irresistibly toward the hospitable clearing of accounts provided by a Marxist framework of understanding. Where Marxism was suggested in *Literary Theory* as a sort of esperanto of all the dizzyingly proliferating dialects of literary theory, Christianity seems to fulfil the same function for all the various ideological substitute-formations that have arisen over the last three centuries in Europe: "Reason, Nature, Geist, culture, art, the sublime, the nation, the state, science, humanity, Being, Society, the Other, desire, the life force and personal relations" (Eagleton, *Culture and the Death of God* 44).

Comedy sometimes appears, like the aesthetic discourses with which it has so many affinities, as I tried to argue in "Art, Criticism and Laughter", to be one of these surrogates. Eagleton begins *Humour* with an acknowledgement of the many different forms that laughter, comedy, wit and humour can take, and the foolhardiness of attempting to cram them all into "a single formula" (xi). But his book ends nevertheless with an evocation of what seems unmistakeably like the redemptive power of the form of comedy theorised by Mikhail Bakhtin in the form of carnival. Despite warnings about pinning

one's political hopes on carnival–the often-observed fact, in particular, that "carnival may be a fictionalised form of insurrection, but it also provides a safety valve for such subversive energies" (162), the final pages of *Humour* smoothly and assuredly outline the analogy between carnival and Christianity:

> Carnival bathos lies at the core of Christianity . . . In the Eucharist as in carnival, flesh and blood become a medium of communication and solidarity between human beings . . . Like carnival, the gospel combines the joy of liberation with a certain violence and intransigence of spirit . . . There is also a vein of *comédie noire* in Christianity (163-164).

But what if religion were not the final instance, in the way that the economy used piously to be said to be among the Marxist faithful, but another kind of displacement, or stand-in? We should, I think, give ourselves leave to wonder if religious thought itself may be regarded as part of a vast variorum of vehicles and vicariances. At the heart of all the systems of thought reviewed in *Culture and the Death of God*, as it is at the heart of many accounts of religion, by believers and disbelievers alike, is the question of transcendence, a word which in its very etymology, *trans-*, across or beyond + *scandere*, to climb, seems to have a chuckley touch of Baron Munchausen about it. Indeed, the logic of the arguments of *Culture and the Death of God* is comic in that the most characteristic feature of the different religion-impersonating systems of thought reviewed in *Culture and the Death of God* is their Irish-bull incapacity to match or catch up with themselves, even as they depend on the gratifications offered by the ideal self-transcendence they posit.

There is indeed a very long history of reflexive acts of reasoning performed by minds fascinated by their own powers of extrapolation yet also made queasy by their own absurd susceptibility to such seven-league overreach. This reflexivity is distilled into 100% proof form by the famous ontological argument for the existence of God offered by St Anselm of Canterbury in his *Proslogion* of 1078. The fact that it is one of the most hilariously cock-eyed bits of cod-reasoning ever wakingly perpetrated has not prevented it from being solemnly debated back and forth by commentators apparently in full possession of their senses, from Descartes onwards, to this day. The argument is so well-known that many will still be able to pick out the tune from the following not altogether friendly paraphrase of chapter 3 of the *Proslogion*. I am able to conceive of a being than which no greater being can exist. But if I am just dreaming up such a being, it could not in fact really be the greatest thing going, since mere existence in the mind, or *a fortiori* on the tongue or fingers'-ends, is much less great than really existing. So if there really is a being than which no greater can be conceived, as the fact of my

being able to conceive it seems to indicate, God must, somewhere, somehow, outside my mind, really exist (Anselm 118-19). The logic here slips and slithers like a foot-high pile of assorted dinnerplates, but the principal objection to relying on the human mental capacity to conceive things as a proof of their extramental existence is simply stated: the human mind is full of shit, and never more so than when making an estimate of its own powers. The way I have just put it is a blunter form of one of the earliest rebuttals of the argument, which was offered in a text comically, or solemnly, one does not quite know how to tell, entitled "On Behalf of the Fool" ("Pro Insipiente"), by one Gaunilo, a Benedictine monk from Marmoutier Abbey. Gaunilo enquires with impressively mild reasonability "could I not say that all kinds of unreal things, not existing in themselves in any way at all, are equally in the mind?" (Anselm 157). Admittedly, Anselm seems to depend in part on this very recognition of the limits of human understanding, even deploying it as a trump card for his deduction that there must therefore be something that passeth it ("I know that there is a narcissistic maniac in my mind, or even perhaps that *is* my mind, but that knowledge is the very thing that allows me to set aside my narcissism and provides my passport to Absolute Knowledge"). But this extra turn of the screwiness of the argument must be sighingly passed over in silence.

Freud offers a characterisation of what is going on in the thought of thought's power to levitate itself beyond its limitations, in the formula "omnipotence of thoughts" (13.84), a phrase which he borrowed, with acknowledgement if not necessarily with permission, from one of his patients, who was actually rather unnerved by the magical power to effect harm that he thought his thoughts had. "We cannot think ourselves outside thought", Eagleton reminds us (*Culture and the Death of God* 50), even as we equally seem not to be able to congratulate ourselves on being able to think that (or think we do, and so on). As a participant-observer in this charivari of vicarious forms of omnipotence, rather than seated securely in the gods above them, religious thought might be seen, not as the final and indubitable vanishing point for omnipotence surrogates, but as a sort of ultimate surrogate or universal equivalent for its own thinking.

So everything that is signified for Eagleton by "God" or the mechanisms of religious belief, may itself be a surrogate, or *proxime accessit*, at once substitute and vehicle, for a paradoxically self-propagating (propagating itself through the paradoxes it propagates) transcendence engine. I do not even think this would come as news to Eagleton, who seems to acknowledge it in his resistance to idolatrously positive conceptions of God, and his fiery vexation at literalist or fundamentalist accounts by celebrity atheists of what religious folk are supposed to "believe". Eagleton repeatedly evokes in response the almost apophatic nature of the Thomist account of God, in a way that seems

to make it clear that God is not in any simple sense an external object of thought: "God for Judaeo-Christian theology is not an object, principle, entity, or existent being. He is rather what makes these things possible in the first place . . . Yahweh is–a peculiarly bruising, traumatizing sort of vacancy" (*Holy Terror* 42). God is somehow the knot intrinsicate of the agonising absurdity of his own absence from the scene, or absconding self-concealment in it.

Nothing could be more of this world, which is perhaps why the materialist Eagleton (who once told me, as an undergraduate perplexed by it, that the term materialism must be understood as belonging to the lexicon of mysticism) should also have cloven so closely throughout his career to questions of divinity. Those of us working in what in almost living memory used to be called the arts, are more and more inclined to call ourselves the humanities (even if "humanists" is a step too far for non-American academics). In medieval universities, which perhaps all universities in a way still are, the humanities were so-called because they dealt with the residual bits left over from divinity. The cobwebby term *divinity* has always struck me as a better name for the systematic trying on, and out, by humanity, and in the humanities, of ideas of god-ness than the haughty and self-congratulatory *theology*, which has never come very close to providing bankable knowledge of God. In succeeding as well as he does and, I might add, as well as he has always done, in showing that, when it comes to humans, nothing could be more unignorably material or less otherworldly than divinity, Eagleton seems with every new book to come closer to recognising the cohabitation of *divina commedia* and *comédie humaine*. Unless it is just me.

Trapdoor

What, to make an end, if laughter were not only not susceptible of explanation by recourse to radical or final first principles, but also in no need of it? What if laughter were neither the concealment nor displaced expression of any kind of something-else? What if we laugh because we enjoy laughing, and enjoy laughing just because we enjoy enjoying ourselves, and in rather a lot of different ways? Rather than wondering what is essentially laughable, we might then be able to see laughter as an abstract will-to-enjoyment in search of occasions. This obviously conceals a reduction of its own, in the version of the pleasure principle on which it may seem to rely, but this can probably not be helped. Anyway, we can be helped out of it to a large degree by the suggestion that the nature of pleasure is not of a fixed and necessary kind, meaning that pleasure may be partly characterised by the desire to diversify, even to perversify,

its forms. One of the things we seem to take pleasure in (needless to say, please, not the only, essential or always necessary thing) is our capacity to take and find pleasure in so many different sorts of thing. Laughter seems materially to assist this process at times: giggling schoolgirls and bantering schoolboys enjoy getting into that metacomic condition, at once infantile and esoteric, in which nothing is safe from coming to seem ridiculous. The contagiousness of laughter (even dogs, in their efforts to pass as human, try to have a go at it) may be an indication that it is laughing, or perhaps the proof of the capacity to laugh, that we find fun, rather than the response to certain kinds of essentially and invariantly funny thing.

If this passes, it may be that, rather than being an expression of the meta-physical predicament (the hyphen doing the work here) of rational-corporeal existence, the comic impulse finds in that predicament a proto-comic set-up that is well adapted to the immanence-transcendence games we like to play, in pursuit of some of the many kinds of pleasure to which we are so hopelessly and willingly addicted, along with the pleasure of seeing what new kinds we can come up with. So we should not be too surprised when religious conceptions rhyme with comic operations, since they both respond to the complicated relation of dependence and delight we have to ideas of transcendence, and/or the transcendence of ideas. If this is right, we likely joke for the same reason as we pray, for the pleasure of getting above ourselves, which includes the gratifying prospect of seeing ourselves tumbling off the ladder, which might be a slapstick translation of the *felix culpa*, or fortunate fall. Once again, we would probably be wrong to see our meta-physical predicament as the explanatory origin both of our earthling taste for laughter and of our immortal longings, for if that predicament did not exist it would be necessary for the pleasure principle to invent it (which it often in fact seems to do anyway). So, versatile though it is, the body-mind problem is only necessary to comedy in the way that laws, logical categories, politeness codes, Irish people, spelling mistakes and biological males are, as apparatus apt to be turned to comic account, which is to say, put to work as play.

Eagleton's comedy seems meant in part to provide a salutary foretaste of the pleasure of what lies beyond embodiment, suffering and contradiction, like the life of the mind for Beckett's Murphy, which "gave him pleasure, such pleasure that pleasure was not the word" (4). Eagleton's own critical manner is perhaps another kind of lieutenant for redemption, in its mingling of matter and manner, sense and sensibility, which might be thought of as a kind of down-payment on utopia. The funny, or possibly grim thing, depending, is that this anticipation never really gets an inch further forward, or back, on its path to the "happy garden" (Eagleton, *On Evil* 135), and even seems intent on

inventing excuses to dilly-dally on the way. Laughter may be a protest against misery, or a minor consolation for it, but cannot easily or reasonably be regarded as a mortgage on happiness. For this reason, though prospects of religious salvation, or religious prospects of political salvation, in this world or some other, may be compatible with comedy, as in the title of Dante's poem, it is hard to imagine that condition of bliss involving much angelic guffawing, as the lovably earthbound cast of much comedy might seem to indicate. Jack Dee, known as an "observational comic", once complained, as the compère of a comedy show, about having to share a dressing room with the acts lined up to follow him: "just imagine being stuck in a room with twelve observational comics, all *noticing* things". For what Beckett calls the "partisans of the trapdoor" (*Collected Shorter Prose* 163), heaven, like hell, would have to be other people, in the *huis clos* of the closed session.

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SOME ASPECTS OF TERRY EAGLETON'S USE OF FREUDIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS

ALGUNOS ASPECTOS SOBRE EL USO DEL PSICOANÁLISIS FREUDIANO POR TERRY EAGLETON

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Abstract: This paper looks at Terry Eagleton's engagement with Freudian psychoanalysis. We start by looking at Eagleton's increasing interest in psychoanalysis in the late 1970s, particularly in "Marx, Freud and Morality" (1977). We then move on to three crucial topics that Eagleton tackles by resorting to psychoanalysis: work, love and reason. In each of these three cases we present the ways in which Eagleton posits psychoanalysis as a plausible complement to Marxism, even where their compatibility is not immediately evident. Our reading is intended to be descriptive; however, it does not shy away from pointing out the inconsistencies that we have found in Eagleton's use and assessment of psychoanalysis. In the case of work, we address the relevance of Freud's view of it as inherently unpleasant in connection with the Marxian concept of alienated labour. Regarding love, we discuss Eagleton's focus on love understood as *agape* rather than

on the Freudian conception of love as *eros*. As far as reason is concerned, we deal with Freud's faith in the intellect and in science as the sole safeguards of humankind against the assaults of the superego.

Keywords: Terry Eagleton; Sigmund Freud; Karl Marx; psychoanalysis; work; love; reason.

Resumen: El presente artículo examina el uso que Terry Eagleton hace del psicoanálisis freudiano. Comenzamos analizando el interés creciente de Eagleton en el psicoanálisis a finales de la década de 1970, particularmente en "Marx, Freud and Morality" (1977). Desplazamos a continuación nuestra atención a tres temas fundamentales en relación con los cuales Eagleton recurre al psicoanálisis: el trabajo, el amor y la razón. En cada uno de estos tres casos presentamos las maneras en las que Eagleton postula al psicoanálisis como un posible complemento al marxismo, incluso cuando esta compatibilidad no es inmediatamente evidente. Nuestra lectura pretende ser descriptiva, pero no deja de señalar las inconsistencias que hemos encontrado en el uso y la valoración que del psicoanálisis hace Eagleton. En el caso del trabajo, invocamos la relevancia de la visión que Freud tiene del trabajo como inherentemente desagradable en conexión con el concepto marxiano de trabajo alienado. En cuanto al amor, presentamos el modo en que Eagleton se centra en el amor *agape* más que en la concepción freudiana del amor como *eros.* Por lo que respecta a la razón, nos centramos en la fe de Freud en el intelecto y la ciencia como únicas salvaguardas de la humanidad contra los asedios del superego.

Palabras clave: Terry Eagleton; Sigmund Freud; Karl Marx; psicoanálisis; trabajo; amor; razón.

1. Introduction

Anyone thoroughly acquainted with Terry Eagleton's work, including the author himself, will immediately detect in the title of the present article a deliberate echo of one of Eagleton's favourite titles ever: "Some Aspects of the Vaginal System of the Flea" (*The Meaning of Life* xiii; "El sentido de la vida"). Eagleton recalls with relish hitting upon this funny title when browsing through a thick volume containing the complete list of PhD dissertations in progress at Cambridge, an amusing habit of his student days: "I liked that 'some aspects'", he says, "nothing too ambitious, you know, very modest English kind of understatement" ("El sentido de la vida"). The scope of this article is in line with the spirit of "appealing modesty" of this doctoral thesis (*The Meaning of Life* xiii). Thus,

we will be limited to just some aspects of Eagleton's use of Freudian theory, a recurrent frame of reference in his work since the publication of *Criticism and Ideology* (1976). Incidentally, psychoanalysis has in common with the amusingly humble doctoral project its attention to the body, and shares with those other, less humble literary and artistic renditions of the flea motif in the English tradition its focus on erotic relations (John Donne's poem "The Flea") and the exploration of the uncanny, dark, bloody, monstrous and phantasmatic underworld (William Blake's miniature "The Ghost of a Flea").

In the space available, we will explore some of the uses that Eagleton makes of the work of Sigmund Freud. Eagleton's recourse to Freudian psychoanalysis to expand and enrich his discussion of different topics is for the most part successful, although it incurs in some contradictions and exhibits some limitations that we would also like to bring to the fore. In this sense, ours is both a descriptive and a critical approach, and needs be selective not only due to space restrictions, but also because Eagleton's *oeuvre* is so large and references to psychoanalysis so frequent that we must pass on to posterity the task of producing a full account of the topic in a book-length study or, perhaps, in a more ambitious doctoral dissertation with the phrase "some aspects of" cut off from the title. This article explores Eagleton's account and use of central Freudian notions, the valuable insights it offers and the contradictions in which it incurs[1]. Even if, as David Alderson argued in 2004, "Eagleton's sense of the value of psychoanalysis is suggestive and provisional rather than fully theorised" (82), it deserves to be examined further, brought up to date, and reassessed in terms of its insights and limitations.

2. Enter Freud

When *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* was published in 1976, it was a landmark in the field of ideological criticism in English. As Eagleton recalls in the "Introduction" to the new edition of the book (2006), it "was first published on the crest of a profound historical change", a moment in which the Left was still strong and optimistic, not yet fully aware that the course of history "was already taking a decisive turn to the right" (n.p.). Apart from the circumstances of its publication and the significant contribution that the book made to Marxist literary theory, *Criticism and Ideology* is also

1 Space limitations make it impossible for us to examine the relevance of Jacques Lacan in Eagleton's work, as we had initially planned. We will refer to Lacan in the ensuing pages but as a source to comment on Eagleton's use of Freud. Eagleton devotes a full ten pages to Lacan in *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (164-174), whilst the previous year, in a *tour de force* engagement with Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, the version of psychoanalysis he draws on is more Lacanian than Freudian as his focus is the symbolic nature of unconscious desire (*The Rape of Clarissa*). The Lacanian order of the Real is a key term to analyze the Irish Famine in *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* (12-15), and his 2009 study on ethics, *The Trouble with Strangers*, is divided into parts that correspond to Lacan's three registers (the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real).

exceptional in a humbler yet transcendental way: it marks the entry of Freud's ideas into Eagleton's work. Whilst discussing Pierre Macherey's *A Theory of Literary Production* (1966), Eagleton opens a brief excursus into Freud's theory of dream-work with a critical remark addressed to his fellow Marxist critics and, implicitly, to himself: "It is worth noting here that these formulations of Macherey suggest the possibility of an encounter between Marxist criticism and the great scientist who has so often figured within such criticism merely as an eloquent silence: Freud" (*Criticism and Ideology* 90). In a short space (90-92), Eagleton establishes an analogy between dream narratives and literary texts, their complex production and their demanding interpretation, based on the fact that, in both, the psychic and political unconscious is consciously and ideologically repressed yet manifests itself in the formal gaps and contradictions that psychoanalytical practice and "scientific criticism" should tackle and unravel (*Criticism and Ideology* 90; see also *Literary Theory* 180-182). Neither (human) subjects, nor (oneiric or literary) texts should be spontaneously taken as entities endowed with plenitude and self-coherence, as totalized givens, as "bourgeois ideology" maintains but rather as riven by gaps and conflicts (*Criticism and Ideology* 92). Like the subject discovered and theorized by psychoanalysis, the literary text is traversed by unconscious desire that stands in tension with the assumptions and prescriptions of dominant ideology. Thus, Eagleton concludes that the "significations" of literary discourse "remain multiple and partly 'open' in a way which enables those displacements and elisions of meaning occasioned by its relation to ideology" (*Criticism and Ideology* 92).

3. "Marx, Freud and Morality" (1977): Psychoanalysis Outlined

In the 1987 "Introduction to the Second Edition" of *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës* (1975), Eagleton criticized himself in retrospect for having upheld an idealized conception of the literary text, informed as the book was by Lucien Goldmann's "covertly organicist impulse towards totalised unities" (xxiii). He declared himself guilty of unfairness towards Charlotte Brontë's works for his disapproval of their contradictions and lack of unity, features of her novels that he now reassessed in a positive light (xxvi). He accepted feminist critics' reproach for his blunt exclusion of gender concerns to the same extent that he laments that psychoanalysis was "another palpable silence in this book" (xxviii). His reading of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Eagleton confessed, was besmirched by his uncritical use of "such essentially Romantic concepts as 'the imagination', 'authenticity' and 'liberation', without submitting these notions to Freud's sceptical rigorously materialist reading" (xxviii). *Myths of Power* is, thus, surrounded by "an aura of idealism . . . which a judicious dose of Freudianism might well have tem-

pered", so much so that "[t]he disruptive force of the unconscious", so intensely at work at both the formal and characterological level in Emily's novel, went unheeded (xxviii).

So, according to the author himself, Freud and psychoanalysis should have been present in *Myths of Power*, but, unfortunately, they were not. In *Criticism and Ideology*, Freud makes a brief appearance after being praised for his scientific stature and for the value of his theories for Marxist criticism. The following year, 1977, saw the publication of Eagleton's article "Marx, Freud and Morality", a piece which, though short, contains a lot of what Eagleton would have to say about psychoanalysis in the years to come (including the contrast with Christian love) and which constitutes an unequivocal index of the great growth in importance of Freudian and also Lacanian ideas for Eagleton's future theoretical and critical work–something more than the zeal of the convert is at work in young Eagleton's words of high praise for the father of psychoanalysis. For instance, anyone familiar with the chapter on psychoanalysis in Eagleton's best-selling book, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983), can find that most of what he says there is already sketched in "Marx, Freud and Morality". In the latter, Freud is not considered merely a "great scientist", as he had been in *Criticism and Ideology* (90), but praised as "the greatest of 20th century scientists" (22). Psychoanalysis is firmly placed on a par with historical materialism as the only two theories capable of bringing to the surface the hidden determinants of the subjects' experience. More than that, it is psychoanalysis that provides historical materialism with the theory of human subjectivity that the latter lacks: "Only one such theory will do for historical materialism, and that is the other classical materialism we call psychoanalysis" ("Marx, Freud and Morality" 22). In introducing Freud's theory of the subject, Eagleton refers to the Oedipus complex as the process through which we are socialized, become *subjected* to the norm, after being forced to repress into the unconscious our libidinal tie to our mothers under the threat of castration, to identify with the parent of our own sex, and to search for substitute objects of erotic attachment ("Marx, Freud and Morality" 25). Eagleton aptly, albeit reductively[2], moves swiftly from Freud to Lacan by reformulating this process in terms of the transition from the Imaginary to the Symbolic Order. It is a movement from centredness, plenitude and identity to decentredness, absence and difference. In the symbiotic relationship with the mother characteristic of the Imaginary, "it, the baby, is *centred*, lodged, positioned secure", yet, once the father shatters that perfect union, the baby is forced to recognize "*difference*", beginning with the fact that it is sexed (*it* becomes *he*

2 This has consequences for Eagleton's understanding of Lacan's Imaginary register. There is a darker, more tormenting side in Lacan's Imaginary that Eagleton (almost) obviates to concentrate on the sense of unity and coherence that it confers on the subject. There is more going on in the order of the Imaginary than Eagleton would make us think here or, more recently, in *The Trouble with Strangers* (2009).

or *she*) and trapped ("Marx, Freud and Morality" 25; emphases in the original). Instead of plenitude, the irruption of the father and his law of the prohibition of incest instals "a *lack* . . ., and this lack sets in motion *desire*" ("Marx, Freud and morality" 25, emphases in the original). The human animal becomes a subject once he or she enters the realm of language in which meaning, as structuralism discovered, derives from difference between signifiers, and the subject is caught in an interplay of absences, incapable of saying all that he/she desires to say, most of which is repressed in the unconscious: "My words are always haunted, creased, inscribed by other possible words which can't be present to my consciousness as I speak, and it is this, precisely, which is the structure of the unconscious" ("Marx, Freud and Morality" 26).

We have devoted some space here to condensing Eagleton's views on Lacan's theory–which, being numerous and far-reaching, would deserve another article–in order to clarify what Eagleton says at the beginning of "Marx, Freud and Morality". Eagleton closes his introduction to the 1977 article by arguing that the psychoanalytical account of the constitution of the subject, though necessary for a radical discourse that lacks one, has a dark underside: it is tragic. Psychoanalysis, Eagleton rightly states, opposes the conception of the individual as the autonomous centre of thought, decision and action endorsed by bourgeois ideology by exposing the terrible consequences suffered by the human body once it is inserted into language and never feeling at home in it ("Marx, Freud and Morality" 22). This discontent (*discomfort* or *queasiness* are closer to the German *Unbehagen* in Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents* [1930]) impels the subject into "a process of infinite regress or flight from language to some more secure home outside it – a home which is finally death" ("Marx, Freud and Morality" 22). Beginning with this article, Eagleton will struggle repeatedly throughout his work up to the present to supplement psychoanalysis' insightful, yet utterly pessimistic view about humanity, by adhering to the Christian commandment to "'love your neighbour as yourself'", which for Freud was unacceptable, unfeasible and absurd–whilst he does not forget here and elsewhere to criticize Marxism for something even worse, for being "silent on the question of love" ("Marx, Freud and Morality" 29).

4. Eagleton's Freud and Its Contradictions

Eagleton is a strong dialectical thinker who courageously rejects the easy way out of sticking to categorial closures or conceptual totalisations. He could have rejected Freudianism at one stroke by saying that it is individualist, as some on the Left do, but, instead, he criticizes the latter by saying that theirs is an utter distortion of psychoanalytical theory

(*Literary Theory* 163). He decidedly takes psychoanalysis on board, yet, in the course of his work, psychoanalysis figures, at once, as a much-needed theoretical companion and a troubling fellow-traveller who has little by way of good news concerning human destiny. This tension pervades Eagleton's works and is the source of both valuable insights (on culture, literature, society, ethics and politics) and contradictory judgements concerning psychoanalysis and its founder, Sigmund Freud; contradictions which are impossible to reconcile as they fall outside a legitimately dialectical *modus operandi*.

Oscillations in Eagleton's assessment of psychoanalysis begin with what he says about Freud himself as a subject inserted in a particular ideological formation. In "Marx, Freud and Morality", he states confidently that "Freud had some approving things to say about abolishing private property, and about the Bolshevik revolution, which negate any notion that he was just another old Viennese petty-bourgeois" (23). How are we to reconcile this with what he says later about Freud in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*? In this work, Eagleton castigates Freud for being "politically speaking a pessimistic conservative authoritarian, full of petty-bourgeois banalities about the insensate hysteria of the masses, the chronic indolence and stupidity of the working class and the need of a strong charismatic leadership" (283). Eagleton supports this assessment of Freud's ideologically-determined position of enunciation by referring to *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), a work in which Freud does, indeed, provide an analysis of the constitution of charismatic leadership and how the masses submit to its mandates, but where neither a criticism of the working class *per se* nor a defence of the necessity of strong charismatic authority are to be found. The source of this contradiction is not the object of the utterance (Freud, the historical figure), but, rather, the subject who utters it (Eagleton). It seems that young Eagleton, in defending that Freud was valuable for Marxism, had to offer a more palatable version of Freud's historical figure, whereas, in 1990, after he had made substantial use of psychoanalytical discourse and submitted it to a dialectical scrutiny in the intervening works, felt more confident to expose Freud's petty-bourgeois alignments[3].

Another ambiguity worth pondering is Eagleton's contradictory view concerning Freudianism's proximity to and value for radical politics. In his 1977 article, Eagleton's praise for psychoanalysis as a valuable theoretical tool for historical materialism was *already* sobered by his definition of Freud as "a deeply *tragic* thinker, despite [his] ra-

3 This should not be taken as an attempt on our side to psychoanalyze Eagleton. Our intention is, rather, to come up with some explanation (a change in Eagleton's position of enunciation) for what is otherwise a striking contradiction. That being said, we are nevertheless surprised by the disproportionate amount of space given to Harold Bloom's concept of "anxiety of influence" and Eagleton's weighed approval of the value of this concept in the chapter on psychoanalysis in *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983, 183-185).

tionalism" ("Marx, Freud and Morality" 28)[4]. The large audience that *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983) has deservedly enjoyed can read the following towards the end of Eagleton's chapter on psychoanalysis: "Freudianism . . . is a science committed to the emancipation of human beings from what frustrates their fulfilment. It is a theory at the service of transformative practice, and to that extent has parallels with radical politics" (192). Readers of this book are, perhaps, struck by this affirmation as, earlier in this chapter, Eagleton had attacked Freud's conservatism and pessimism concerning subjects' capacity to liberate themselves from internal and internalized forces that hold sway over the course of their lives (160-161). Among the latter, the overpowering death-drive (the truly primary regulating principle *beyond the pleasure principle* theorized by Freud in a 1920 book with this title) and its corresponding mental agency, the omniscient superego, which unremittingly torments the vulnerable ego (our conscious self, the site of pleasure and pain), drawing its energy from the id (that part of the subject in which repressed desires and drives are repressed but never stop exerting their pressure) (160-161). Thus, in view of his own discoveries, Freud, though not completely refractory to the possibility of social change, could not but be "scornful of all utopian proposals" (Eagleton, *Literary Theory* 161). This darker side of Freudianism is brought to the fore in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, where, according to Eagleton, Freud's theories oppose the Marxist conviction of the possibility of social transformation and human liberation: "Freud's bleak Hobbesian view of human society forbids him from envisaging it as a potentially nourishing space, or from imagining morality as emancipatory rather than oppressive" (268; see also *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* 16-17). But, as in *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Eagleton is impelled to find affinities between Freud and radical politics, when he points out later, in the chapter titled *à la* Lacan "The Name of the Father: Sigmund Freud" of *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, that psychoanalytic practice, if successful, allows the subject to liberate herself from disabling attachments to the past and orient that free energy to other ends. "Of those ends themselves," Eagleton writes, "Freudianism, like Marxism, has little prescriptive to say; Freud joins Marx in attempting to shift us . . . from prehistory to history proper, resolving those conflicts that lock us in the past" (281).

5. Foundations for a Future Society

In the construction of a future society of emancipated individuals, liberated forces which had previously been repressed should be oriented to appropriate ends so as to make

4 Eagleton's oscillation in labelling Freud a *rationalist* and an *irrationalist* is another source of ambiguity on which we will elaborate.

human happiness and fulfilment a reality. Freudianism and Marxism may not have anything *prescriptive* to say about those ends (in the sense of 'do this' or 'don't do that'), but *they do say something*, offer something by way of guidelines, no matter how indirectly or implicitly. We will begin by discussing the theme of *work*, move onto the topic of *love* next, and finally tackle the question of *reason*, three problematic areas in Eagleton's interpretation and use of Freudian theory.

5.1. Eagleton on Freud on Work

With the clarity and precision that constitute a trademark of his style, Eagleton explains that the Freudian superego is the agency in charge of guaranteeing that we obey the social law, a law which forces us to renounce our erotic or aggressive instinctual gratification either through repression (into the unconscious) or sublimation (inhibiting it in its primary aim and directing it to a different end or object). The superego thus "is the source of all idealism, but also of all our guilt" (*The Ideology of the Aesthetic* 270). In "On Narcissism: An Introduction" (1914), Freud had argued how "conscience", the predecessor of the superego in Freudian theory, delivers love to the ego whenever the subject is equal to the ideal that he/she has internalized and identified with (the so-called *ego-ideal*, the ideal invested with the features of the law), whilst punishing the subject whenever he/she fails to do so by instilling in him/her a sense of guilt (92-102). However, this balance between love and guilt, pleasure and pain mediated by the reality principle, is upset in later Freudian theory, in which the intrapsychic moral agency (now renamed the superego) comes across as a basically aggressive, punishing, sadistic agency, with little or no love in stock for the ego, after Freud formulated his thesis on the death-drive as the primordial regulating principle of mental life in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and delineated the second topic of human subjectivity in *The Ego and the Id* (1923). Hence, Eagleton's version of the Freudian superego as the purely aggressive, violent, sadistic agency related to the death-drive, which draws its energies from the id to inflict more and more pain on the increasingly vulnerable and increasingly civilized ego, is correct, as it finds clear support in Freud's own theorizations–and in Lacan's, for that matter, who insists that the superego is obscene and violent (*The Ideology of the Aesthetic* 269-271; *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* 45-46; *Holy Terror* 44, 49-50 and 115; *On Evil* 65, 107-109 and 127). As Freud writes in *Civilization and Its Discontents*,

> the prize we pay for our advance in civilization is a loss of happiness through the heightening of the sense of guilt. . . . [T]he sense of guilt produced by civilization is not perceived as such either, and remains to a large extent unconscious, or appears as a sort of

> *malaise* [*Unbehagen*, translated in a more palatable manner as 'discontents' in the title], a dissatisfaction, for which people seek other motivations (134-136).

In the society of Freud's time and of our time, *work* is for the most part and *de facto* regulated by *Thanatos*, another name for the death-drive and its companion agency, the increasingly aggressive superego. In *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Eagleton comments on how, for Freud, society should be held together by sublimated *Eros*, the sexual instinct or libidinal energy inhibited in its aim and employed in work. To function properly, the working activity should be gratifying, but it seldom is for the vast majority of the people, for whom work is the source of pain (*Unlust*, 'unpleasure') and frustration, so that people feel an aversion to it[5]. In sum, *Eros* triggers *Thanatos* and is overpowered by it. Eagleton writes: "Only a minority of men and women will be capable of effective sublimation; the masses, for Freud as for Burke, must do with the coerced sublimation of manual work, which is never very effective" (*The Ideology of the Aesthetic* 277). Granted: in a long footnote in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud speaks about a "natural human aversion to work" and points out the fact that it is gratifying only for a small number of people (80n1). However, Freud insists that work can and should be gratifying, as "by means of sublimation, it makes possible the use of existing inclinations, of persisting or constitutionally reinforced instinctual impulses" (80n1). Eagleton refers to this, but he is not completely fair to Freud in this connection as, reading Eagleton, one is left with the impression that Freud is describing an immutable state of affairs, as if Freud were not speaking in the present tense and referring to the present historical context. But Freud *does hint* at the possibility of freedom and happiness to be found in work–hence the need for the attentive reader to qualify his idea of a *natural* human aversion to work. In affirming the path that work opens for individual and collective happiness, Freud comes closest to Marx and Engels. In the chapter on "Ideology" of his great little book *Discerning the Subject* (1988), Paul Smith draws on Lucien Sève's sketch in *Man in Marxist Theory* (1978) of the two human types derived from Marx's texts: "concrete individual" and "real man." According to Sève, Marx's radical distinction between these two types rests on his belief in the existence in each human being of particular potentialities, of an individual "essence" which could be realized in a free society. The social space for fulfilled individuality, for the "concrete individual," is located in a future after the advent of communism or socialism. In capitalist society, people, "real men", are estranged

5 It is surely no coincidence that the prevailing term for work in Romance languages such as Spanish (*trabajo*), Portuguese (*travalho*) or French (*travail*) comes from the Latin *tripalium*, an instrument of torture similar to a pillory. The English *travail* preserves a nuance of suffering and oppression.

from their own essence: that is, they are alienated[6]. They cannot realize their individual potentialities in active life due to the unjust organisation of social relations. Men are just "the actual bearers of the effects produced at particular conjunctions of social relations" (Smith 6). People are kept in this alienated state because they are barred from becoming conscious of their real conditions of existence, which are conditions of oppression. Marxism aimed at producing an undistorted representation of the real social relations that would erase false consciousness enforced by ideology and contribute to the proletarian revolution and so to men's eventual emancipation. Future communist society would thus be for traditional Marxism a post-ideological stage. In it, "real men" become "concrete individuals" at last, each according to their essence. As Marx and Engels write in *The German Ideology*: "Only at this stage does self-activity coincide with material life, which corresponds to the development of individuals into complete individuals" (97)[7]. Further in the same work, whilst refuting Stirner's *The Ego and its Own*, Marx and Engels formulate a well-known apophthegm that suggests that a post-revolutionary society would not be as dependent on the category *work* as a capitalist one or, at least, not in the same way: "in a communist society there are no painters but only people who engage in painting among other activities" (418).

It must be stressed that, for Marx, the question is not just the quality of work but also, crucially, its quantity; or, rather, that shift in quality which will allow human beings to be concrete individuals cannot be achieved without a change in quantity. In a crucial section in the *Grundrisse*, Marx points out that with the employ of machinery, capital reduces the amount of labour necessary for production, "but only in order to realize a maximum of labour" (701), i.e., to augment production. However, this reduction of labour "will redound to the benefit of emancipated labour, and is the condition of its emancipation" (701). It is precisely this reduction of the amount of time devoted to work that will enable the full development of human beings once time is liberated from the demands of profit and put in the service of workers themselves: "the measure of wealth is then not any longer, in any way, labour time, but rather disposable time" (708). This disposable time, perceived as unproductive under capitalism, is actually anything but unproductive: "the saving of labour time [is] equal to an increase of free time, i.e. time for the full development of the individual, which in turn reacts back upon the productive

6 Regarding the Marxian view of alienation, see Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, particularly, in connection with work, 'Estranged labour', 106-119. The most important development of the notion of alienation, predating the publication of Marx's *Manuscripts* in 1932, is Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), particularly "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat", 83-222.

7 Smith quotes from a passage from Volume II of Marx's *Capital* where he describes post-revolutionary society as the one that would promote the "development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom" (6).

power of labour as itself the greatest productive power" (711). In other words, less time devoted to work implies more time devoted to personal development, which in turn implies an improvement in production, not through an increase in effort but through a growth in accomplishments: "free time–which is both idle time and time for higher activity–has naturally transformed its possessor into a different subject, and he then enters into the direct production process as this different subject" (712).

Freud's idea that human "existing inclinations" and "persisting or constitutionally reinforced instinctual impulses" could be "a source of special satisfaction" when materialized in professional activity (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 80n1) is quite close to Marx's ideal of the free and satisfied "concrete individual" who realizes his/her potentialities, his/her individual "essence", that part of his/her "species being" in work–Eagleton endorses this notion of the "species being", quoting from Marx himself (*The Ideology of the Aesthetic* 411-412) and from Sebastiano Timpanaro (*Sweet Violence* xiii-xiv). A humanist vein runs through Freud and Marx that is nowhere more visible than in their similar ideal conception of work, in spite of the former's meagre treatment of the topic and of the latter's conviction that it requires a revolutionary process about which Freud has little or nothing to say.

5.2. Eagleton on Freud on Love

Early in his engagement with psychoanalysis ("Marx, Freud and Morality"), Eagleton already affirmed that the only possible way to turn around Freud's tragic and pessimistic view concerning individual and social improvement was endorsing the Judaeo-Christian mandate of *love* (28-29). Eagleton is the Marxist author who, consistently throughout his career, has more insistently and loudly broken Marxism's "silen[ce] on the question of love" (29). He does not mince his words when he affirms "if Freud is right, as I think he is, then nothing short of the gospel will save us" (29). By the phrase "if Freud is right", Eagleton means not only if, in the present state of affairs, the death-drive and the tormenting superego have gained the upper hand, but also if the commandment "love your neighbour as yourself" is "absurd" and "foolish" (28-29). "It's only by being committed to the utter foolishness of Jesus", Eagleton writes, "that any sort of constructive response to the scientific findings of Freud is going to be possible" (29). What are we to make of this apparent absurdity? Is Eagleton encouraging us to take foolishness instead of enlightenment as the solution for the discontents of civilization? Although it would take too long to elaborate, late Lacan said something quite similar, but in the negative: "*les non-dupes errant*" ('the non-fools err'), playing with the homophony of *les noms du*

père, one of Lacan's synonyms for the Law (Žižek 206). Lacan's target here is the cynic: discovering that the Law is a fiction, the cynic "denounce[s] 'genuine authority' as a pose, whose sole effective content is raw coercion or submission for the sake of some material gain", or "[i]n matters of [erotic] love, the cynic excels in denigrating exalted declarations of deep spiritual affinity to exploit the partner sexually or otherwise" (Žižek 205). The cynic, surely one of the dominant modalities of subjectivity in our age (if not the dominant one), proclaims that the virtues, ideals and models explicitly consecrated in the Law are a set of lies to sugar-coat the hidden, implicit dynamics of exploitation, violence, greed and self-interest in which he thrives (all of them features of *evil* in Eagleton's 2010 monographic study on this topic). Where he errs is precisely in declaring his independence from the Law, in maintaining that he would achieve his self-seeking ends even if there was no Law. This disavowal is, on the contrary, a sign of his absolute attachment to the Law, of his complete dependence on it, of how deeply he is "caught in the symbolic ritual he publicly mocks" (Žižek 206). Without the Law, there is no sin, as St. Paul wrote with unsurpassable clarity: "I had not known sin, but by the law. . . . For without the law sin *was* dead" (*NIV* Rom 7:7-8)–we will return to St. Paul, Eagleton's main reference in relation to Christian love. At this point, we would like to push Lacan's *dictum* to the extreme so as to turn it upside down and say: *fools do not err*, which means they take the Law literally and try to fulfil its mandates, abolishing in the process its obscene, cynical, destructive underside. This is precisely what Jesus, in his "utter foolishness" did: "The scandal of Jesus is not that he breaks the Mosaic law (which by and large he does not), but that he seems to lay claim to authorship of it. If he obeys it himself, then, it is not because he has to, but because he believes it to be life-giving once its real meaning is manifest. That manifestation is his own life and death." (Eagleton, *Holy Terror* 38-39). Indeed, Jesus took Mosaic law literally and even reproduced it, most importantly that part concerning the mandate of Love. The God in the Old Testament issued the commandment "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Lev 19:18), which Christ repeated verbatim in the Gospel of St. Matthew (22:39) when asked by a lawyer what the great commandment in the law was. "For St Paul," Eagleton writes in *Holy Terror*, "it is not that love liquidates the law, but that it replaces its ideological misreading [and, we may add, malpractice] of it with an authentic one" (34). Eagleton argues that Freud "can see nothing in the Christian commandment to love all one's neighbour than yet another overweening imperative of the superego" (*The Ideology of the Aesthetic* 283; see also *The Trouble with Strangers* 53). Furthermore, Freud dismissed Christian love as absurd and unrealisable because "[t]here just wasn't that much libido to go around. And of course he was right: there isn't" (Eagleton, "Marx, Freud and Morality" 28; see also

The Ideology of the Aesthetic 283). Freud was right, but, according to Eagleton, he was also wrong because Judaeo-Christian love is not libidinal, erotic, sexual, sensual: it is, like the Kantian imperative, an apathetic mandate, "'lawful' rather than affective", "more like an edict than an instinct" (*The Trouble with Strangers* 58), somewhat "inhuman" and "traumatic", "commanded . . . indiscriminately" (*Holy Terror* 30), love not in the sense of *Eros* (as Freud understands it), but "love in the sense of caritas or agape […, whose] paradigm is the love of strangers and enemies, not friends or family members" (*Humour* 117)[8]. As Eagleton writes in *On Evil*, "the Law which punishes our transgressions also provokes them", so that, according to St Paul, "this vicious circle can be broken only by transforming the Law of censure and condemnation into the Law of love and forgiveness" (110). So, instead of "obtain[ing] relief from the inner torment . . . by inflicting that torment on others"–Eagleton's very definition of *evil* (*On Evil* 107; see also *Holy Terror* 120-121)–, instead of sadistically punishing the ego for its frailties, flaws, vulnerability and imperfection as the law of the superego demands, we must accept them as we accept ours, and this is what love as *agape* actually is (*Holy Terror* 49).

Eagleton does try, however, to align Freud with *agape*, in spite of Freud's dismissal of Christian love. Hence, he repeatedly remarks how Freud constantly showed "compassion", "pity for the plight of the ego" ("Marx, Freud and Morality" 28; *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* 282). In *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* (1995), Eagleton elaborates this redeeming aspect of Freudian theory:

> There is no doubt that for Freud the law is out of control, a ragingly malicious superego which exacts the impossible from the *fragile* ego and issues its imperious edicts with scant regard for whether or not they can be obeyed . . . Freud's compassion for the *poor, harassed* ego, buffeted between id, superego and external world, is strong and persistent; and he regarded the law, which drives men and women to guilt and self-loathing as one of its oldest enemies (45-46; emphases added).

So, unbeknownst to himself, Freud was following the commandment of love in caring for the underdog, the ego, who, as a theoretical category that conceptualizes real human beings, refers to no one in particular, does not discriminate among individuals–we refer to Freud's general view on the pervasive human suffering in modern society, not so much to clinical cases, but, even in this context, patients are, more often than not, complete strangers. Furthermore, Eagleton, contradictorily, perhaps, in view of what he says about Freud's disregard for *caritas* or *agape*, tries to redeem the latter by discovering in him a version of the foundations of civilization that is radically different from the domi-

8 See also Eagleton's references in this connection to both Oliver Goldsmith and Kwame A. Appiah in *The Trouble with Strangers* (26-27, 58-60).

nant one based on repression and guilt. Thus, at the end of his chapter on Freud in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Eagleton remarks: "Whatever his strictures on the Christian injunction, Freud certainly believes love to travel right back to the beginnings of subjective life, and sees in it one of the foundations of human civilization" (284). In support of his thesis here and elsewhere (*Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* 112n21), Eagleton unearths a passage from Freud's early work *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895) in which the stress is placed on the primordial experience of love derived from our prematurity and vulnerability: "the original helplessness of human beings is thus the primal source of all moral motives" (Freud qtd. in Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* 285). Although it involves care for the helpless, this type of love that founds morality does not really qualify as *agape*, universal love for our fellow human beings in their weakness and frailty, but as affection dispensed within the close realm of the family, something Christian ethics transcends. Another problematic aspect of Eagleton's reasoning is that, by implication, he comes very close to conferring on the baby the status of an ethical subject before it actually becomes one: "*Before* we have come to internalize the parental function, *before* the voice of conscience begins to whisper disapprovingly in our ear, the seeds of morality have already been planted . . . Morality has its origins . . . in the small infant's affectionate gratitude for the care of its elders" (*The Ideology of the Aesthetic* 285; emphases added; see also *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* 112n21 and *Holy Terror* 37).

Furthermore, even if we accepted Eagleton's reading, we would stumble against the radical ambiguity of Freud's affirmation, an ambiguity that cannot be solved by attributing, as Eagleton does, the moral import of primordial helplessness to the baby alone. As Adam Phillips asks: "is the original helplessness of human beings the primal source of all moral motives in the infant as helpless subject, or does the infant's helplessness . . . call up moral motives in the recipient?" (121)[9]. Based on this partial reading of the baby's original experience of love, Eagleton closes his assessment of Freud's legacy by establishing an affinity between psychoanalysis and Marxism: "To acquire a more reciprocal, egalitarian style of loving is thus one of the goals of psychoanalysis, as it is of revolutionary politics" (*The Ideology of the Aesthetic* 285). Actually, what Eagleton affirms *apropos* Freud may be true, but the reasons he gives are, in our view, insufficient. We have to look elsewhere in Freud for an endorsement of the view that human happiness is a possible goal, that we can liberate ourselves from the tormenting, destructive effects of the coalition superego/death-drive and achieve self-fulfilment in

9 Phillips rephrases the question thus: "Does our original helplessness make us moral, or is morality prompted in us by the way we respond to dependent others?" (121).

work and come to love others as ourselves. For Freud, the human faculty that can bring this about is none other than *reason*, his "God, λόγος", as he says towards the end of his 1927 work *The Future of an Illusion* (54).

5.3. Freud on Reason … and on Love and Work

In "Marx, Freud and Morality", Eagleton dubs Freud a "pessimistic rationalist" (23; see also *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* 268-269), whilst elsewhere he considers the father of psychoanalysis as part of the "'irrationalist' heritage" along with Schopenhauer and Nietzsche (*Ideology* 16). In our opinion, Freud's final view concerning the future of society and of humankind is neither that of a pessimistic rationalist nor that of an irrationalist, but that of a *soberly optimistic rationalist*. In this way, he bears some resemblance to Eagleton's own position in defence of "sober realism" as "the only sure foundation of an effective ethics or politics" (*Sweet Violence* xvi; see also *On Evil* 150). According to Freud, individuals and societies are presently beset by conflicts and discontents due to the increasing power of the superego and the influence of the death-drive. In view of this, Eagleton quotes approvingly Freud's chastising statement in chapter II of *The Future of an Illusion*: "It goes without saying that a civilization which leaves so large a number of its participants unsatisfied and drives them into revolt neither has nor deserves the prospect of a lasting existence" (12; see also Eagleton, *Literary Theory* 193). But this view, here expressed in the negative, is not Freud's final word regarding the desirable society of the future. Freud's hopes are explicitly placed on the power–actually, he calls it the "voice"–of reason or the intellect in the final chapter of *The Future of an Illusion*, which Eagleton does not mention. It is a common practice to illustrate Freud's confidence on reason by quoting his famous *dictum* in "The Dissection of the Psychical Personality" (1933), "*Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*" ["Where id was, there ego shall be"] (80). But there, Freud is exclusively concerned with the ego and the cure in the therapeutic context. In final chapter of *The Future of an Illusion*, however, Freud's widens his perspective to comment on civilization as a whole and on the chances it may have of correcting its present imbalance. As he does elsewhere, Freud uses the discursive device of a fictional voice that expresses those views he opposes; in this case someone who defends the superiority of religion over science in putting an end to individual and collective conflicts and discontents. Freud retorts:

> We may insist as often as we like that man's intellect is powerless in comparison with his instinctual life, and we may be right in this. Nevertheless, there is something peculiar about this weakness. *The voice of the intellect is a soft one, but it does not rest till it has gained a hearing*. *Finally, after a countless succession of rebuffs, it succeeds*. This is one

> of the few points on which one may be *optimistic* about the future of mankind, but it is in itself a point of no small importance. And from it one can derive yet other hopes. The primacy of the intellect lies, it is true, in a distant, distant future, but probably not in an *infinitely* distant one. It will presumably set itself *the same aims* as those whose realization you expect from your God . . . , namely *the love of man and the decrease of suffering* (53; emphases added except for "*infinitely*").

Judeo-Christian *agape* is, then, *also* considered the final aim of the workings of the intellect: love's labour and reason's labour eventually coincide, according to Freud. Thus, he tells his interlocutor: "We desire the same things, but you are more impatient, more exacting" (54). Reason, the intellect or science are still in their youth, Freud admits, but there are no short-cuts for them to reach their maturity and bring about the desirable transformation of individuals and societies. Reason or science works slowly and patiently, hence the accusations of uselessness raised by religion against science. In "The Question of the *Weltanschauung*" (part of *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*), around the time in which Adolf Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany (30 January 1933), Freud pushed his confidence in reason to its extremes by stating: "Our best hope for the future is that intellect–the scientific spirit, reason–may in process of time establish a dictatorship in the mental life of man" (171). He goes on to emphasize the harmonizing effect reason *will* have when it rises to power and becomes the ruling force, allowing for the self-fulfilment of individual instincts (in non-alienated *work*, for instance) and binding individuals to each other through no other force but *love*:

> The nature of reason is a guarantee that afterwards *it will not fail to give man's emotional impulses and what is determined by them the position they deserve*. But the common compulsion exercised by such a dominance of reason will prove to be *the strongest uniting bond among men and lead the way to further unions* (171; emphases added).

With the help of Jacques Lacan and, more recently, Mladen Dolar, we may develop the implications of what Freud says about reason or the intellect in a way that a striking parallel may be established with the unconscious and the id, which the father of psychoanalysis hinted at but never made explicit. This will also allow us to bring into sharper psychoanalytical technical focus what Eagleton, on the one hand, affirms is the abstract quality of the Judaeo-Christian commandment of love and its affinity with the formalism of Kant's categorical imperative, yet, on the other, stresses as the irrational aspect of the injunction to love one's neighbour: "unreason is not simply a question of violence and monstrosity;" Eagleton argues in *Holy Terror*, "it is also . . . a matter of love, which is neither reducible to rationality nor independent of it. It is only when *reason is nurtured by the 'unreason' of love that it has the power to confront that more malign form of unreason which is the lust for destruction*" (9; emphasis added). Like the destructive

superego, reason also draws its power, its energy from unreason, from the id. Thus far Eagleton goes, and his insight is right, but it entails a short cut towards a solution for the discontents of civilization that Freud did not accept, the imposition of the commandment of love enforced by religion in its impatience.

Harmonizing love and satisfying work are, indeed, the aims Freud sets up for reason. Lacan and Dolar tread the ground Freud left untrodden yet hinted at, so that a technical development is rehearsed by the former which brings along with it some surprising results. In *Seminar XI* on "the four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis", Lacan revisits Freud's comments on the soft, yet indestructible voice of the intellect in *The Future of an Illusion*: "*The voice of reason is low*, Freud says somewhere, *but it always says the same thing*. The parallel hasn't been drawn to the effect that Freud says exactly the same thing about unconscious desire. Its voice, too, is low, but its insistence is indestructible. Perhaps there is a relation between the two" (qtd. in Dolar 92)[10].

Freud places all his trust on the voice of reason, which, like David against Goliath, is soft and seemingly powerless in relation to the obscene clamour of the superego–we may think of Hitler's mesmerizing shouting voice at Nazi rallies as a historical correlate in this context. Rather than considering it "in terms of the agency of repression"–as is commonly done–the voice of reason in Freud's account must be understood "in terms of the repressed", and "it will get heard under the harshest of censorships, just like unconscious desire" (Dolar 92). Moreover, desire for Lacan is, like the law and like reason, purified of all pathological elements, which allows Lacan to identify desire with Kant's categorical imperative: Kant's "moral law . . ., looked at more closely, is simply desire in its pure state" (*Seminar XI* 275)[11]. So, all in all, informed by this detour through later psychoanalytical elaborations, Freud's hopes for the possibility of a happy future–where "the love of man and the decrease of suffering" are at last materialized (*The Future of an Illusion* 53)–are placed on the soft voice of reason which, in its persistent indestructibility, will grow in pitch and volume drawing an increasing amount of energy from the id, so as to eventually silence the loud voice of the superego, the agency in service of the death-drive. Science will develop little by little until it provides a solid ground for a future better society to stand on. Perhaps, after all, Freud is more of a scientific critic than Eagleton himself.

10 Dolar modifies the extant English translation (*Seminar XI* 255).

11 See also Lacan (*Seminar VII* 315-316; "Kant with Sade" 660). We owe these references to Lacan's works to Dolar (199n9).

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THEORY NOW
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ON THE OCCASION OF TERRY EAGLETON'S HONORARY DOCTORATE, UNIVERSITY OF SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA, SPAIN[1]

CON MOTIVO DEL DOCTORADO *HONORIS CAUSA* DE TERRY EAGLETON, UNIVERSIDAD DE SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA, ESPAÑA

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Abstract: My essay–very much in the original, tentative and exploratory sense of the word–takes retrospective stock of Terry Eagleton's (roughly speaking) early to middle-period work across its dauntingly diverse range of topics. I focus, naturally enough, on those books that have most strongly influenced my own thinking or–as so often–pointed me in new and deeply mind-changing directions. The approach is in part anecdotal as befits a recurrent crossing of paths that has kept me reading his work with a constant sense that, whatever the shifts in my own interest, his latest book or article is likely to open up some fresh and germane line of enquiry. Nobody has done more than Terry over the past fifty years to extend the possibilities of creative inter-disciplinary exchange that opened in the late 1960s and are now being closed down with ferocious zeal

1 Note: the following talk was delivered impromptu, transcribed from audio tape, and then lightly edited for publication. It is therefore quite informal–at times anecdotal–in style, as was felt to befit the occasion of its delivery.

by a UK in government in quest of unthinking ideological compliance. In this tribute I focus chiefly on his successive approaches to the question of ideology as it figures not only in literary and cultural theory but in daily praxis and various contexts of communal experience.

Keywords: Eagleton; Marxist Literary Theory; Aesthetic Ideology; Cultural theory.

Resumen: Mi ensayo -en el sentido original, tentativo y exploratorio de la palabra- hace un balance retrospectivo de la obra de Terry Eagleton (en términos generales) de principios a mediados de su período, en su abrumadora variedad de temas. Me centro, naturalmente en los libros que más han influido en mi propio pensamiento o -como tantas veces- que me han llevado a direcciones nuevas y profundamente cambiantes. El enfoque es en parte anecdótico, como corresponde a un cruce recurrente de caminos que me ha mantenido leyendo su obra con la constante sensación de que, sean cuales sean los cambios en mi propio interés, su último libro o artículo probablemente abrirá alguna línea de investigación nueva y pertinente. Nadie ha hecho más que Terry en los últimos cincuenta años para ampliar las posibilidades de intercambio creativo interdisciplinario que se abrieron a finales de la década de 1960 y que ahora están siendo cerradas con feroz celo por un Reino Unido en el gobierno en busca de la conformidad ideológica irreflexiva. En este homenaje me centraré principalmente en sus sucesivas aproximaciones a la cuestión de la ideología, tal y como figura no sólo en la teoría literaria y cultural, sino en la praxis cotidiana y en diversos contextos de la experiencia comunitaria.

Palabras clave: Eagleton; teoría literaria marxista; ideología estética; teoría de la cultura.

This has been a happy but also a fairly ceremonious event so let me be as unceremonious as possible during the next hour-or-so. What I want to do is to introduce Terry Eagleton's work by giving you a sort of aerial survey from his earliest books to his latest writings. Some of you will be familiar with most, if not perhaps all of his prolific output but for others–undergraduates especially–this may be their first acquaintance with a corpus that extends across more than thirty years of intensive theoretical (as well as creative) activity. Anyway I shall try to put Terry's work in context from the viewpoint of someone who has grown up with it, who has read his books as they came out from the late 1960s on, and who has been constantly impressed, provoked, intrigued, often surprised, always stimulated by them.

I won't talk much about myself since obviously it is not the occasion for that. Still perhaps there is room for a few bits of personal anecdotage before we get on to the main business. The first paper I ever gave (back in 1973) was to a weekly post-graduate seminar that Terry was running in Oxford. It was a very high-powered, often rather combative seminar devoted to new developments in Marxist literary theory, especially the latest ideas coming from France: Althusser, Macherey, "structural Marxism", already certain challenges from a post-structuralist quarter, although so far as I recall the term "post-structuralism" hadn't yet caught on. It was a very intense, very lively sort of hothouse atmosphere. Actually I wasn't "at" Oxford, just living nearby while working for a London Ph.D. and travelling up to London once a week for the odd spot of supervision and for another weekly postgrad "theory" seminar, this one organised by Frank Kermode. They were both great occasions and main points of entry for these new ideas; perhaps the only places in Britain at the time where debates like this were being carried on among people fairly up-to-date with the French sources. Still they were very different in other ways, since Kermode's group (actually quite a floating population, with occasional star-turn appearances, including Roland Barthes) didn't have so much of an interest in Marxist developments but focused more on issues in hermeneutics, poetics, narrative theory, and deconstruction. So I used to shuttle back and forth, telling each group what the others had been talking about and sometimes feeling (to borrow a favourite metaphor from Kermode) like someone who wanders into no-man's land offering cigarettes all around and then gets shot at by both sides.

Anyway I was nervous about giving that paper–something about Althusserian Marxism from a fairly critical standpoint–and was trying to steady my nerves while travelling into Oxford on a motorbike. Half-way there (on a three-lane stretch of road) one car overtook another coming very fast from the opposite direction, missed me by a couple of inches, and very nearly put an end to all my anxieties. I swerved off the road and all my papers went flying to the wind, including the text of my seminar presentation. (I used to write things out at full length in those days, not like now!) So I sat by the roadside for a half-hour or so in a state of shock-induced false tranquillity and then got back on my bike, finished the journey, and gave my paper. Predictably, it was attacked from all quarters, except by Terry who managed to parlay some of the more awkward questions, to play a kind of tactful moderating role, and get me through the session with my sanity and intellectual dignity more or less intact. So–to cut short this self-indulgent ramble–I have always been grateful for that, as for a good many other personal kindnesses and acts of loyalty on his part. Academic and intellectual distinction of the highest order don't always go along with qualities like these but in Terry's case they do–outstandingly

so–and this is all the more reason to celebrate his Honorary Doctorate.

So what I want to do really is to talk about the development of his work and about some of its more salient cultural and intellectual contexts. In many ways this story has also been the story of Marxist literary criticism and theory in Britain since the early 1970s. That is to say, he has shown an extreme, almost barometric sensitivity to each successive wave of theorizing, not only Marxist theorizing, but structuralism, post-structuralism, postmodernism, deconstruction, various forms of feminism, New Historicism, and Cultural Materialism. He has taken all these on board, sometimes (in fact very often) in a critical way but usually finding something of interest or value, something that is worth salvaging, even if in a form that might not please their more orthodox-minded proponents. So it has been a remarkable work of synthesis, quite apart from anything else, but also a highly distinctive and original mode of engagement. You could well write a history of post-1970 Marxist literary and cultural theory–along with its various crises, turning-points, intellectual conjunctures, and so forth–which took its main bearings from Eagleton's work of the past three decades. Each of his books in a way marks a new departure, a fresh engagement with some challenge or provocation thrown up the *Zeitgeist*.

I will not talk much about his very earliest work, that is to say, a couple of small print-run (and now very hard-to-find) books that he wrote from a radical-left Catholic but also a phenomenologically inspired perspective. Time was when mischievous opponents would seize on the fact of his having written these books (without, one supposes, having actually bothered to read them) and treat it as some kind of scandalous revelation: "Monsignor Terry Eagleton: the missing years". Anyway they have now come in for more intelligent treatment by various commentators and will surely be of interest to anyone who has read his recent fragment of autobiography *The Gatekeeper*. However my own acquaintance with his work was through books like *Shakespeare and Society* and *Exiles and Emigrés*, works which can now be seen to have belonged within a certain distinctive (no doubt highly complex and overdetermined) cultural context. Probably the dominant strain of English criticism at that time was one that bore the mark of F.R. Leavis and his fervently evangelical approach to the "great tradition" of English poetry and fiction. Now, to people from other intellectual cultures, people who read English literature and criticism in other countries, Leavis will most likely be seen as a rather strange, eccentric, fiercely embattled character; one who taught at Cambridge for most of his working life yet conceived himself as locked in struggle with the Cambridge establishment; who insisted on the absolute centrality of English Literature, on the teaching of English as the living heart of the university; and who argued that such teaching should concern itself

only with those poems and novels that made up the canon of indisputably great works. This attitude found expression in the title of his book *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture*. Leavis claimed to be speaking up for certain values that were everywhere under threat: for "maturity", for an "open reverence before life", for the "creative-exploratory" use of language as a means of preserving and enhancing those values. That to say, Leavis conceived the activities of reading and teaching in terms of their experiential significance, their capacity to enrich and deepen our experience of life. And this went along with a fiercely moralistic (even, at times, puritanical) tone which dismissed any work that didn't measure up to his own high standards in that regard.

Now this is at least one part of the formative cultural background to Eagleton's early books. And, typically, it is not something that he has ever gone on to reject or denounce outright, despite taking a critically distanced and sharply diagnostic view of it in texts like *Criticism and Ideology*. He is not one for rejecting things out of hand. He tends to take the best of what he finds and put it to use in often distinctive and original ways while not for one moment passing over its blind spots of doctrinal or ideological prejudice. What he finds in Leavis, what he found at that time, during the early 1970s, was a commitment to certain important human values, modes of experience, the recording of whole generations of experience that would otherwise be forgotten, buried (as E.P. Thompson memorably put it) under the "vast condescension of posterity". What he found objectionable about Leavis was that parochial narrowness of vision, the exclusive and doctrinaire nature of Leavis's "Great Tradition". Also, its failure to adequately theorise or conceptualise the conditions of experience, in other words, the lack of any kind of informing theoretical background which Eagleton felt to be a drastic limitation of that kind of criticism. Then again, he had some shrewd points to make about its unrecognised class bias, that is, a kind of rather puritanical, humourless, self-righteous, lower middle-class moralism. So this formation, this cultural formation of English studies, this distinctively "Leavisite" formation, he found both important for various reasons and indicative of much that was wrong with the state of English literary culture.

That particular kind of reading, that way of reading texts (both literary and critical texts) for their symptomatic absences, blind spots, gaps, unconscious elisions, and so forth, is something that Eagleton was doing long before it became an orthodox approach in various (e.g., Marxist, and post-structuralist) academic quarters. It was the main topic of those Oxford seminars–at the time when he was reading Althusser and Macherey and writing the first draft of *Criticism and Ideology*–and has continued to play a large role in his work since then, albeit in various qualified and nuanced forms. Yet he never goes so far in this theoreticist direction as to treat all appeals to "experience" as

the product of bourgeois-humanist illusion or ideological mystification. This is important partly because the very idea of literary texts (or any kinds of text) as possessing an experimental dimension became deeply suspect to many theorists of a post-structuralist or Althusserian Marxist bent. The appeal to experience, the notion that literature can communicate anything truthful or important about certain distinctive modes of human experience, came to be regarded as a kind of theoretical naïvety, something to be theorised away in post-structuralist terms, along with the very notion of the subject as a locus of will, agency, choice, memory, and creativity. Here again, Terry never went so far as to endorse this full-scale programme of theoretical anti-humanism. Well, there was a period during the mid-to-late '70s–which I shall come back to in a moment–when he did appear to go along with it. But, generally speaking, he has not been one to endorse this kind of fiercely dismissive theoreticist attitude toward the notion of experience.

Of course the most decisive early influence was that of Raymond Williams. Terry has talked about that already and has written about it on various occasions; Steven Regan referred to it yesterday, and it popped up again in discussion this afternoon, so I will not labour the point here, except to say very briefly that one of the things he learned from Williams, and he is very happy to acknowledge the fact, is this respect for experience, for historical memory, for the idea of literature as, among other things, an imaginative record of what would otherwise be lost to living memory. This kind of appeal, which came to strike post-structuralists as downright naïve, has always been something very important in his work. Another, less obvious influence which often comes through–to my ears, at least–is that of William Empson. In fact, you may recall, Empson's name cropped up this morning during Terry's address at the degree ceremony. I think there are passages in Terry's work, some of the most memorable, where Empson's tone quite distinctly comes across, especially passages that put one in mind of his book *Some Versions of Pastoral*; not his best-known work, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, but Empson's second book, published in 1935, which is, among other things, a work of political criticism, but of a very elusive kind. Here Empson reflects on "pastoral" in the broadest sense of that term, not only on texts that we think of as classics of the *genre*, but on pastoral as a mode of feeling, a worldview, a complex of social and political attitudes; among other things, a mode of engagement with literary texts that involves what Empson calls "putting the complex into the simple". This is the idea–in brief–that human relations, like literary texts, are complex and difficult things but also that sometimes the best way to say the most complicated thing is to say it in simple terms. Hence the strangely intimate connection, as Terry suggested in his talk this morning, between the simplest things and the most complex things. There is a Freudian dimension to this, of course:

the relationship between what we think of as the lowest, most basic, most fundamental (even shameful) aspects of human life, and the highest, the most intellectual, spiritual aspects.

This Empsonian idea is I think something that plays a really important role in Terry Eagleton's thinking. It is there also in his style: the way in which he will switch sometimes in mid-paragraph, even in mid-sentence, from a passage of dense and arcane theoretical reflection to a style of down-to-earth, common-sense talk. If I had more time I'd like to read you a few passages that provide some good examples of that. Sometimes it takes a jocular, deflationary form, as a means of talking people down–himself (one suspects) very often included–from the rarefied heights of theoretical abstraction to a level of straightforward plain speaking. Thus when Eagleton is attacking postmodernism, for instance, he will typically spend a few sentences, perhaps a few paragraphs, going into theoretical detail about just what is wrong with postmodern notions of "the end of ideology", the "end of history", and so forth, but he will then bring you back down to earth with a couple of homely metaphors to emphasise the point. This is partly, no doubt, a matter of intellectual temperament, of impatience with high-toned abstract discourses that always run the risk of getting out of touch with certain basic truths of human experience. It is a risk that Eagleton has run himself and which thus gives his use of such devices a tone of good-humoured, self-implicating irony, rather than one of offensive jocularity at others' expense. In fact Empson (again) comes closest to describing it when he includes, among his multiform versions of pastoral, the device of "ironic self-parody to disarm criticism". But it also has to do with Brecht's idea of *plumpes Denken*, or "rough and ready thinking", that is to say, the idea that sometimes the best thing to do, the best sort of approach to take, is a direct approach which cuts through complexities, ironies, sophistications, theoretical refinements and so forth, and goes straight to the point. Which is not, of course, to say that those other, more complex kinds of thinking are mere evasions of the point, or Hamlet-like excuses for failures of moral or political nerve. One reason for Eagleton's fascination with Walter Benjamin is that he, more than anyone, embodied this conflict between the claims of intensely abstract theoretical reflection and the Brechtian demand for straightforward, unambiguous political commitment.

Marxist critics–Williams among them–have often expressed a strong sense of unease about the implied politics of Empsonian pastoral, or what they see as at best its quietist, and at worst its reactionary character. This has to do mainly with Empson's idea (most prominent in the chapter on Gray's "Elegy") that the pastoral *genre* gains much of its expressive power–or its enduring appeal across large differences of cultural and socio-political outlook–from the capacity to evoke certain "permanent truths" about the

human condition. This is a highly unfashionable line of thought among critical theorists. That is, they are very apt to reject the idea that there might be any truths (least of all "permanent" truths) about the "human condition" in general, or human nature, or the gap between human hopes and aspirations and the stark reality of human lives not only under this or that political system but as a matter of shared (universal) experience. Still it is something that has always been very much present in Terry Eagleton's writing, early and late. Empson (*via* Gray) puts the case more directly: that no conceivable social transformation could finally eradicate the sources of human dissatisfaction; that even a life maximally rich in fulfilment and intimacy still falls short of certain, intrinsically human needs and desires. Empson says that this goes deep into human experience, and that something like this is the central theme of tragedy. The emphasis falls differently in Eagleton's work, as indeed one might expect, given his Marxist commitment to socio-economic and political change as at any rate a means of significantly bettering the conditions of human existence. Still it is theme that resonates strongly from *Exiles and Emigrés* to his latest writings on Irish literature and history, for instance, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*, and also in his latest book on tragedy. What it comes down to is a realist acceptance that no amount of political commitment, no degree of commitment to the radical transformation of prevailing socio-political structures can eradicate certain permanent truths about the human condition: death, suffering, sickness. So these are some of the contexts of his early work, contexts which help to explain the complexity of Eagleton's thinking at this time. Nevertheless, they made up a highly original project which, at that time, represented a significant break with the conventions of British academic criticism.

After that he went through a phase of intense theoretical reflection during the early nineteen seventies. This was the time during which he organized those seminars in Oxford which were focal points of theoretical activity. Its beginning was marked by the publication of a little book called *Marxism and Literary Criticism,* which was very much a kind of theoretical primer or report of work in progress. It was a kind of interim thinking-through of the legacy of Marxist criticism, all the great contending theories and approaches, such as Lukács *versus* Brecht. It didn't so much stake out a new position on these issues as pass them in critical review and clear the ground for something more original. The book that really laid out that new position, achieved through an intense effort of theoretical self-scrutiny, was *Criticism and Ideology*, published in 1976. This was a relatively short text, considering how much ground it covered. For many it represented a radical rethinking of Marxist criticism: the modes of literary production, the various levels of ideological interpellation, the relations between material (economic)

base and socio-cultural superstructure. It was a "difficult" book–for me and (I guess) for most readers at the time–in the sense that it was quite relentlessly theoretical. The jokes are scattered relatively thin, compared with most of Terry's later books. It was very much influenced by Althusserian structuralist Marxism and even more so by Macherey's *A Theory of Literary Production*. It is an attempt to explain what Terry calls the "literary mode of production" in relation to other, more directly material modes of production. And it does so in a very abstract, at times highly schematic, even (he might now want to say) rather reductive way. This is the one book of Terry's in which there is a very high degree of abstraction from anything plainly recognizable as the experience of reading. Not that he dismisses such notions outright, but it is a book that argues its way at a very high level of conceptual abstraction, and to that extent I think it is unique in Terry's *oeuvre*.

This is not to say that it steers clear of offering particular cases for detailed treatment. In fact, the first part of the book is devoted to a critical working-through of various other sources in the tradition of Marxist thinking from Christopher Caudwell to Raymond Williams. However he treats those sources in a mode of extreme clinical detachment and analytic rigour. He says some pretty harsh things about Caudwell who represents, for Eagleton, a kind of abortive, premature start for English Marxist criticism, a crudely empiricist, commonsensical, insufficiently theorized, grossly reductionist mode of base-superstructure thinking. Thus Caudwell stands as a cautionary instance of how Marxist criticism can go wrong when it fails to achieve an adequate theoretical grasp of its own conceptual premises. He is also extremely critical of Williams, and this was, I suppose, the period of greatest distance between Eagleton's and Williams's thinking. Still it is an immensely impressive piece of work, quite extraordinary in its way; there is nothing else quite like it in the history of Marxist criticism.

All the same it is a book which I think Terry himself came to feel was deeply problematic for various reasons. I am going to provide a bit of background here for those who didn't (like myself) grow up intellectually and politically during that time. This was the period of emergence for various influential thinkers who grouped around the journal *New Left Review*, edited at the time by Perry Anderson, when various left intellectuals, Eagleton among them, felt an urgent necessity to rethink the nature of cultural criticism, of literary criticism, of sociology, of political theory. You will find a number of very influential articles written and published at that time, including a famous essay by Perry Anderson called "Components of the National Culture". This is, again, a fiercely theoretical article in which Anderson laments the absence in Britain, in British intellectual culture, of any really worked out, solid, rigorous tradition of theoretical reflection, especially within sociology. He asks: where is the British Max Weber?, where is the British Emile Dur-

kheim?, and he says we just do not have such thinkers, and we don't for various specific reasons, historical and socio-cultural reasons. What we have in their place is a kind of down-to-earth, homespun, untheoretical, un-self-critical common-sense outlook. And this has deeper historical roots; it goes back to Hume, to the tradition of eighteenth-century British empiricism, but it goes back especially to the French Revolution when it takes on a kind of sharpened polemical and socio-political edge. The idea gains ground among British conservative ideologues like Burke at the time of the French Revolution that it is all very well for the French to have these abstract ideas about Justice, Liberty, Truth, and so forth, but the British don't need anything like that. We get by perfectly well without a written constitution, without principles or precepts of that sort; we get by on a tried and tested mixture of tradition, common-sense, and due regard for the decencies of communal life.

This tended to produce a strong mistrust of abstraction in any form, that is to say, the idea that abstract theorizing leads to all sorts of unpleasant things like the French Revolution and post-revolutionary terrors. It thus gave rise to a deeply entrenched ideological antipathy toward the very notion of theory, or toward any large-scale theoretical project that claimed to challenge the plain self-evidence of common-sense, empirical wisdom. Anderson's diagnosis, shared by Eagleton, was that this helped to explain why a certain type of literary criticism, specifically Leavis's type, had become so widely influential at the time; such thinking took the place of any developed, systematic, adequately theorised form of sociological enquiry. Hence Leavis's contemptuous rejection of "theory" or "philosophy" as having not the least relevance to literary criticism. This went back to his early exchange with René Wellek and emerged at full force in his later writings, as with the title of a posthumously edited volume of essays: *The Critic as Anti-Philosopher*. Hence also Leavis's rhetoric of sturdily common-sense empiricism and his appeal to a range of jointly epistemic and moral values (of "sensuous enactment", "particularity", "maturity", "vivid realisation", and so forth) that should somehow be self-evident to anyone suitably equipped to perceive them, whether by native intelligence or through the right kind of literary education.

Thus the Anderson diagnosis, or the New Left diagnosis, was that literary criticism in Britain had become so theoretically impoverished precisely because it came out in fixed opposition to the very idea of theory, theory (that is) as a means of reflecting systematically on the conditions under which certain notions of experience–as likewise of "tradition", historical memory, and cultural value–were subject to certain determinate modes of ideological or socio-historical formation. So this was the phase of high theoreticist endeavour on the British left during the early-to-mid 1970s. It is very marked in

Terry's work at that time and his book *Criticism and Ideology* is in many ways its most representative product. So, basically, his approach is one that derives its chief theoretical bearings from the structural Marxism of Louis Althusser and Althusser's close colleague and "literary" adjutant, Pierre Macherey. It took the form of reading texts, mostly fictional texts but also works of criticism, with an eye to their symptomatic absences and blind spots. So it is crucially what the text is unable to say, what is repressed or sublimated, what you have to read between the lines, its textual fissures and crevices and contradictions that are taken as symptomatic evidence of the text's ideological complicity. But these also indicate the way that historical and material reality breaks through the text, thus revealing its insistent counter-pressure despite and against such ideologically motivated efforts of concealment.

Now this was a relatively brief though immensely productive and stimulating phase in the development of British Marxist literary theory. I suppose its peak was around 1976-1980, partly because of Terry's book, and during that time it pretty much captured the high theoretical ground, at least among those who sought some viable Marxist alternative to other (less politicised) modes of structuralist or nascent post-structuralist theorizing. But what then happened–and Terry's books and articles at the time register this development–was that the Althusserian position came to seem increasingly problematic. Althusser, who was himself by training a philosopher, tried to construct a Marxist theoretical apparatus that would not fall into the errors or naiveties (Hegelian, empiricist, 'vulgar'-Marxist, etc.) of hitherto prevalent approaches. He wanted to place Marxist theory on a "scientific" basis, one that would allow its elaboration in rigorously theorised terms while at the same time enabling us to read Marxist texts in a more adequate (critical-symptomatic) way than the ways they had been read before. But in the process of doing that Althusser constructed a system, a theoretical system, that was in many ways decidedly idealist, even though constantly insisting on its own materialist credentials. He drew, for instance, a very rigorous distinction between what he called the "real object" and the "object in thought". He maintained, on fairly familiar (e.g., Kantian) philosophical grounds, that we do not–cannot–have unmediated access to the world, the noumenal thing-in-itself, to ultimate material reality; we only have access via concepts and categories, modes of perception, cognitive processes, and so forth. Therefore, we have to rigorously theorise this distinction between the object-in-thought and the object itself. His insistence on that struck many of his critics, both Marxist and non-Marxist, as leaning over pretty far in an idealist (Kantian or even Berkeleian) direction. And what happened in the course of Marxist debate over the next half-decade or so was that this issue emerged as one of the central problems in Marxist theory. Agonised debates

broke out at various conferences and seminars toward the end of the 1970s and during the early 1980s. Some of the most heated took place at a series of "Sociology of Literature" conferences at the University of Essex where people were trying to find some way of rescuing Althusserian Marxism, some kind of viable materialist theory of the literary text that wouldn't fall back into naïve empiricism. At the same time–on a different though related front–they were striving to head off other challenges, e.g., from disciples of Foucault who dismissed Marxism as an antiquated nineteenth-century mode of thought and who wanted to reduce everything to the play of various discourses, paradigms, power/knowledge differentials, and so forth. What happened ultimately was that those battles were lost, at least in the rather rarefied atmosphere of post-Althusserian theoretical debate. Or again: what happened, to put it very briefly, was that post-structuralism came in.

Post-structuralism, even left post-structuralism, even the more *soi-disant* "radical" kinds of post-structuralism were quite happy to abandon any notion of the real, except in an arcane (Lacanian) sense of the "real". That is to say, they were more than willing to concede that ultimately Althusser was right, but in that case one had to accept the logic of Althusser's position, i.e., that "reality" was a linguistic, discursive, or narrative construct. There is no way that we can get beyond the "arbitrary" relationship between signifier and signified to the referent, to the thing-in-itself, to the real object as distinct from the object-in-thought. So post-structuralism tended to regard that particular battle as fought and won, with the victory going (naturally enough) to its own side in an unequal debate where the opponents had started out by yielding crucial philosophic ground. This also marked the beginning of a new phase in Terry Eagleton's work, a phase which saw him re-thinking his whole approach to Marxist literary theory, but at the same time engaging in a series of polemical encounters with various representatives of post-structuralism, deconstruction, and latterly postmodernism. At the time he clearly thought it important to resist these particular movements or currents of thought whose effect, he believed, was to "textualize" reality, to deprive criticism of any political force, and to go along complacently with various kinds of then-fashionable "post-Marxist" or "end-of-ideology" persuasion.

Thus he published a couple of short books during the early 1980s which were sharply polemical in tone even though they raised significant theoretical issues. The most combative and prickly was *The Rape of Clarissa*, which appeared in 1982. It is partly a book about Samuel Richardson's epistolary novel *Clarissa*, but is also an engagement with various critics who had written about that novel, or others whose theoretical positions allow him to surmise what they *would* most likely have said about it, given half

a chance! In particular Terry goes after one hapless critic, an American deconstructionist, William Beatty Warner, who wrote a book entitled *Reading Clarissa*. The heroine, let us recall, is a victim of kidnapping and seduction and rape, and eventually commits suicide. According to Warner any sympathies or sense of moral outrage that we feel on her behalf are wholly misplaced–just a product of conventional prejudice–since really she is depicted in the novel as boring, prudish, narrow-minded, manipulative, hypocritical, and (in short) thoroughly odious. Her kidnapper and rapist, Lovelace, he casts as a kind of witty and resourceful proto-deconstructionist who is in the business of showing us that in fact all those fabled virtues such truth, sincerity, trust, good faith, moral integrity, etc., are just so many naïve "logocentric" illusions. In which case whole generations of readers who took Clarissa's side, and who regarded Lovelace as a dreadful villain, had themselves fallen prey to that deep-laid "metaphysics of presence" that equates truth with authentic inwardness, or the *rapport-à-soi* of the solitary mind in a state of pure, self-communing, virginal presence. Such–Terry argues–is the upshot of deconstruction when it becomes just a handy, all-purpose technique for inverting moral values and (in this case) persuading us to adopt a particularly nasty, sexist, downright misogynist line toward damsels in distress. So what he is doing here is taking an example of the use–or abuse–of deconstruction by some (mostly US) literary critics and deploying it strategically as a point of entry to certain topical but none the less important debates within literary theory.

I think this was a phase in Terry's work when he was working through some of the problems raised by *Criticism and Ideology* and in the meantime also trying to combat various emergent and–to his mind–morally or politically delinquent critical trends. So *The Rape of Clarissa* has various pointed and perceptive things to say about feminist criticism and other developments in literary theory at the time. However it is also typical of Terry's work (then and since) in so far as it argues its case though a mixture of intense theoretical engagement and witty, irreverent, sometimes even knockabout humour which places those developments in a different, altogether more sane and balanced perspective. Hence the passages of Juvenalian or Swiftean satire that continue to yield great pleasure when re-reading these books–even now that their targets have mostly disappeared from view–and which probably (though this is sheer conjecture) owe something to Terry's reading of Bakhtin at around that time. Still, as I have said, there were signs of an alternative "position" emerging through the smoke and heat of polemical exchange. That position is defined more sharply in his next short book *The Function of Criticism* (1984), which examines not only the historical formation of certain canons of literary taste, but also the formation of a "public sphere", to use the Habermasian

expression. This development occurred during the eighteenth century and involved the emergence of certain kinds of dialogue, public debate, the exchange of opinion, shared values, the forging of an alliance between the lower aristocracy and the higher middle classes, a kind of *sensus communis*, if you like, which found expression through the coffee-shops and other recently-established channels of communication. This is very much the kind of thing you find in Hume's "Essay on Taste": an ethos of open, democratic, participant exchange which purports to represent a kind of classless appeal to universal human values but which in fact takes in only a certain (quite restricted) range of class-specific "tastes" and opinions.

In fact Eagleton's title is a piece of deft irony. It was Matthew Arnold, in his essay "The Function of Criticism", who spoke up most eloquently for that notion of "disinterested" literary culture whose claims Eagleton here sets out to challenge. From the eighteenth century to the present, criticism has always been engaged in a struggle to legitimize its own authority and, along with that, the social order from which it springs. Criticism was born, Eagleton argues, at the moment when a rising bourgeoisie felt the need to establish a public sphere–a community of shared discourse–against an old order whose powers were based on aristocratic privilege. This ethos discovered its natural milieu in the clubs, coffee-houses, and literary periodicals of eighteenth-century England and Scotland. A "polite, informed public opinion" sets itself up as the acme of civilized taste, a realm in which conflicting social interests are apparently reconciled, since everyone (or everyone qualified to speak) has an equal share in the "consensus of universal reason". Addison's essays in *The Spectator* are taken as the single most sustained and representative example of this new kind of discourse. Gentry and aristocracy, landed and mercantile interests, "backwoods Tories" and Whig *arrivistes* all had a voice in this emergent public sphere. Of course there were those uncultured individuals–actually a vast number of them–whose interests were politely ignored in achieving this dominant consensus. But conditions were such that a writer like Addison could feel himself to be addressing a broad-based readership whose differences of social status were transcended in the common cultural enterprise.

By Arnold's time (as Eagleton remarks) the pressures had intensified to a point of manifest crisis in the social institution of English letters. "Culture" became a means of warding off the conflicts and threats posed by a deeply class-divided society. Deprived of any access to a genuine public sphere of shared interests and values, the critic became increasingly a voice in the wilderness, obliged to invoke (or invent) his own beleaguered minority culture. Eagleton finds this dilemma still at work in Leavis and the *Scrutiny* critics, since their project was, paradoxically, "to create a public sphere in the

conviction that only a minority was capable of true discrimination". An incisive reading of Leavis on Johnson serves to emphasise the cultural and socio-political distance that we have now travelled from that still vaguely plausible eighteenth-century discourse of civilizing values. Then–in a chapter of quickfire polemics–Eagleton turns his attention to present-day literary theorists, especially the avatars of US deconstruction. Their work, he argues, is "the true locus of 'high culture' in late monopoly capitalism", a last-ditch retreat from history and politics into a realm of purely rhetorical strategies where "society both encounters and exiles its own disabling absences". On the positive side, he salutes Raymond Williams for his long-standing practice of a genuinely socialist cultural criticism, alive to those problems but resisting the beguilements of premature system and theory. I have to say (well, you'd expect me to say this) that in my view when Eagleton writes about deconstruction–at least in those books and essays of the early 1980s–he selects his targets with somewhat mischievous intent and doesn't take adequate account of other, more philosophically as well politically informed kinds of work. In fact there is a steady revision in his estimate of Derrida, from the rather offhand, dismissive treatments to be found at that time to the more sustained (though still pretty combative) engagements of the past few years. On the other hand it is perhaps not surprising that Eagleton found little to admire in Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, his long-awaited, in many ways brilliant, but politically elusive (not to say evasive) *rapprochement* with "a certain" Marxism. However it would take us too long and far afield to pursue this question in anything like an adequately detailed way.

Literary Theory: an introduction is the book that I guess most of you will have read. For one thing it is a veritable best-seller; it has broken all records for texts of that sort, even popularising texts. But it is not *just* an "introduction", or a handy synoptic account of various post-1900 developments in literary criticism and theory, along with bits of philosophical background where needed. It is also a continued thinking-through of issues from Eagleton's earlier work and a text that constantly engages readers in some pretty challenging lines of thought. Still the book that stands–up to now, at least–as Eagleton's theoretical *summa* is his splendidly ambitious and vastly erudite *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, which came out in 1989. It received some very sniffy and mean-minded reviews from various people–philosophers and critical theorists among them–who seemed to resent it for just those reasons, for its covering such a range of topics and treading on specialist toes. Terry would probably disown comparisons with works in the grand European tradition such as Lukàcs's *Aesthetics* or Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*. All the same it is a book that rivals theirs for scope of coverage and depth of philosophical as well as historical and socio-cultural analysis. It is partly an account of the emergence,

development, and changing (culturally variant) status of the notion of the aesthetic, and partly a running critique of those various aesthetic conceptions put forward by thinkers such as Baumgarten, Kant, Schopenhauer, Hegel, Nietzsche, right down to Adorno and Lyotard, always from a Marxist point of view. It is a philosophic work in so far as it engages with central philosophical problems; about the definition of the aesthetic, about the nature of aesthetic experience, about the relationship between aesthetic judgement and other modalities of judgement. Thus a part of Eagleton's agenda is one that derives quite directly from Kant: it addresses the relationship between knowledge and aesthetic judgement, between practical reason in Kant's sense, that is, ethical judgement, and aesthetics; it looks at the different ways in which the notion of aesthetics has figured in the discourse of post-Kantian philosophy. However it also ranges more widely than that. It is also very much a social and political history of the idea of the aesthetic.

This makes it quite a courageous book in the sense that at this time, in the late 1980s, many theorists on the left, at least in Britain, took a pretty dismissive or hostile view towards aesthetics. Indeed the very notion that aesthetics might be a worthwhile discipline or object of study was held up to ridicule in some quarters. For instance, there was an article by Tony Bennett which bore the title "Aesthetics: a completely useless kind of knowledge", and which epitomised this kind of thinking. It is the idea that aesthetics–or the branch of philosophy going under that name–was invented during a certain historical period and amounts to no more than a quasi–or pseudo–discipline, one whose only purpose was (and is) to prop up certain ideological or class-based cultural values. This idea found support in a certain current of sociological thinking, especially in arguments developed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu who wrote a book called *Distinction: a critique of taste*. Here again the title already tells you quite a lot about its anti-aesthetic–and especially anti-Kantian–line of approach. Thus Bourdieu comes out pretty much in agreement with Bennett: there really is no such thing as aesthetic "taste", it is a bourgeois invention, a marker of class privilege, a way that certain people have of feeling good (superior) about their cultivated modes of aesthetic judgement, perception, or appreciation. The kind of picture you hang on your wall will indicate what socio-cultural class you belong to, or perhaps something about your class aspirations. If you have a Matisse, a Picasso, or a Mondrian on the wall then you are probably middle-class, or aspiring middle-class. If you don't go in for that sort of arty stuff and prefer country scenes, seascapes, animal pictures, or whatever, then most likely you are working-class, perhaps with lower-middle aspirations. The same goes for music: the difference between listening to Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Messiaen or whoever on the one hand, and "pop" classics on the other. What Bourdieu won't accept–what

he sets out to demolish–is any idea of "taste" or aesthetic judgement as something that might transcend class-interests or involve distinctions of aesthetic value as opposed to distinctions of social rank.

I am rather glad to say that Terry doesn't take this line of downright reductionist sociological analysis. Nor, of course, does he take the opposite (Kantian) line that there are indeed certain universal, or at any rate intersubjectively valid aesthetic criteria that mark the possession of genuine good taste. What he says is that the aesthetic is an important category, not because it has any kind of ultimate trans-cultural validity, but rather because it has figured centrally and crucially in some of the most important, not only philosophically important, but socio-politically important debates of the last two centuries and more. Besides, there is something insulting–a kind of inverted snobbery–about Bourdieu's habit of telling people (from whatever class background) that they can only be self-deluded or in the grip of some unwitting class prejudice if they think that some kinds of aesthetic experience might actually be better than others. Also it is a fairly obvious piece of academic gamesmanship, a put-down of philosophers or anyone else who denies sociology the last word in such matters. So Eagleton's book is a critique, but by no means a debunking or dismissive critique, of what the aesthetic has meant, and what sorts of function it has served, in these various discourses on "good taste", on the beautiful, the sublime, on aesthetic "disinterest", and so forth. And it contains not only some acute philosophical commentary but also some passages that bring out the more comic aspects of what various philosophers have had to say on the topic of aesthetics in relation to other, more basic, or less elevated modes of human experience. Here again there is an echo of Empson on pastoral, that idea of "putting complex into the simple", which can sometimes work out as a comic sense of how the highest, most "sophisticated" human pleasures have a close (though hard-to-acknowledge) link with various–forgive the term–fundamental bodily functions.

Of course this theme has been taken up by recent theorists who have had a lot to say about the Kantian sublime and its involvement with "sublimated" instincts, desires, somatic impulses, and so forth. Still if you want to get the hang of all this then you could do much worse than look up Terry's philosophically acute but also quite hilarious chapter on Schopenhauer which you will find reprinted in Stephen Regan's *Eagleton Reader*. Terry has something of a soft spot for Schopenhauer, despite Schopenhauer's extreme reactionary politics, his well-known pathological misogyny, the fact that (supposedly) he invited soldiers to shoot at the 1848 revolutionaries from his upstairs window, and so forth. What Terry finds so intriguing and fascinating about him is that he does tell one of those "permanent truths" about the human condition, the fact that we are subject

to bodily ills and miseries, that no matter how high-minded we wish to be, no matter how "philosophical" we try to be, something will eventually pull us back down to this shared bodily condition. It's a bit like Bergson's theory of the comic, his idea that what most regularly makes us laugh is the obtrusion of brute mechanism into our lives, or the spectacle of human dignity knocked for six by some absurd physical pratfall. Still I don't want to make too much of these analogies since they are liable to give a false impression. What is far more striking about Eagleton's work is its capacity to see all around the complexities of human motivation and–I keep going back to Empson, but I don't think Eagleton will mind–its sense of shared humanity despite and across large differences of cultural and socio-political perspective.

He once reviewed a book by Peter Brooks, the American narrative theorist, a book called *Body Work* whose basic theme was the way that human bodies had lately made something of a comeback in the otherwise rarefied discourse of literary criticism. Terry makes various points here but his opening sentence captures the tone well enough: "There will be soon more bodies in contemporary criticism than in the field of Waterloo". What he goes on to talk about is the way that invocations of "the body" among various (mainly post-structuralist) literary theorists have acquired a kind of talismanic power that seems oddly detached from any sense of the physical body as a locus not only of extreme agony and ecstasy but also of "everyday" pleasure, pain, suffering, hunger, and other such theory-resistant kinds of experience. Roland Barthes' late writings–like *The Pleasure of the Text*–are one major source for this sort of thing, this rhetorical invocation of the body, the eroticized but curiously abstract "body" of Barthesian textual *jouissance*. What Terry went out to say in his review is that there is a whole missing chapter in the theorists' reception of recent French thought, namely Merleau Ponty's phenomenology of perception, which doesn't go in for such merely notional, elaborately theorised body-talk but really engages with the lived actualities of human bodily experience. I think this is something that perhaps goes even further back in Terry's work to those early books that he wrote from a left-Catholic, phenomenologically inspired, even (in some sense) incarnationist viewpoint. But these are deep waters where an atheist like me wouldn't wish to swim so I'd better leave off this particular line of speculation.

Anyway–back onto safer ground–it is very much a central theme in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, where Eagleton is constantly recalling our attention to the sensuous, physical, somatic aspects of aesthetic experience, as against the usual tendency of theorists and philosophers to fix their sights on its "higher", more spiritual or abstract dimensions. This is one reason why he goes back beyond Kant to Baumgarten's notion

of the aesthetic as involving, paradoxically enough, a "logic of the sensations", an order of sensuous, bodily, affective experience that precedes all the concepts and categories that we (or philosophers like Kant) bring to it. Sometimes, as in the chapter on Schopenhauer, it breaks through as a kind of jubilant pleasure in the way that intellectual dignities are pricked by awkward reminders of our physical condition as creatures forever liable to various, far from dignified ills and afflictions. Elsewhere–and I am thinking particularly of his recent book *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*–Eagleton offers another, more sombre reminder of the way that human suffering on a vast scale can easily be lost from view when historians, literary critics, and others discuss cataclysmic events from an armchair (whether "orthodox" or "revisionist") perspective. But there is also–and this receives just as much emphasis–a liberatory, even utopian aspect to Eagleton's thinking about the aesthetic. It is an aspect that often comes through at just those moments when he is talking about the body as a locus of physical needs, desires, somatic drives, mutual dependences, and so forth, which cannot be captured or held within bounds by any regulative system of concepts and categories. It is rather like those few, very striking passages in Adorno–in *Minima Moralia* especially–when Adorno lets up on his otherwise relentless drive to negate all false, ideologically conditioned or distorted sources of hope and allows himself a brief moment of utopian reverie.

There are, I should add, many more of those moments in Eagleton and he is certainly not given to anything like Adorno's outlook of almost unremitting pessimism. Nor does he go along with the currently widespread, de Man-influenced idea that "aesthetic ideology"–beginning with Schiller's disastrous misreading of Kant–has been among the chief sources of "national aestheticism", that to say, the fascist drive to project such values onto the nation-state as a spectacle of power and expression of its leader's sovereign will. To be sure, Eagleton is keenly aware of these arguments and never inclined to underestimate the power of the aesthetic as a means of ideological persuasion, even–as de Man would have it–one that exerts a coercive claim on "the shape and limits of our freedom". Still he holds out against those hard-bitten cynical versions of the case that would find not the least redeeming merit in so basic a source of what Marx recognised as the natural human desire for satisfaction through various forms of creative activity. He is not just saying–although he does make the point–that if people on the left take to denouncing "aesthetic ideology" in this indiscriminate, blanket way then they will leave the door wide open for ideologues of the right (such as Roger Scruton) to monopolise the subject. Rather Eagleton is staking a claim–the strongest by any theorist in recent years–for aesthetic experience as a primary good, albeit one that shouldn't distract us from those facts of the human condition (whether permanent or remediable) that art cannot assuage.

Anyway, that's more than enough from me, except to say that the University of Santiago de Compostela could not have chosen a better, more distinguished, intellectually creative, and altogether worthy recipient for the award of an honorary doctorate.

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CULTURA, ESTADO Y LITERATURA: ALGUNAS REFLEXIONES TEÓRICAS PROGRAMÁTICAS

CULTURE, STATE AND LITERATURE: SOME PROGRAMMATIC THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS

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Resumen: El trabajo resume los principios de una investigación en curso acerca de las consecuencias teóricas que tendría conceder al Estado un rol más crucial en la investigación literaria, hasta ahora, sintomáticamente, más interesada en la nación, la sociedad o, especialmente, la cultura. Para ello, se rastrean en la obra de Raymond Williams las fuentes de la noción de cultura todavía dominante en los estudios literarios actuales. Luego se discute esta noción a partir de su confrontación con otras conceptualizaciones de los aspectos culturales de los procesos de conformación de los Estados modernos, y se llama la atención sobre los alcances y limitaciones de aquella, y sobre los caminos críticos que ha obturado. Por último, se presta atención a las concepciones de la literatura puestas en juego por estos procesos, que coinciden con su estetización, autonomización e institucionalización, y se explicitan las consecuencias que podría tener incorporar de manera central la reflexión sobre el Estado en la investigación literaria del presente y del futuro.

Palabras clave: Estado; literatura; contracultura; política cultural; autonomía; dispositivos; subjetivación.

Abstract: The work summarizes the principles of an ongoing investigation about the theoretical consequences that would have to grant the State a more crucial role in literary research, until now, symptomatically, more interested in nation, society or, especially, culture. For this, the sources of the notion of culture still dominant in current literary studies are traced in the work of Raymond Williams. This notion is then discussed based on its confrontation with other conceptualizations of the cultural aspects of the shaping processes of modern States, and attention is drawn to its scope and limitations, and to the critical paths that it has blocked. Finally, attention is paid to the conceptions of literature put into play by these processes, which coincide with its aestheticization, autonomization and institutionalization, and the consequences that incorporating a reflection on the State in current and future literary research in a central way would have are made explicit.

Keywords: State; literature; counterculture; cultural policy; autonomy; devices; subjectivation.

Durante mucho tiempo, la historia de la literatura moderna fue concebida como estrictamente unida a un proceso teleológico de emancipación colectiva que habría sido capaz de reunir una lengua, una nación y una cultura. Los estudios filológicos surgidos en el siglo XIX se edificaron sobre esta concepción de la literatura –y de la lengua– que las hizo acervo, tradición y canon para un movimiento político identificado con el objetivo de la conformación de un estado-nación. Pero la literatura no intervino en esta historia solo bajo estos modos de apropiación, interpretación y archivo. También contribuyó a la configuración de las condiciones de posibilidad del sujeto moderno de la ciudadanía, porque la abstracción de este modelo de subjetividad, que es, asimismo, condición del estado-nación moderno, depende de una conmensurabilidad de espacios, temporalidades, registros discursivos e imaginarios heterogéneos y dispares, y la ficción literaria se prestó muy bien, y de forma única, para resolverla en figuras memorables capaces de ser perceptibles e inteligibles de manera en apariencia autoevidente (Anderson 46-50). Desde fines del siglo XVIII, la literatura se convirtió en un manual de instrucciones para inscribir un cúmulo de afectos, disposiciones y comportamientos –en fin: modos de existencia siempre locales, situados y de otro modo inconmensurables –en la órbita de las significaciones públicas compartidas (de aquello que, desde entonces empezó a denominarse opinión pública (Habermas). La literatura fue capaz

de hacer que lo invisible, intangible o virtual, y heterogéneo, variable o dispar de la subjetividad se incorporase culturalmente como un conjunto de formas a una instancia de intercambios públicos ampliados bajo la figura general de un sujeto individual de derechos y obligaciones, que es lo que necesitaba el Estado para legitimarse como soberano y representativo, autoritario y democrático a la vez. Pero ese sujeto individual también es la sede de la experiencia estética; y, a través de ella, la literatura se volvió también capaz de interrogar aquello que constituye la soberanía, sin restringirla a los modos de su apropiación por parte del Estado.

La abstracción que introduce el Estado moderno en el ámbito de las relaciones sociales a partir de las ideas de ciudadanía y de política representativa –y, por supuesto, también de la promoción, administración y regulación de un mercado de bienes y servicios extendido a gran escala– supone una mediatización de esas relaciones, en que la literatura, a partir de las coordenadas arriba expuestas, interviene. Pero, al mismo tiempo, la literatura se constituye como un refugio de lo no mediado en ese ámbito de universal mediación, aquello que del sujeto subsiste por fuera de su ciudadanía –y de su rol de trabajador, consumidor, contribuyente–, y que resumimos aquí como expresivo. Aquello que, desde el siglo XVIII, se pensó como la conformación inmanente de una institución autónoma respecto de la sociedad y del mercado, que es condición de posibilidad de una historia y una crítica de la literatura, se deja pensar también como despliegue de prácticas ligadas con el reconocimiento, el manejo, la gestión, el archivo y la trasmisión de fenómenos culturales como acción y efecto de los procesos de mediatización y universalización que implica un Estado en sentido moderno. Las mismas lógicas jurídicas, políticas, burocráticas y mediáticas que están detrás de la representación parlamentaria y de la ciudadanía, lo están también de la literatura tal como todavía la conocemos. La distinción clásica, en la teoría política, entre Estado y sociedad civil –la producción literaria y cultural pertenecerían en exclusivo a esta última, definida como cultura, en el sentido universalista que la Ilustración empezó a dar a esta palabra, y que amplió, hace sesenta años, Raymond Williams– enmascara la capacidad de intervención que el Estado tiene sobre estos campos, y también cómo ellos se refieren todo el tiempo al Estado, y no solo a la sociedad o a la nación. Pero la teoría y la metodología de nuestra disciplina, los estudios literarios, nos prepara para pensar las relaciones de la literatura con otra cosa que se da, por excelencia, bajo la forma de la cultura y de la sociedad civil, no de las políticas del Estado, que parecen estar muy lejos de las virtudes expresivas de aquella. ¿Por qué?

Cultura

El consenso actual en las Humanidades sobre qué se entiende por cultura es todavía bastante reciente. Como se sabe, aún en 1958, un crítico, teórico e historiador marxista como Raymond Williams, en su *Cultura y sociedad,* debía aclarar repetidas veces que la cultura no le pertenece solo a una clase, la burguesa, durante mucho tiempo la única alfabetizada, letrada y por esto capaz de acceder a ella y detentarla –o, en todo caso, a un grupo disidente, los artistas e intelectuales, pero siempre dentro de esa clase. Sin embargo, Williams también debía reconocer que, si se intentaba empezar a considerar y legitimar la posibilidad de la existencia de otras culturas sociales –por ejemplo, una cultura de la clase obrera– tampoco convenía hacerlo como si se tratase solo de una cultura propia de esa clase. El choque contra la cultura de la burguesía que pretendieron ser las vanguardias históricas del siglo XX había sido asociado a menudo con la promoción de una cultura proletaria que supuestamente la reemplazaría como resultado del acontecimiento revolucionario, aunque –a pesar de lo que muchos entonces consideraban su inminencia– una cultura como esa todavía no se pudiera encontrar, en carácter de tal y en estado puro, por ninguna parte, al menos como sistema plenamente integrado de ideas, obras, agentes e instituciones[1].

Sin embargo, la historia del concepto de cultura hoy dominante en las Humanidades ha sido la de su paulatina pero persistente toma de distancia respecto de una estricta pertenencia de clase y de un carácter oposicional o antagonístico correlativo. Como sostiene Williams, esto es resultado de la larga revolución que, lenta pero sostenidamente, tras luchas intensas, fue democratizando el acceso a la alfabetización y a la cultura letrada –y también, como asimismo destaca Williams, al consumo, en un mercado ampliado, de otros bienes y servicios, de goce antes asimismo exclusivo. A esta convicción sobre la tendencia al universalismo democrático de la cultura –más allá de cualquier pretensión de absolutismo ideológico–, Williams agregaba su desconfianza respecto de las nociones de cultura de masas o de industria cultural entendidas como mera producción o reproducción masivas de entretenimiento manipulador o adormecedor de las clases populares, entonces difundida sobre todo por la Escuela de Frankfurt (Adorno, Horkheimer y Adorno). Williams –como lo han seguido haciendo los investigadores en Humanidades, especialmente tras los impactos sucesivos de la teoría literaria y los estudios culturales– destacaba la importancia del lenguaje, la co-

1 Algunos ecos de las discusiones de esos años, en el seno de las izquierdas, sobre qué hacer con la cultura burguesa y la cultura proletaria se dejan todavía oír hoy –en la bibliografía habitual de los cursos académicos de teoría literaria– en lo que Walter Benjamin presume que le responderá su público comunista parisino en la famosa conferencia "El autor como productor". Quizás esto sea una buena muestra de los *quid pro quo* a que el uso del mismo vocablo "cultura" ha podido dar lugar con el paso de los años.

municación, el sentido y lo simbólico para la idea moderna de cultura: las líneas que definen el dominio y la propiedad en estas instancias –habría que decir ya su hegemonía– han ido dejando de coincidir estrictamente con posiciones de clase determinadas objetivamente –al menos de acuerdo con la ortodoxia marxista anterior al 'giro cultural'– por la propiedad o la carencia de los medios económicos de producción. El campo de la cultura está atravesado por otras tensiones más específicas –entre lo hegemónico y lo disidente, y entre lo residual y lo emergente, sostendrá más tarde el propio Williams–, que no son exactamente homólogas a las de la lucha de clases. De este modo, en el análisis y la historia cultural, la diferencia de clase ha tendido a ir autonomizándose respecto de la distinción cultural y del gusto artístico: el valor cultural ha dejado de depender de un juicio de gusto que tiene como única fuente la distinción de clase social, y se ha abierto así a un juego de identificaciones colectivas heterogéneas y variables como estilos de vida (Hebdige 14-16). Se trata del nacimiento conjunto de la posibilidad de una contracultura como disidencia, frente a lo establecido, de carácter colectivo amplio e incluso masivo –ya no solo de una élite artística disidente–, pero dominantemente cultural, estética o 'subjetiva' (McGuigan 26-28) –es decir, no necesariamente ligada con una cultura oposicional organizada de clase como factor de lucha y resistencia políticas entendidas como disputa por la soberanía y eventualmente orientada al asalto del Estado–; y también de una cultura de mercado a gran escala y a la vez cada vez más hipersegmentada y 'de nicho', estriada por identificaciones parciales que relativizan la importancia cultural de categorías sociológicas o económicas 'macro' como las ligadas a la clase social: una cultura de acceso cada vez más universal pero de carácter cada vez menos universalista. Este proceso coincide tanto con un cambio profundo en los comportamientos culturales de las élites –su desafección creciente respecto de proyectos culturales y artísticos de gran escala tanto nacionales como cosmopolitas– como con el desarrollo exponencial de los medios de comunicación y los sucesivos cambios en su estatuto, hasta alcanzar la actual "plenitud digital" (Bolter).

Williams sentó las bases para una comprensión más amplia y, al mismo tiempo, específica y diversa, por parte de las Humanidades, de la noción de cultura, desatada de la vieja idea de cultura letrada y literaria burguesa –pero también de una eventual cultura oposicional y antagonista de clase. Esto le sirvió también para relativizar la distinción marxista tajante entre prácticas materiales económicas y prácticas ideales significantes, culturales o, mejor, ideológicas. De este dualismo Williams pasó a un monismo de las prácticas culturales simbólicas materiales, según el cual la comprensión y la producción de ideas y de sentido está ligada con la experiencia –es decir, ya no solo con un corpus o acervo de obras individuales–, y de este modo implicada

materialmente en la vida y en la organización social colectiva de las distintas esferas del conjunto de la actividad humana. De hecho, para Williams, cultura es el nombre de este mundo humano de sentido en tanto concretamente experimentado, incluso en lo aun no formulado explícitamente, en lo sentido o presentido. De este modo, la cultura obtiene para sí una politicidad intrínseca e inmanente, ya no solo ligada a su subordinación a un movimiento oposicional de clase organizado como tal.

Esta expansión totalizante de la cultura, solidaria con su democratización, logrará desplazar del campo de interés de la investigación en Humanidades incluso las referencias entonces más habituales a la sociedad y a 'lo social'. En *Marxismo y literatura* (1977), Williams explicará que, tras su inicial impacto oposicional contra el Estado –en el siglo XVIII entendido todavía en el viejo sentido de orden heredado o impuesto, característicamente feudal–, la idea de sociedad –a causa de esa oposición, fundamentalmente idea de sociedad *civil*– terminó volviéndose una abstracción, un sistema funcional sí identificado solo con el modo burgués –individualista, atomístico, abstracto e indiscriminadamente sumatorio– de existencia, y de este modo excluyó muchas experiencias de naturaleza mucho más inmediata y comunitaria que, para Williams, sí podían resumirse mucho mejor bajo la noción de cultura (popular). Sin embargo, se percibe también cómo la idea de sociedad civil ocupa un lugar importante en la genealogía de esta noción expandida de cultura. De aquí se desprende un modo característico de pensar las relaciones entre cultura y política que los investigadores actuales han heredado de aquellas discusiones: en la manera en que se adjudica sentido al mundo y los fenómenos se da un espacio de intervención material sobre la realidad, porque esta no es sino cultura vivida, experimentada. La cultura es un ámbito, no un objeto o un conjunto de objetos apropiables, y ese ámbito es sustancial y esencialmente democrático: está hecho de la vida en común –no solo de la pública[2]– y de la participación colectiva en la interpretación de su sentido. Ese sentido está sujeto a disputas, es decir, a luchas por la hegemonía cultural que, además –y esto es importante para el desarrollo ulterior de este trabajo–, tienen lugar enfrente, lejos, fuera o incluso en contra del Estado.

En efecto, ya en *Cultura y sociedad* Williams separaba del Estado el ámbito de la cultura tal como la definía, en especial cuando discutía las diferencias entre la solidaridad y el colectivismo obreros y las ideas burguesas de servicio público –del funcionario– y de ciudadanía –como utilidad meramente formal respecto del Estado (268-270). Sin embargo, se imponen al respecto algunas preguntas: ¿no se encuentra también entre los propósitos sustanciales aducidos por los documentos de constitución de los

2 Para la distinción entre público y común, consultar Rowan 35-44.

Estados nacionales modernos propiciar modos de participación afines a esa experiencia cultural radicalmente democrática que Williams describía? ¿Y no pueden –o, al menos, deberían– darse procesos de identificación y participación colectivos y democráticos con políticas que sean propuestas desde y por el Estado? Es cierto que los Ministerios de Cultura han sido un descubrimiento muy tardío, posterior a la fecha de estas formulaciones originales de Williams[3], pero los sociólogos e historiadores de la nación y el nacionalismo –ejemplarmente, Ernest Gellner y Benedict Anderson– han adjudicado un lugar central en toda la historia de su conformación a la promoción de la cultura nacional a través de sistemas de educación pública universal por parte de los Estados –aunque esta promoción haya tenido originalmente que ver más con una selección interesada entre los acervos lingüísticos y culturales disponibles, que con un direccionamiento del sentido de los productos culturales a través de subsidios específicos, más allá del rol propagandístico que la cultura pudo adquirir a veces en relación con el Estado.

Las políticas del Estado y sus efectos generales en el campo de la cultura no han suscitado el mismo interés en el ámbito de las Humanidades que la formación de las lenguas, literaturas y culturas como instituciones nacionales específicas y autónomas. Por el contrario, los investigadores han tendido habitualmente a cuestionar y desmerecer muchas de las realizaciones de las políticas culturales del Estado como simples fenómenos de 'cultura dirigida', cuando no de simple propaganda, en la estela del rechazo generalizado entre los intelectuales de los modelos totalitarios de Estado en sucesivas olas tras el derrumbe de los fascismos, el stalinismo y la Unión Soviética (Fumaroli, Semprún). A partir de, por lo menos, los años 60 se tendió, bastante sistemáticamente, a establecer una distinción entre fenómenos de resistencia cultural y contracultura, y aquellos objeto de la promoción estatal: la intervención favorecedora, subsidiaria o utilitaria del Estado sirve de criterio excluyente maestro, aun cuando se perciba al mismo tiempo la dificultad –y hasta la imposibilidad– cada vez mayor de diferenciar contracultura de cultura subsidiada por el Estado. Y, al mismo tiempo, estos subsidios y políticas de promoción cultural han dejado de constituirse como estricto dirigismo de Estado porque este tiende a propiciar, al mismo tiempo, la creación y el desarrollo de mercados ampliados de industrias y consumos culturales, como resultado de la ampliación y masificación del acceso a estos productos. Cada vez es más difícil pensar la cultura por fuera de la intervención de política cultural del Estado y de

3 En Francia existe desde 1959, en Argentina desde 1973 y en España desde fecha tan tardía como 1977, aunque allí antes –y significativamente– algunas de sus incumbencias estuvieron a cargo del Ministerio de Información y Turismo franquista.

la explosión de un mercado de bienes y servicios culturales a gran escala, y de acceso ampliado y cada vez más diversificado.

En esta caracterización se puede percibir que la idea de una cultura abierta, participativa y sustancialmente democrática que, desde Williams, ha logrado generalizarse en el ámbito de la investigación académica en Humanidades, depende de considerarla una institución autónoma, simultáneamente, respecto del Estado, el mercado, la clase y el partido político, pero sin perder, a la vez y al mismo tiempo, su politicidad intrínseca, aunque *sui generis*, en tanto resistente al *statu quo* –una contracultura cada vez más generalizada a todo el campo cultural, al alcance de todos, aunque subsidiada por el Estado y objeto de apropiación, a partir de la estructura jurídica de la propiedad intelectual corporativa, por parte de las industrias culturales y el mercado. Dado que un efecto del giro cultural inaugurado por Williams fue restringir la oposicionalidad, que por esto tendió a perder sus contenidos de clase específicamente obreros, al ámbito de la disidencia cultural, donde proliferó, la contracultura surgida en los años 60 –en su momento teorizada por Theodore Roszak, Luis Antonio de Villena y Luis Racionero, entre muchos otros– puede hoy, poniendo la crítica artística de las vanguardias al alcance de todos, considerarse un modelo extensible a gran cantidad de fenómenos culturales populares, desde la publicidad (Frank) a los emprendimientos en dispositivos y las aplicaciones informáticas, aunque no se deje comprender completamente si solo se enfatiza y lamenta el sometimiento de su disidencia original vanguardista a imperativos de mercado.

Estas cuestiones se pueden estudiar como transformaciones en los procesos de identificación, cada vez más diversificados a partir de una inmersión en instancias de mediación interrelacionadas y omnipresentes a gran escala de las que políticas culturales y educativas del Estado, medios de comunicación masiva y, hoy, dispositivos digitales son solo algunas obvias manifestaciones, junto a una miríada de otras fuentes entre las que la literatura no ocupa un lugar tan determinante como el que ocupaba en el pasado, en la época historiada como la conformación de las culturas nacionales. También debe notarse que lo que desde las Humanidades se sigue denominando de forma generalizada 'mercancía' o 'mercado' son hoy entidades de una complejidad e interactividad extremadas que incluyen enormes variedades de formas de consumo y financiamiento, entre las que hay que empezar a contar cada vez más bienes y servicios comunes cuya circulación e intercambio exceden la economía monetaria (Helfrich y Bollier). Por todo esto, cada vez resulta más difícil pensar la cultura a partir de proyectos modernistas revolucionarios de sustitución generalizada, por ejemplo a partir de cambios artísticos oposicionales revolucionarios; sin embargo, a pesar de

esto, subsiste, como fantasía nostálgica, la hipótesis de un cambio cultural catastrófico, movilizado, por ejemplo, por las innovaciones tecnológicas. Sin embargo, no se puede oponer ya la organización comunitaria en red y horizontal al Estado o al mercado porque hoy el capitalismo funciona descentralizadamente, y no solo en el plano cultural. La disidencia contracultural subjetiva se ha vuelto la forma en que funciona hoy el sistema: es hegemónica.

Estado

La soberanía legítima del Estado consiste en la existencia de una instancia de autoridad y poder sin superior sobre una territorialidad delimitada por fronteras, según la famosa definición de Max Weber sobre el monopolio de *"la violencia física legítima"*. Supone una distinción clara entre una población gobernada y un aparato de gobierno, aunque este se considere representante de la primera.

La legitimación de la soberanía del Estado se basa en una idea general del bien común: hay un interés general público que está por encima de los intereses privados parciales, y se produce una consonancia entre ese bien y la existencia de una autoridad última, aunque todos seamos iguales ante la ley, porque esa autoridad se encarga de bregar por ese bien común, y no por uno particular. Así, el poder del Estado moderno está mediado y abstraído por la idea de lo general y de lo público: no es perceptible inmediatamente (en el aspecto del funcionario público o el representante parlamentario, por ejemplo), sino de manera mediada y conceptual, mientras que, hasta su surgimiento, la soberanía aparecía ligada a representaciones físicas claras de autoridad, fuerza, poderío y trascendencia, resumidas en atavíos, sitios de aparición sacralizados, rituales, etc. Por supuesto, todos estos elementos subsisten en las democracias modernas, pero han sido transformados por la idea del bienestar general como propósito constitutivo del Estado.

Pero ¿qué es el bienestar general? Por supuesto, no puede ser resultado de la sumatoria de los intereses privados individuales o de grupos porque estos son por definición conflictivos entre sí y benefician naturalmente más a unos que a otros. Por lo tanto, es una fantasía colectiva de unidad y armonía por encima de los antagonismos políticos que sostiene nuestra existencia concreta (Laclau y Mouffe, Žižek). Una especie de ficción colectiva, resultado de procesos de elaboración simbólica, pero con efectos muy reales, de que el Estado debe representar todo lo que queremos y nos hace felices, aunque, en lo concreto, a menudo frustre la mayor parte de nuestros intereses privados individuales. Peter Bratsis sostiene que el Estado logra esto a través de

actividades que actúan (en el sentido teatral del término) la unidad social inalcanzable (dada la inevitabilidad del antagonismo): el voto universal y la política parlamentaria, por ejemplo, pero también todo lo que produce efectos de comunidad, especialmente la cultura (nacional)[4]. Una consecuencia de esto es la fetichización del Estado soberano, su representación como un actor casi personal detrás de cada funcionario y de cada representante, pero a la vez trascendente respecto de las personas, que cumple una función clara de legitimación social, aunque el Estado no consista en otra cosa que un modo específico de sociabilidad caracterizado por la capacidad de administrar una interactividad exponencial y una complejidad siempre creciente de las relaciones sociales.

La legitimación de que hay una soberanía, es decir, una instancia última del ejercicio del poder (siempre dentro de los límites de un territorio) sostenida en el tiempo y más allá de la desaparición física de quienes, sucesivamente, la encarnan, como la del Estado, no puede preexistir a su constitución como tal, como si este ya fuera un agente capaz de generar las condiciones que favorezcan su desarrollo. Hay que buscar entonces las condiciones de la existencia del Estado en las maneras en que se conforma la vida cotidiana colectiva, es decir, en el sentido que les damos a nuestras relaciones con los demás, como ha sostenido Joel Migdal a partir de su idea del "Estado en la sociedad". ¿Cómo pueden coincidir y ser creíbles las descripciones de socialdemócratas y liberales libertarios? ¿Puede el Estado estar reducido al mínimo frente a un mercado que avanza sobre cada vez más aspectos de la vida y, por lo tanto, necesitar ser recuperado y reestablecido y, al mismo tiempo, ser un ente elefantiásico que permea todas y cada una de las esferas de la vida y la sociedad y que, por lo tanto, habría que abolir? Sucede que Estado y mercado no son solo, respectivamente, una institución política y otra económica que disputan entre sí, sino, sobre todo, modos de existencia social y cultural interrelacionadas. Más que preguntarse qué es un Estado (o un mercado) que ya existe siempre en sí, como un actor social institucionalizado y autónomo, hay que preguntarse más bien cómo es existir en condiciones de estatalidad. Las ideas del monopolio legítimo y la especialización de Weber plantean un hecho consumado (ostentar el monopolio legítimo, aunque sea solo como tipo ideal al que todo Estado debería tender), mientras que, en realidad, ese monopolio es siempre objeto de actualización, negociación, disputa y cuestionamiento, aunque, al mismo tiempo, sea parte del 'sentido común'. El Estado es, a la vez, algo del orden del sentido, una

4 Cabe preguntarse si hoy no cumple una función similar –aunque no provenga del Estado, sino de las corporaciones de medios– la celebración, cada vez más evidentemente contrafáctica, del carácter esencialmente democrático de las redes y plataformas colaborativas en Internet.

imagen, una representación en la población (como ese actor autónomo que representa a esa población como pueblo trascendiendo su conformación demográfica concreta, y que es el nombre del lazo social por excelencia); y también un conjunto de prácticas, rutinas y dispositivos, más o menos burocráticos, aquello que Foucault teorizó, en sus seminarios del Collège de France de finales de la década de 1970, bajo la idea de la gubernamentalidad. Representaciones y prácticas no siempre son coherentes entre sí; y las prácticas, a su vez, pueden no ser coherentes entre ellas. La imagen del Estado tiene que ver tanto con sus límites, territoriales o no, es decir, qué queda dentro y qué fuera del pueblo representado por el estado-nación, como con las imágenes que tenemos de la distinción entre lo público y lo privado. Se trata, por supuesto, de instancias liminales constantemente sujetas al conflicto y que resultan sistemáticamente reforzadas y disputadas.

Del mismo modo que el Estado no puede preexistir como agente a sus condiciones de posibilidad, tampoco puede comprenderse la población del territorio sometido a su soberanía como una acumulación de sujetos individuales previamente existentes sobre los que ella sobreimprimiría su autoridad. La estatalidad, como modo de existencia, es también una máquina de conformación de la subjetividad, algo que enfatizaron tanto Althusser, con su teoría de la interpelación, en "Ideología y aparatos ideológicos del Estado", como su discípulo díscolo Foucault, que ha tendido a destacar los efectos del poder del Estado sobre la vida misma de las poblaciones y sobre los cuerpos. El sujeto individual moderno es él mismo un efecto de los procesos de subjetivación promovidos por el Estado. Los historiadores comparativos han llamado la atención sobre el desarrollo de algunos elementos básicos indispensables de la infraestructura del Estado moderno: por un lado, la recaudación centralizada y monopólica de impuestos, pero, sobre todo, la capacidad para disponer de un flujo de capitales suficientemente abundante como para sostener los gastos del Estado; por otro, la conscripción, la capacidad de disponer de fuerzas militares organizadas y centralizadas (Tilly). A esto se podría agregar un sistema de rutas y comunicaciones amplio, denso y abarcador, así como, también, una instancia de registro y archivo, desde el registro civil, pero también policial, hasta el archivo nacional, el museo y el canon[5]. Cuando la economía y los mer-

5 Maurizio Ferraris, en su libro *Movilización total*, pone en relación un análisis de los dispositivos ligados al teléfono celular con las reflexiones de Ernst Jünger, tras su experiencia en la Primera Guerra Mundial, sobre los efectos de las políticas de Estado en la población, que implicaron ponerla completa e integralmente, en todas sus facultades, al servicio de sus intereses, como parte del aparato bélico, por ejemplo. La digitalización generalizada implicada por Internet a través del teléfono celular y las redes sociales supone un registro generalizado e indiferente: todo queda inscripto en la 'nube', archivado a partir de su mero acontecer, sin requerir para ello la burocracia del Estado. Al mismo tiempo, la tecnología informática del *blockchain* permite hoy registrar transacciones económicas de manera autónoma respecto de cualquier instancia soberana necesaria para garantizar una moneda de curso legal –típicamente los bancos centrales de los Estados–. ¿Puede la tecnología volver ob-

cados se van volviendo más complejos, diferenciados, especializados e interdependientes, es necesario establecer sistemas de intercambio (comercial, monetario, pero también comunicativo) de gran escala. Según el sociólogo Norbert Elias, un correlato de estos procesos en el plano de las relaciones interpersonales fue la aparición de los modales y las buenas costumbres, como sometimiento de las acciones y los cuerpos a una disciplina abstracta y general que facilite los intercambios, pero que no es efecto de la coacción externa, sino de la acción y reflexión del sujeto sobre sí, como auto-formación individual. La pertenencia de clase se vuelve fundamental en relación con esto: tiene modales el que sabe cómo hay que tratar a cada cual según la clase a la que pertenece. Pero esto sobre todo implica, como dice Peter Bratsis en su libro *Everyday Life and the State,* que cada uno, como sujeto, deba diferenciar en sí lo público y lo privado, lo político y lo económico, el interés general y el particular. Hay algo en cada uno, abstracto y general, que comparte con otros individuos en esto iguales a él, que es lo que convierte a todos en ciudadanos iguales ante la ley, pero también hay algo en mí que me hace único, porque excede esa generalidad intercambiable. El Estado es también esa instancia que pretende resolver el conflicto entre el ser público y privado hasta en el propio cuerpo.

A fines de los años 90, los investigadores David Lloyd y Paul Thomas formularon una crítica interesante a las definiciones originales del Williams de *Cultura y sociedad* en un libro que titularon, intencionadamente, *Culture and the State*. Las preguntas de las que partían eran: ¿cómo se constituye como autoevidente la existencia de un Estado como el moderno? y ¿cómo se vuelve impensable cualquier otra alternativa para concebir la soberanía, el gobierno y la organización colectivos? Según estos autores, la respuesta tiene que ver, en ambos casos, con la elaboración y divulgación de una idea de Estado capaz de constituirse como sentido común –es decir, de una verdadera ideología del Estado, en el sentido de Althusser (en contra del cual Williams había argumentado especialmente en *Marxismo y literatura*). Esta difusión y generalización de la idea de Estado se dio sobre todo a través de la institucionalización de la educación pública, que se ocupó de la conformación de subjetividades que reprodujeran ese sentido común acerca de la existencia de una agencia y una soberanía estatales inalienables. De hecho, la cultura –entendida a la manera de Williams, es decir, del modo dominante en las Humanidades tras el 'giro cultural': como un ámbito, separado del Estado, en que es posible, a través de la producción compartida y comunicativa de

soleto el Estado al permitir cumplir de forma aún más automatizada y descentralizada algunas de sus funciones prácticas (registro y respaldo de flujos de capital, gobernanza, control y seguridad, codificación del valor)? Cabe preguntarse si esto no podría implicar también un desplazamiento de algunos de las funciones más constitutivas del Estado ligadas con el archivo y, por lo tanto, con la literatura, según se indicará al final del artículo.

sentido, una realización democrática colectiva de los sujetos relativizando los antagonismos de clase– cumple en realidad, para estos autores, precisamente la función de asimilar esos sujetos al Estado haciéndolos concebir la política exclusivamente a partir de la soberanía estatal, es decir, solo a través de la representación institucionalizada (en los órganos parlamentarios, por ejemplo), lejos de cualquier otro tipo de experiencias y prácticas políticas más directas y autónomas, pero no menos colectivas. La cultura así definida instituye un ámbito de mediación que sienta las bases ideológicas a partir de las cuales el Estado va a poder erigirse como representante soberano de la población en tanto pueblo de un estado-nación. Por lo tanto, hacer de la existencia vivida y de la experiencia, como Williams, un orden de representaciones simbólicas concebidas como culturales es llevar a cabo una operación que vuelve representables y, así, conmensurables en un mismo plano de universalidad los distintos intereses antagónicos copresentes en la sociedad. La totalización de la cultura por parte de Williams oculta la totalización de la que surge el Estado, entendida, según el motivo sociológico de Weber, como racionalización, abstracción y sistematización relativas de prácticas y experiencias compartidas, a través de instancias específicas y autónomas de mediación simbólica de largo alcance y a gran escala. La democratización de la cultura de que habla Williams tiene así más de formal y abstracta que lo que él supone: la cultura no es un simple dato entre los modos de existencia y experiencia (social, económico, biológico, etc., y cultural), sino que es el nombre del proceso por el cual el sujeto se termina definiendo, en la sociedad capitalista burguesa, solo como aquel que es capaz de acceder a la política de manera individual por la vía de la representación, la elaboración simbólica y la formación estética. La reflexión desinteresada sobre las propias experiencias que termina de imponer la estética romántica es, según Lloyd y Thomas, la vía para que el sujeto se conforme como universalizable, es decir, como un ciudadano igual a otro ciudadano, pero solo desde un punto de vista formal, exclusivamente relativo a sus derechos, deberes y garantías (constitucionales). El Estado es también un dispositivo de administración de la subjetividad a través de una cultura definida como universal y autónoma, se restrinja o no a la clase burguesa.

La educación del hombre a través del arte y la cultura impone la forma misma de la ideología burguesa que legitima la democracia mediada y representativa como única vía de acción política en la que la igualdad –entre individuos– es puramente formal. La cultura es una "disposición ética" para convertirse en ciudadano y así hacer del Estado el único factor soberano que puede 'mediar' entre intereses sociales contrapuestos y antagonistas, pero ahora y para siempre subordinados al poder estatal como horizonte último de la conformación subjetiva. De acuerdo con Lloyd y Thomas, la cultura es, por un lado

> . . . un espacio de reconciliación puramente formal a través de la identificación, mientras que, por el otro, contiene, bajo formas trasmutadas, el diferimiento constante de la autonomía que es la inevitable consecuencia de la sustitución de la emancipación política por la emancipación humana. . . . La cultura media el cambio de la auto-representación al ser representado desarrollando en cada uno esa disposición 'indiferente' del Sujeto en que las diferencias materiales son anuladas (7, 15).

Es dable estudiar concretamente en los fenómenos culturales tanto las formas de subjetivación a través de la identificación estética como, al mismo tiempo, la legitimación, a través de una trasmutación figural, de este 'drenaje' de soberanía política hacia el Estado representativo. La educación pública y la formación cultural son así, por más democráticamente que se las defina, la vía maestra para la asimilación al Estado de una clase obrera para la que se va a ir volviendo simbólica y políticamente imposible optar por una política de resistencia autónoma, colectiva, cooperativa y auto-organizada al orden burgués capitalista, es decir, de una instancia de subjetivación real sustraída a los mecanismos de identificación con el Estado; y así resultará vedado el desarrollo de una cultura genuinamente autónoma y oposicional de clase, y de un eventual universalismo democrático real. Esta objeción de base a la tesis de la 'larga revolución' de Williams llevará a Lloyd y Thomas a estudiar, en concreto, las reacciones disidentes y radicales de la clase obrera a la educación pública durante la primera mitad del siglo XIX –es decir, la época de la implantación definitiva y conjunta de la idea moderna de cultura, del estado-nación moderno y del trabajo asalariado–, resistencias que cuestionan incluso la división de la sociedad en esferas que se considera consecuencia mayor de las reformas burguesas de las instituciones del Antiguo Régimen: la separación misma de lo político, lo económico, lo religioso y, por supuesto, lo cultural y artístico. La cultura cómo ámbito de lo vivido e inmediatamente experimentado en las prácticas colectivas tal como la concibe Williams sigue siendo autónoma y burguesa –a pesar de no definirse ya a partir de un canon o acervo de obras– en el sentido de que se encuentra completamente mediada por una ideología de la soberanía incuestionable del Estado burgués moderno una vez asumida la renuncia a cualquier subjetivación, resistencia oposicional y emancipación política autonomistas.

Lloyd y Thomas extraerán las consecuencias de sus análisis para las Humanidades tras el 'giro cultural':

> Nuestras conclusiones nos conducirán a criticar la manera en que el pensamiento de izquierda subsiguiente, hasta los estudios culturales contemporáneos, en su mayor parte dio por sentado el concepto de cultura y no logró para nada criticar la relación intrínseca de la cultura con la idea del Estado (8),

dando así lugar a una especie de cosificación inadvertida detrás de una apariencia de participación democrática realmente experimentada, solo posible como resultado de haber dejado 'fuera del radar' las relaciones entre cultura, subjetivación y Estado. ¿Hasta qué punto puede ser posible llevar a cabo, como se pretende habitualmente desde los estudios culturales, una crítica cultural inmanente de la soberanía estatal?[6] Los autores sostienen que esto resulta especialmente válido en una época de estetización y culturalización general de la vida cotidiana como la actual, según lo han explorado algunas perspectivas sobre la posmodernidad (Jameson) y la cultura neoliberal (McGuigan).

Lloyd y Thomas cuestionan también expresamente las perspectivas de análisis cultural contemporáneo que sí son capaces de referirse al Estado, pero lo hacen solo o fundamentalmente a partir de los dispositivos de gubernamentalidad identificados por Michel Foucault en sus cursos del Collège de France. Jon Beasley-Murray ha descripto como poshegemónico el funcionamiento de estos dispositivos burocráticos estatales, pues operan por debajo o más allá de la comprensión y del sentido, es decir, del orden simbólico de las prácticas culturales definido a la manera de Williams y los estudios culturales, pero de todos modos conservan el *statu quo* y garantizan el consenso a través de mecanismos exceptuados de cualquier aceptación de carácter ideológico, ligados con una gobernanza de control y vigilancia administrados sin una sede de soberanía identificable y una gestión de afectos y hábitos que parece tener poco que ver con las iniciativas y proyectos a propósito de la creación de instituciones o de intervención en los llamados 'asuntos públicos', que es lo que solemos identificar habitualmente con la política –pero sí probablemente mucho con el orden de las estructuras del sentir estudiadas por Williams. De este modo, convertido en maquinaria de ejercicio irrestricto de un poder deslocalizado, asignificante y omnipresente siempre en 'estado de excepción', sin embargo el Estado se desvanece del plano de las posibles elaboraciones simbólicas de la cultura; el ámbito privilegiado de la creatividad y la imaginación de nuevas formas de lo común y colectivo tiene vedado inventar nuevas formas de subjetivación y organización soberanas, porque, aparentemente, la burocracia estatal, una vez establecida, absorbe cualquier otra forma de soberanía o bien resulta demasiado banal como para tener un sentido culturalmente vinculante, que solo podría encontrarse en una autonomía auto-organizada desde las bases pero sin carácter de clase, o en todo caso 'policlasista'.

Cabe preguntarse, primero, si puede ser posible sostener desde las Humanidades un análisis de la cultura centrado en el poder, la representación y el ejercicio de violen-

6 Sobre las críticas a la noción de soberanía desde la filosofía y la ciencia política, se puede revisar Bartelson.

cias físicas y simbólicas en que la elaboración, difusión y legitimación de la idea moderna de Estado no se constituya como un fenómeno capital; y, segundo, cuáles han sido las razones de una invisibilización tan marcada de este verdadero 'elefante en la habitación'. Entonces, no se trata solo de vivir la democracia como experiencia cultural por fuera del Estado, sino también de pensar el Estado y la representación política desde la imaginación cultural democrática radical, no solo desde la administración burocrática. Se trata de repolitizar lo que se ha convertido en una ontología reaccionaria del poder del Estado como estado de excepción permanente (Agamben). Quizás, como indicábamos más arriba, no sea ya posible fundar una cultura oposicional de clase, basada en la acción directa y en la auto-organización, como la que Lloyd y Thomas pudieron rastrear en la resistencia obrera al Estado durante la Revolución Industrial y que todavía pudo manifestarse en los desiderátums de una cultura proletaria de la primera mitad del siglo XX y, posiblemente, en las teorías políticas contemporáneas autonomistas surgidas del obrerismo u operaísmo italiano. Sin embargo, vagas representaciones culturalistas de lo común extremado al infinito por exclusión de los supuestos fracasos de instancias existentes de comunidad organizada no tienen por qué reemplazar la poderosa imaginación a propósito de las formas de organización colectiva –entre las que, sin dudas y privilegiadamente, también se encuentran los distintos tipos de Estado– que las historias del arte y de la literatura todavía son capaces de testimoniar. Subsiste sin dudas aún, detrás de muchas reflexiones recientes a propósito de lo común (Laval y Dardot, Helfrich y Bollier) una fantasía cultural persistente acerca de la acción colectiva directa y de una comunidad inmanentemente auto-organizada, por ejemplo bajo la figura del poder constituyente de la multitud (Hardt y Negri), a partir de una radical exterioridad respecto del Estado y sus dispositivos asociados. Es, en efecto, muy importante que el crítico literario y cultural conserve una sensibilidad respecto de estos momentos de los fenómenos que estudia que impugnan 'infrapolíticamente' (Moreiras 189-236) un orden simbólico desde la base a partir de la interrupción del sentido y de la comunicación, de la irrupción inmanente de lo real capaz de hacer, de toda soberanía, un mero efecto, una ilusión.

Sin embargo, el precio a pagar por esta fantasía que asocia resistencia al sentido con antagonismo político es muy alto, pues esteriliza cualquier referencia al Estado bajo la figura de una exterioridad radical, de un afuera indeterminado. Nuestra actual definición universalista y totalizante de cultura está completamente permeada por la idea del Estado, pero es erróneo concluir de esto la obligatoriedad de condiciones de una exterioridad radical tal, incluso respecto del sentido y de la comprensión, para la acción política colectiva. Al contrario, una política de la cultura de también marcada ra-

dicalidad se puede vislumbrar en la puesta de la creatividad artística y literaria al servicio de la imaginación y legitimación de formas alternativas de organización, soberanía y subjetivación, incluso del Estado tal como todavía lo conocemos o lo imaginamos. La capilaridad de las intervenciones del Estado, encarnada en modos de existencia y experiencia que llamamos culturales, pero también en prácticas y dispositivos burocráticos asignificantes, no es un simple dato o una condición trascendental, sino que habilita también, cruzada por la literatura y el arte, una pregunta sobre cómo la reflexión sobre sí y las identificaciones colectivas involucran una interrogación posible de la soberanía y la organización del Estado –pregunta claramente del orden de la subjetivación y, por tanto, eminentemente política. La pregunta de las Humanidades sobre la cultura es una pregunta sobre el Estado que concierne a los dispositivos, pero también al acontecimiento y al sujeto, que a menudo aparecen en los márgenes, implícitos en los fenómenos que analizan (Badiou). Por ejemplo, y especialmente, en la literatura.

Y literatura

La literatura, en su historia y su presente, se ha mostrado especialmente sensible a propósito de la relación entre subjetivación y Estado, aunque esta no haya estado en el centro de las preocupaciones de generaciones de críticos, estudiosos y académicos más interesados, sintomáticamente, por la relación entre lengua y nación o entre forma y sociedad. El interés creciente, dentro de los estudios literarios contemporáneos, por las identidades, personales y colectivas, por el cuerpo y por los afectos abrió una vía de interrogación que visibilizó el Estado entre sus preocupaciones, pero tendió a concebirlo desde un punto de vista exclusivamente jurídico, burocrático, policíaco y represivo, frente a una literatura que, consecuentemente, en el contexto de la generalización de las disidencias contraculturales que extendieron el acceso a procedimientos de experimentación vital antes solo asociados con sectores sociales críticos pero burgueses –artistas bohemios, estetas, vanguardistas–, se pensó habitualmente como espontánea o constitutivamente resistente y original frente a aquellas limitaciones estatales percibidas como externas. El impacto y amplísimo desarrollo posterior de las ideas originales de Michel Foucault sobre gubernamentalidad y biopolítica en los estudios literarios, si bien puso el poder y el control por parte del Estado en el centro de los debates críticos, multiplicó al mismo tiempo este tipo de referencias a una plasticidad identitaria, corporal y sentimental originaria e inmanente a la literatura ante la ley y el Estado que impidió –interesadamente, en una coyuntura de crisis de los valores culturales históricamente adjudicados a la institución literaria por la élites culturales burguesas– explorar los modos en que la literatura tanto ha participado de la conformación de

las condiciones de posibilidad objetivas y subjetivas del Estado, como ha alumbrado y puede aún sugerir vías de subjetivación e ideas de la soberanía y del Estado alternativas respecto de las imperantes.

El investigador Antonio Gómez López-Quiñones ha tomado como punto de partida de sus reflexiones sobre Estado y estética las reacciones políticas más actuales contra el primero, tanto por parte del anarquismo de los comunes (que él llama anarco-comunismo) como de los que hoy se conocen como liberales libertarios (que él llama anarco-capitalistas). Desde estas posiciones, el Estado se figura, a la manera fetichista usual ya revisada, como un tirano que limita y se aprovecha de las fuerzas de la población, que de hecho podrían existir como tales sustancialmente antes, más allá o al margen del Estado. Sin embargo, como vimos, el Estado participa de e interviene, como condición de su existencia, en esas fuerzas generales, que son resultado de las interrelaciones hipercomplejas que habilitan los campos abstractos de interacción (económica, social, cultural, mediática) que el Estado favorece y que, a su vez, favorecen su conformación. También hemos visto cómo, desde los estudios literarios contemporáneos, y en consonancia con estas reacciones anti-estatales, se ha tendido a pensar que la literatura está intrínsecamente ligada con la conciencia individual, con las emociones y los afectos, y con el cuerpo, que son factores que, en su inmanencia como fenómenos, se sustraerían a la abstracción, a la generalización y a la mediatización que imponen las ideas modernas de lo público, del bienestar general y de la ciudadanía, sin, sin embargo, perder su politicidad. Según estos puntos de vista 'anarco-literarios', el Estado habría tratado siempre de poner la literatura a su servicio, de convertirla solo en canon, en propaganda o en patrimonio, como factor central de dominación cultural, y ella se le habría resistido a partir de las credenciales antirrepresentativas e inmediatizantes de la escritura literaria en su acontecer mismo, capaces de producir un aquí y ahora inmanente sustraído a las mediaciones estatales. La cultura y la literatura serían fuentes y orígenes de una creatividad ilimitada y soberana, que el Estado coartaría.

Gómez López-Quiñones rastrea los orígenes filosóficos de estas ideas de la crítica en la tradición de la estética alemana, desde la *Crítica del juicio* de Kant y las *Cartas para la educación estética del hombre* de Schiller. En la literatura y el arte definidos estéticamente se resolvería lo que en la vida parece irreconciliable: la interioridad creadora inalcanzable para el Estado se reconciliaría con el carácter de otro modo coactivo, externo y abstracto del poder, porque, en esta tradición de pensamiento, la percepción estética es al mismo tiempo interior y generadora de comunidad, individual y social-cultural. Una realización colectiva plena sin antagonismos: la literatura

y la cultura podrían dar lugar, genéticamente, desde sí mismas, a una transformación política revolucionaria capaz de acabar con los aspectos represivos y coactivos de las instituciones estatales. Se trataría de la idea de un bien al fin verdaderamente común, capaz de reabsorber incluso todo resto de insatisfacción privada, sin ninguno de los déficits de la abstracción y la mediación. Esto requiere, según Schiller, la educación de los individuos de modo que sean capaces de realizarse en forma libre y a la vez comunitaria. A lo largo de la historia, este proyecto todavía nunca realizado, dado el carácter insuperable de los antagonismos sociales, que no se pueden terminar de resolver culturalmente de forma definitiva, ha sido sin embargo persistentemente cautivador en los ámbitos del arte y la literatura –como hemos visto, bajo la figura de una fantasía comunitaria constituyente–, aunque al precio de la conformación de aquellos como esferas e instituciones autónomas separadas de una actividad política restringida a las instituciones del Estado liberal. Gómez López-Quiñones se sirve entonces de las reflexiones sobre el régimen estético de Jacques Rancière para mostrar los límites de los intentos de suturar esa separación entre actividad política y estética; y al mismo tiempo, llama la atención sobre la apropiación capitalista de la estética como respaldo de intereses comerciales particulares en el mercado. Su conclusión es que no hay estética sin Estado y que, por lo tanto, para acabar con una estética y una cultura impotentes por autónomas, cerradas sobre sí mismas y mercantilizadas habría que acabar también con el Estado tal como lo conocemos.

Como hay una relación constitutiva entre literatura y Estado moderno, que –según hemos visto– tienen un origen histórico común y una historia íntimamente compartida, difícilmente podrá encontrarse, a pesar de las fantasías autónomas y antiestatalistas generadas desde su institucionalización moderna y autónoma, una literatura libre que surja solo de sí misma y por sus propios medios tal como sería si el Estado no la hubiera, en primer lugar, nacionalizado, canonizado, propagandizado, archivado, patrimonializado o comercializado, etc. Al mismo tiempo, por supuesto, resulta difícil imaginar una historia cabal del Estado moderno sin tener en cuenta las contribuciones desde el imaginario de la literatura a la subjetivación expresiva de la ciudadanía a través de la producción de fantasías vinculantes acerca del bien común.

De estas convicciones, Gómez López-Quiñones también desprende una crítica a las historias y las críticas de la literatura realizada desde el paradigma biopolítico heredero de Foucault y Agamben:

> No es difícil sucumbir a su atractivo: contra instancias estatales de reglamentación y disciplina se encomia una literatura del disenso y del desorden vitalista, heterodoxo y excéntrico. En mi opinión, no es menor el hándicap de esta oposición entre el Estado (que

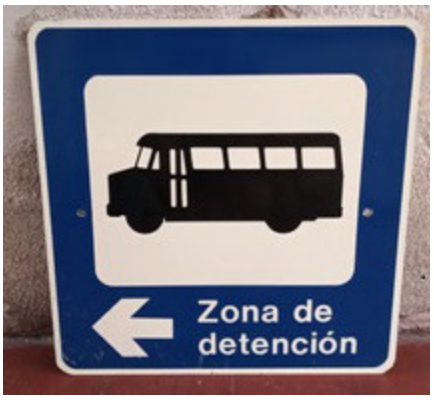
> se arroja sobre la vida como una camisa de fuerza) y una literatura díscola, proteica, proliferante y disconforme que se escapa por los intersticios de cualquier control. Este es su gran inconveniente: se magnifica y erotiza el shock puntual que provocan ciertas salidas de tono biográfico-discursivas, y simultáneamente se omite que hay «literatura» porque existen el «Estado» y su correspondiente departamentalización de campos teóricos y prácticos. Es decir, la condición de posibilidad de la literatura y de su experimentación bio-celebratoria es el Estado. La maniobra festiva de una literatura que subvierte los códigos del Estado es también el efecto de la existencia instauradora de este (26).

Y concluye entonces que "si lo que perseguimos a un nivel fundamental es otra Literatura, hará falta con anterioridad otro Estado" (26-27). La experimentación literaria radical que, de los esteticismos y las vanguardias a la contracultura, busca terminar con (los límites de) la literatura (o de la institución literaria) desde la literatura, en realidad solo confirma su característica separación en una esfera autónoma –aunque esa esfera ya no esté restringida a una élite artística burguesa disidente, sino se extienda a un conjunto cada vez mayor de la población; y no esté ya solo reducida a acervos literarios nacionales, sino incluya otras artes y medios de circulación trasnacional–, porque esa misma crítica ya depende para existir de las relaciones institucionalizadas de literatura y Estado –intrínsecamente dependientes y contribuyentes a las condiciones de la estatalidad–, y esas relaciones, la experimentación –formal y/o vital– estética las deja intactas, aunque semeje destruir todo lo demás. Los ideales de los defensores de la autonomía como política frente al Estado no son otros que los de la cultura de la autonomía artística, cultural o contracultural. Hay entonces que desconfiar, sostiene Gómez López-Quiñones, de las imitaciones de la política desde la estética que buscan saltar de manera aparentemente revolucionaria los límites entre esferas sin pensar a fondo las relaciones entre Estado y sociedad, es decir, sin pensar la mediación de la estatalidad, puesto que, a pesar de sus ambiciones radicales, pueden ser rápidamente reapropiadas tanto por el Estado como por el mercado. Es necesario, entonces, antes, replantear las relaciones entre literatura y Estado, y desde allí pensar opciones alternativas, que implicarán revisar la manera en que las Humanidades han entendido la subjetivación –hasta ahora directamente implicada en la formación de condiciones para la estatalidad.

En la práctica de los escritores la reflexión sobre el Estado no siempre ocupó un segundo plano, aunque la estrategia más común siguió siendo la de la defensa de la exterioridad contracultural radical constitutiva de la literatura respecto de un Estado de carácter habitualmente totalitario y exterior a ella. Este tipo de posiciones tuvieron un impacto importante en la investigación académica y llegaron a convertirse en paradigmas dominantes para pensar la politicidad de la literatura. En Argentina, tras el impacto inevi-

table sobre la cultura de la última dictadura militar y los efectos sociales de la represión ilegal y el terrorismo de Estado, Ricardo Piglia esbozó una teoría de la creencia y la ficción entre los discursos sociales públicos y, particularmente, en relación con el discurso del Estado. Según Piglia, el Estado moderno, incapaz de recurrir constantemente a la pura coerción para mantener el orden, es fuente productora y propaladora de creencias para legitimar su soberanía, creencias hegemónicas –o, como sugerimos, fantasías fundantes del bien común– que este autor tiende a pensar como narraciones, ficciones socializadas y, por eso, abiertas al interés y al análisis de los críticos e investigadores literarios. La literatura, a su vez, disputa ese espacio de ficciones estatales porque ella es, aparentemente de por sí, una fuente antagónica y 'contra-hegemónica' de creencias alternativas, de interpretaciones críticas capaces de hacer visible aquello que la ficción estatal oculta –dado que Piglia consideraba, en esa coyuntura, que guardar el secreto era el propósito central de las ficciones de Estado. Piglia proporciona, en una entrevista, el siguiente ejemplo de estas operaciones culturales y discursivas de la literatura:

> En junio del 77 vuelvo, salgo a caminar por la ciudad. Con esa mirada única que tiene uno cuando vuelve a un lugar después de mucho tiempo. Lo primero que me llama la atención es que los militares cambiaron el sistema de señales. En lugar de los viejos postes pintados de blanco que indicaban las paradas de colectivos han puesto unos carteles que dicen: «Zona de detención». Tuve la impresión de que todo se había vuelto explícito, que esos carteles decían la verdad. La amenaza aparecía insinuada y dispersa por la ciudad. Como si se hiciera ver que Buenos Aires era una ciudad ocupada y que las tropas de ocupación habían empezado a organizar los traslados y el asesinato de la población sometida. La ciudad se alegorizaba. Por lo pronto ahí estaba el terror nocturno que invadía todo y a la vez seguía la normalidad, la vida cotidiana, la gente que iba y venía por la calle. El efecto siniestro de esa doble realidad que era la clave de la dictadura. La amenaza explícita pero invisible que fue uno de los objetivos de la represión. «Zona de detención»: en ese cartel se condensa la historia de la dictadura. . . . Una estructura que dice todo y no dice nada, que hace saber sin decir, que necesita a la vez ocultar y hacer ver. Y el tipo de lenguaje, el uso estatal de la lengua. Porque nos podemos pasar dos días eligiendo nombres para la parada de ómnibus y vamos a encontrar muchos pero no creo que se nos vaya a ocurrir una solución tan sofisticada y manierista. Ahí actuó el contexto de modo cifrado y enigmático, como pasa siempre. Todos sabemos lo que significaban «las zonas» en las que los militares habían dividido el país para que los grupos «de detención» actuaran libremente. En esa expresión se sintetiza una relación entre el lenguaje y la situación política (182-183).



Piglia recurre al poder soberano y a la vez impotente de una literatura autónoma pero a la vez enteramente sometida a un Estado infinitamente coactivo, capaz de producir momentos epifánicos de revelación de lo que aquel quiere ocultar, pero solo a partir de la reproducción –con otros énfasis, con la mínima distorsión perceptual de una "mirada única", es decir, de una instancia de subjetivación– de los discursos del poder, y que por eso es capaz de cuestionar la hegemonía del Estado a partir de las operaciones de aquella en el común elemento de la ficción y la creencia, del imaginario y de la fantasía. La literatura suspende por un momento y en circunstancias muy específicas, incluso de carácter estrictamente personal –aunque hipotéticamente generalizable–, la creencia colectiva en el relato y en la lengua del Estado, en el 'bien común' que organiza la "vida cotidiana" y el doble represivo siniestro nocturno que es su condición. Al mismo tiempo, al considerarse eminentemente discursivo, el poder del Estado es siempre doble por encontrarse abierto al cambio de contextos, a la connotación y a la interpretación (el aparentemente espontáneo "alegorizarse" de la ciudad que describe el texto). Es esa estructura "que dice todo y no dice nada, que hace saber sin decir, que necesita a la vez ocultar y hacer ver", es decir, que alcanza la hegemonía a través de la producción de creencia y de la fantasía, de la identificación con un discurso omnipotente que define la realidad al tiempo que la vela. Frente a esa omnipotencia, ¿cómo explicar ese poder impotente de la literatura? Parece estar ligado a un tipo de posicionamiento subjetivo disidente individual, personal y quizás aleatorio, aunque paradójicamente institucionalizado, en el marco de un espacio social definido en su totalidad por la palabra del Estado, respecto del cual no se puede aspirar sino a la exterioridad, por más precaria que parezca. Esa mirada por fuera del Estado es típica de los procesos de subjetivación cultural autónoma que describimos más arriba, y una variante de los discursos sobre la autonomía institucionalizada de la literatura bajo el Estado. Piglia parece sugerir, de este modo, que los poderes de la literatura para contribuir desde dentro a la conformación del Estado moderno están completamente agotados.

También en un contexto de Estado dictatorial, el escritor español Juan Benet, de quien Pascale Casanova dijo que

> . . . constituye por sí solo, a partir de finales de los años 50, la primera posición internacional en un espacio literario español entonces dominado por la dictadura franquista . . . ; introduce la ley de la independencia literaria, aboga por la primacía de la forma y del recurso a modelos internacionales (152, 154),

se planteó la pregunta por la institución paradójica de la literatura frente al Estado, y llamó la atención, característicamente, sobre "el divorcio de la cosa pública" (Benet 175) y la exterioridad sostenida de una literatura española predominantemente costum-

brista, realista y casticista, respecto de las empresas de un Estado que sobre ella solo había podido cumplir funciones de censura y castigo. Pero Benet no ve en ello, como Piglia, una condición para la posibilidad de la crítica y la disidencia. Al contrario, ese divorcio habría vedado sistemáticamente a la literatura la posibilidad de acceder, según los términos de Benet, al *grand style* serio y noble que, de otro modo, habría implicado su asociación histórica, constitutiva y soberana con tales empresas políticas. De este modo, explica el autor de *Volverás a Región*, la literatura solo "atacó a la cultura, pero no a los tabús del estado" (175), aunque, al mismo tiempo, la censura hizo que todo escritor se transformase en un "escritor político, . . . que no es capaz de acercarse a una sola cosa sin pensar oblicuamente en sus repercusiones sociales y políticas" (179).

Aquí Benet también destacaba el carácter privilegiadamente dictatorial, coactivo y represivo de las políticas históricas del Estado español y su nula implicación cultural, es decir, su escasa dedicación a la producción de creencia y de modos específicos de subjetivación de carácter expresivo. Al mismo tiempo, asociaba la autonomía estética de la literatura, es decir, su propio valor soberano, a sus vínculos con la conformación del Estado moderno entendido en sus aspectos culturales nacionales. De este modo, Benet explicitaba la ligazón que había unido, a las empresas del Estado, la literatura como patrimonio colectivo. Así, frente a la exterioridad más trascendental que encontrábamos en las formulaciones de Piglia, Benet hallaba en las condiciones históricas específicas de conformación del Estado en España la razón, al mismo tiempo, de la politicidad constitutiva y de la impotencia de la literatura frente al Estado, y de sus chances actuales de cuestionarlo. El lazo entre Estado y literatura no siempre es el de una represión o sometimiento unidireccional: apelar al *grand style* es sumarse a las empresas del Estado, pero puede implicar también atacarlo, pues ambos, (discurso del) Estado y literatura, se mueven en un mismo elemento de soberanía, ligado con el trabajo sobre el lenguaje y la escritura, del que, por el contrario, el realismo del culturalismo costumbrista resulta excluido. La literatura española, según la hipótesis de Benet, se habría desvinculado completamente de ese medio autónomo soberano (la invención escrituraria), convirtiéndose en crítica solamente cultural de las costumbres, y al mismo tiempo politizándose de cabo a rabo, pero entendiendo esa política de manera inmediata, como simple exposición subordinada a la represión y al castigo estatales, de la que no es obvio ni inevitable que tenga que ser objeto. No hay así mediación institucional entre literatura y Estado, solo servidumbre respecto de un poder, una represión y un castigo sin límites. Pero puede haberla.

Por supuesto, Benet estimaba que solo su propia literatura –quizás junto con la de algunos amigos coetáneos– sí venía a resolver este entuerto a partir de una escritura

antirrealista, autorreferida e intransitiva, dado que le disputaba al Estado su función de asignación soberana de sentidos –de creencias, diría Piglia; de figuraciones del bien común– al sustraerse al mismo tiempo tanto al costumbrismo culturalista, políticamente siempre pre-definido en sus límites por las hipótesis represivas del Estado, como, en consecuencia, a la politicidad inmediata y a la censura. La ficción literaria era capaz, así, de poner un límite inmanente a la soberanía del Estado, pero históricamente situado; su estatuto mismo implicaba que esa soberanía tiene límites, aunque aquel sea, en sí mismo, el de la más completa impotencia definida por negación, excepción o ausencia de la soberanía del Estado. La autonomía de la literatura es un límite, institucionalizado, modélico y proselitista, de la soberanía estatal, aunque reducido, si no solo a la mirada de personas singulares aisladas, sí a una élite disidente dentro de la burguesía capaz de acceder a ella de las maneras específicas que ella misma requiere. ¿Se puede seguir sosteniendo este paradigma de politicidad para la literatura en el contexto de las condiciones culturales actuales analizadas más arriba en este trabajo? ¿Cómo pensar la autonomía soberana de la escritura literaria en el contexto contemporáneo de acceso cada vez más generalizado a la cultura y de textualidades digitales proliferantes?

De acuerdo con nuestra propuesta, si entendemos el Estado o la estatalidad, a la manera de Migdal o Bratsis, como un verdadero existenciario, un modo de vida o existencia, y tenemos en cuenta los señalamientos althusserianos recuperados por Lloyd y Thomas a propósito de la ligazón entre idea de Estado y subjetivación, es dable volver a pensar las mediaciones entre literatura y Estado sin caer en resoluciones abstractas, indeterminadas o vacías de los límites entre estética y política como las criticadas por Gómez López-Quiñones. La literatura moderna es tanto medio como testimonio de la máquina de subjetivación que también es el Estado moderno: ella es un manual de las vías para convertirse en sujeto en condiciones de estatalidad. No se trata meramente de las marcas de identificación cultural en que la literatura se ve involucrada, estudiadas, por ejemplo, bajo la figura de la "subcultura" (Hebdige), que luego sirvió de paradigma modélico para pensar cualquier relación entre cultura, identidad y política en el ámbito disciplinar de los estudios culturales. La subjetivación es el modo de ser dominante bajo estatalidad, y la literatura fue una de sus vías regias. Participando de los elementos o medios de la creencia y la ficción, de la conciencia y del lenguaje, de la expresión, de lo afectivo y del cuerpo, cruciales –además de la recaudación impositiva centralizada, el capital financiero y la conscripción militar estudiados por los historiadores– para la conformación de un Estado moderno, porque este depende constitutivamente en su existencia de legitimarse a partir de la organización y mediación de

estos aspectos subjetivos y experienciales de la vida humana –aunque, por virtuales o inmateriales, hayan excedido su control o supervisión directas–, aparece la literatura. No hay Estado sin sujetos en condiciones de estatalidad, pero de esas condiciones, en sus aspectos subjetivos y expresivos, surge también la literatura. El poder del Estado, en su relación central con una idea o fantasía del bien común, se constituye y refuerza a través de la generalización de modos de trascendencia y realización vital subjetivos, culturales, autorreflexivos, pero que, en tanto se postulan como autónomos e inmanentes, sea a partir de una mirada singular disidente, una escritura antirrealista y experimental, o una inmediatez paraconceptual de afectividad y corporalidad, son capaces de dar lugar a todo un cuerpo de imaginación cultural antiestatalista que a menudo se actualiza en la literatura. La literatura aparece disputando la soberanía del Estado moderno, como un factor generador de comunidad alternativo, pero enteramente dependiente de la posibilidad de postular un bien común universal que solo aquel hasta ahora ha propiciado, aunque nunca efectivamente realizado. Se trata de una politicidad en última instancia impotente, solo (contra)cultural, dado que literatura y Estado participan del mismo elemento fundante, que a su vez contribuye a la generalización de las condiciones de estatalidad. Sin embargo, a la vez, la ligazón entre fantasía de un bien realmente común superador de los antagonismos políticos y sociales y ficción literaria alumbra una potencia imaginaria de realización que hasta ahora solo el Estado moderno pudo convencer de poseer y ejercer.

Una literatura verdaderamente sin sujeto, ni obra ni representación implica no solo un más allá de la institución literaria, sino, sobre todo, otras condiciones de existencia que no serían ya las de la estatalidad tal como la conocemos. Sin embargo, la posibilidad de imaginar esta alternativa, por ejemplo desde las elaboraciones sistémicas clásicas de la teoría literaria, puede servir para comprender mejor los modos históricos de implicación de literatura, subjetivación y Estado sin hacerlas depender –hoy, tras el fin de la hegemonía del discurso teórico en los estudios literarios– de ilusiones culturales antiestatalistas y de identificaciones parciales. Al mismo tiempo, la proliferación contemporánea de instancias de subjetivación como realización vital de carácter expresivo de acceso abierto y gratuito, especialmente a partir del desarrollo y expansión de las redes sociales, ha impuesto nuevos desafíos tanto a la literatura como al Estado. ¿Puede haber literatura cuando las funciones del Estado tienden a reducirse cada vez más solo al control y la gobernanza, y, en apariencia al menos, se debilita la generación de creencias de orden subjetivo y cultural que favorezcan su hegemonía, es decir, se desvanece definitivamente la fantasía de un Estado proveedor del bien común? ¿Hay una literatura posible, en un mundo de gobernanza y control globales en que la soberanía

y la representación políticas se adelgazan y la distinción entre público y privado tiende a desdibujarse, y en que la realización subjetiva expresiva está constitutivamente generalizada gracias a dispositivos específicos y tiende a independizarse del grado de difusión y alcance modélicos y ampliados de las actividades originales de una élite, es decir, de lo que Raymond Williams llamaba 'cultura', concebidas frente a o ante el Estado? ¿Puede haber literatura cuando la afiliación cultural y afectiva colectiva se saltea la mediación de los dispositivos educativos productores de hegemonía del estado-nación y la creencia en la realizabilidad del bien común y se convierte en apego, adicción y goce de los dispositivos mismos de registro, gobernanza y extracción de datos ahora sustraídos al control centralizado del Estado y dispersos entre soportes tecnológicos, aplicaciones y redes muy diferentes entre sí pero interconectados, de formas ajenas a cualquier deliberación y representación democráticas institucionalizadas, y sin la posibilidad de imaginar siquiera un bien compartible por todos?

Un programa de investigación actual en estudios literarios puede no tener las respuestas, pero no puede ya obviar –bajo una plasticidad política, cultural e identitaria pretendidamente espontánea para la literatura–, aunque sus objetos sean históricos, estas preguntas.

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THEORY NOW
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"FREEDOM OF SPEECH" AS A THREAT TO LIBERAL DEMOCRACY. NOTES ON STANLEY FISH'S CRITIQUE

LA "LIBERTAD DE EXPRESIÓN" COMO UN PELIGRO PARA LA DEMOCRACIA LIBERAL. APUNTES SOBRE LA CRÍTICA DE STANLEY FISH

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Abstract: In his polemic and seminal book, *There's No Such Thing as a Free Speech and It's a Good Thing, Too*, Stanley Fish argued that the advocates of an unrestrained, absolute freedom of speech ended up weakening the very same thing they intended to defend: liberal democracy. In this essay, Fish's arguments are reviewed and analyzed in order to show that, both from a philosophical and a practical perspective, the universalist position on free speech is untenable. It inevitably slips on utilitarian grounds, and ends up denying its grounding principles: tolerance, neutrality and negativity. Instead, its arguments end up being political and partisan, as Stanley Fish shows. However, contrary to Fish's conclusions, this essay argues that it is precisely that political logic that makes it unwise to fully disregard "free speech" as a higher value.

Keywords: Free speech; Stanley Fish; Liberal democracy; Universalism.

Resumen: En su polémico y seminal libro, *There's No Such Thing as a Free Speech and It's a Good Thing, Too,* Stanley Fish argumenta que los defensores de la libertad de expresión absoluta, irrestricta, terminan siempre por debilitar exactamente lo que pretenden defender: la democracia liberal. En este ensayo, se revisan y analizan los argumentos de Fish para mostrar que, tanto desde una perspectiva filosófica como pragmática, es insostenible la postura universalista sobre la libertad de expresión. Inevitablemente termina deslizándose hacia terreno utilitario, y contradiciendo sus principios fundacionales: tolerancia, neutralidad y negatividad. En cambio, sus argumentos terminan por ser políticos y parciales, como demuestra Stanley Fish. Sin embargo, contra lo que Fish concluye, este ensayo sostiene que precisamente en virtud de esa lógica política, no conviene del todo descartar la "libre expresión" como un principio fundamental.

Palabras clave: Libertad de expresión; Stanley Fish; democracia liberal; Universalismo.

Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that the media has an indispensable role in liberal democracies, insofar as it allows its citizens to become familiar with public issues, to be informed about the different political options and, in general, to engage in political life. And it is commonplace to consider that freedom of speech and of the press must be considered as a universal principle in order for the media to be able to fulfil its democratic functions. Thus, Stanley Fish's famous assertion–that free speech is not universal, and that is a good thing–cannot be but perplexing, uncomfortable, and unacceptable to some.

In this essay I will explain in what sense, from Fish's point of view, the universality of "freedom of speech" can indeed be detrimental to liberal democracies, and at the same time I will argue in support of this view. The first two sections are devoted to this, with the first focusing on Fish's theoretical arguments, and the second putting stress on his more empirical observations. My agreement comes to an end when Fish assesses the implications of his conclusion that liberty of expression is not universal. On this point Fish is ambiguous, and the third section is devoted to analysing and discussing the possible implications of the author's account. It is on this point, I will argue, that it becomes most difficult to agree with Fish.

The philosophical impossibility of universal free speech

It is not easy to evaluate Stanley Fish's arguments regarding free speech. In this debate, his position seems to be somewhat paradoxical. He makes a devastating and, as I will argue, for the most part correct critique of the liberal view on free speech, yet it appears to me that he would hardly call himself an antiliberal. Far from this being the case, he seems to share the purposes that liberalism strives to achieve, but to his mind the universalism of this political doctrine provides a poor weapon with which to defend those aims. Fish's disagreement with liberalism starts being profoundly philosophical. Nevertheless, his attack on universalism does not aim at putting forward a better philosophical argument, for, according to him, philosophy is of little help in this debate. His whole objective is to show that, at least concerning free speech, liberalism is a self-defeating position; down in the battleground, due to its fascination with universalism, it is self-deceptive and, in the last analysis, it is in its own terms both theoretically untenable and practically unattainable. Neither more nor less (Robertson 313-315).

The core of Fish's argument can be summarised as follows. Contrary to what the advocates of a universalist position claim, speech is never valuable for its own sake. When we speak, we always do so for a particular purpose: we intend to convince someone to embrace our ideas, we try to get other people to do something, we aspire to persuade them. In his effort to be faithful to his liberal commitments, what the universalist fails to see is that in his defence of free speech he is speaking too on behalf of particular purposes. But soon he is drawn into a paradoxical circumstance in which, for the sake of philosophical coherence, he feels obliged to defend a universal and unrestricted view of free speech. Thus, he has to protect those very forms of expression that, if allowed to flourish, endanger his purposes, the ultimate ends that render valuable the protection of speech (Fish, *There's No Such Thing*).

What Stanley Fish shows is that there is no need for such a tragic destiny, for such a stoic virtue, because the universalist point of view has no philosophical coherence to take care of. Before going on to see how our author achieves this, it is useful to briefly map the debate on free speech, in order to better understand the contending positions and the target of Fish's critiques. On one side we have the so called "consequentialists", who argue that it could be valid and desirable to impose limits on free speech, when it has negative effects for society or when it harms the dignity or interests of certain groups. For them free speech is not a sacred, untouchable principle, but one among many others; when conflict occurs, its benefits should be in each case weighted against its possible consequences, as well as against other values and interests. At the (apparently) opposite side, we have the so called "strong position" on free speech.

Its supporters argue, to put it succinctly, that there can be hardly any good reasons for restricting the freedom of expression and the press. Free speech is taken to be of the highest value for liberal democracies and as a general principle it should never be restricted. This is the position typically expressed in the First Amendment of the United States' Constitution, which indicts the government to "make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press" (Dworkin 195).

Now, there are two different ways of arguing in favour of freedom of speech and the press. One is instrumental. It claims that freedom of speech is valuable mainly because of the benefits it brings about. Here we find the classical utilitarian arguments. A policy of liberty of speech and press is preferable to one of censorship because the former is more likely, firstly, to promote the pursuit of truth and, secondly, to enhance the moral perfection of citizens. Banning harmful, false, or disgusting ideas is undesirable, since critical analysis brings valuable truths into light, while the falsity of pernicious ideas is defeated. Which in turn allows citizens to exercise their rational judgement, all of which promotes a healthy and thriving democratic society (Mill 20-61).

Quite different is the second kind, the so-called constitutive argument, which considers liberty of speech to be valuable in itself, insofar as it is an inherent characteristic of free, responsible moral agents. The ability to choose among options is what defines autonomy and thus liberty of speech is constitutive not only because it provides the plurality of ideas indispensable for these choices to take place, but because it allows individuals to exercise their freedom. It is clear why free speech is taken to be a supreme and almost sacred principle. Governments that have regard for the freedom and dignity of their citizens–as liberal democracies are supposed to do–will avoid imposing restrictions on speech at all costs. Otherwise, their whole purpose would be rendered meaningless and human life itself would be deprived of its value (Dworkin 195-202)[1].

It is particularly this last idea that Fish disputes and especially its foremost implication: that expression should always be privileged above any other value or interest, and speech should always be legally protected notwithstanding what the real conse-

1 It seems to me important to clarify the distinctions between these arguments, in particular because Dworkin does not seem to take into account the existence of a consequentialist position, which apparently, he includes into the category of instrumentalism. However, the kind of reasons that can be advanced against the regulation of speech from a consequentialist standpoint are very different in nature from those of instrumentalism. It can be argued, for instance, that it is not advisable to ban hate speech because this would drive extremist groups underground, where it would remain unknown who they are and how much support they enjoy. Similarly, it could be argued that regulating the hateful speech of certain groups could enhance their resentment and, in the long run, provoke more violence (Parekh 217-223). As I hope to make clear later, what makes this kind of argument so different–much closer to Fish's–is that it does not need to rely on the assumptions of a universal human being provided with an essential rationality, as the "strong" position does. So we have the case that a strong free speech advocate like Dworkin is actually debating only within his own field of assumptions. An exclusion which tends to confirm Fish's argument, as will be latter explained.

quences are (Fish, "Interview"). Only such a constitutive point of view intends to provide grounds for justifying free speech as a universal and sacred value, for its own sake.

As Dworkin notes, a universalist position could not be maintained on instrumental premises, from which it too easily slips into consequentialist grounds (195-202). In order to justify the restriction of free speech, it would be sufficient to prove that certain forms of speech are not getting citizens closer to the truth, but reinforcing their prejudices, or harming their dignity. An instrumental position seems to be too close to consequentialism and, as Greenawalt argues, a strong position should not be consequentialist (Greenawalt 128). John Keane notes too "that the various justifications of liberty of the press are mutually conflicting in a philosophical sense", however, during the eighteenth century they were often used in combination by the early modern defenders of liberty of speech (48). It would seem that this confusion persists nowadays, and to prove this is the first step that Fish takes in order to advance his argument: the implausibility of a universalist defence of free speech.

Curiously enough, Fish's point is confirmed by Dworkin, one of the most prominent defenders of an unrestricted liberty of the press, when he points out that in reality instrumentalism and constitutivism are not as mutually exclusive as they would seem to be. It is, indeed, quite unusual to find universalists assuming a purely constitutive point of view (Dworkin 195). Indeed, in "On Liberty of Thought and Discussion", the cornerstone of the strong argument for free speech, John Stuart Mill tried to attain a synthesis between both arguments. Mill intended–and failed, in John Gray's opinion–to rework classical utilitarianism so as to make it coherent with a more fundamental–we could say metaphysical–view of reason and natural rights (Gray vii-xxx). A failure, as Stanley Fish would have it, that the strong free speech advocates have blindly inherited.

If such an unnatural communion seems plausible to the liberal mind, that is because both instrumentalism and constitutivism are grounded on common assumptions about the nature of human beings. The refutation of this liberal ontology, by demonstrating "the insubstanciality of its empirical foundations" (Gray xxix), is the point of departure of Fish's critique.

Key to this universalist ontology is the assumption, essential to liberalism, that Michael J. Sandel has called "the precedence of the right over the good". It is basically the idea that, in order to affirm the possibility of liberty and autonomy, the human ability to make choices has to be asserted and ontologically privileged. Individuals, so the argument goes, should be able to choose, amongst a variety of alternative goods and ideas, what they consider to be the best option for them. Which in turn means that, prior

to the moment of their selection, they should not be committed to any particular idea of the good. For if this were the case, if they knew beforehand what the good consists of, it would make sense for individuals to sacrifice their election for that particular conception (Sandel). Now, if it were true that human beings lack any previous conception of what is convenient for them, then it would be difficult to say what could possibly orient them in their decisions. Not for the liberal, who fills that vacuum with a rationality that is supposed to be an essential, universal characteristic of all human beings (Scanlon 533-534).

It is not difficult to see why all those who wish to affirm the inviolability of free speech, the supremacy of this principle above everything else, have an instinctive urge for universality. For them, freedom in general can only be asserted on the basis of a universal, rational human essence. Hence all the supporters of a strong position end up relying on this assumption.

One could start with the instrumentalist argument that free speech is preferable to a policy of censorship because it is more likely to promote the spread of true beliefs. But this could only hold if we assume, firstly, the existence of such clearly identifiable truths and, secondly, the intrinsic rational ability of human beings to discover them. Something similar occurs with the other instrumentalist statement, that liberty of the press fosters the development of individuals. This is embedded in another fundamental universalist assumption: the existence of a "free market of ideas", in which individuals can rationally and equally debate their diverging opinions in the pursuit of truth. However, as Bhikhu Parekh notes, it might well be possible that the result of such competition is not the individual's moral development, but the furtherance of inequality and the persistence of falsity. Too often certain individuals or groups are disadvantaged, either as a result of unequal material conditions or of prejudice, so that for them it is much more difficult to make their voices heard (Parekh 217-223). In such circumstances, not only can certain offensive and false ideas create an environment of inequality, they might impede the emergence of truth, since they are often intended to intimidate and silence certain groups (MacKinnon 69-113). To these objections, the standard response is that of Stuart Mill: censorship is in any case unwise since we do not know if the suppressed opinion might be true, and even if it is not, it is not uncommon that ideas that we regard as false still contain some portion of truth (22-59). Yet, once again, the risk is only affordable if we uphold the certainty that in the end it will produce valuable outcomes, namely, that those portions of truth will be discovered by rational individuals. Grievous speech must be tolerated because it is a worthy price to pay for a future benefit (Fish, *There's No Such Thing* 110).

So far, this review of the arguments for an unrestrictive view on free speech has had the intention of showing that, in any case, they end up being universalist[2]. A first conclusion can be drawn at this point, that a strong position, as Dworkin rightly notes, cannot be sustained in instrumentalist terrain (203). It is always necessary to recur to a certain form of universalism. Now the next question to be asked is whether on these grounds the strong free speech position can be maintained, and Fish's answer is a straightforward no. His most pervasive argument is that universalist assumptions are empirically unsustainable, nothing else than a matter of faith, but I will save this demonstration for the following section. In any case, what Fish is committed to show is that, perplexing as it might seem, universalism–or a strong position, which from now on we can treat as synonymous–slides inevitably into consequentialism all the time.

I insist, if this is the case it is because universalist foundations of free speech are, to Fish's mind, untenable, so that a strong position on free speech is an impossibility. This, as I have been arguing, is what our author wants to prove, and he does so by departing from the ontological premises of a universal, rational human nature. His conception of what a human being is is a very different one. Now we shall keep in mind that his argument is not intended to be a philosophical one. His purpose is rather to show that in the actual practices in which speech is deployed, in the contextual environments in which the principle of liberty of the press is legally interpreted, politically defended and contested, things simply do not work as universalists would like. However, it is convenient to devote a few words to "Fish's ontology", in order to better understand what his argument is and how he supports it.

As opposed to the liberal point of view, Fish endorses what can be called an embedded conception of the self. To put it briefly, what this notion refuses to accept is the idea that there is a universal human nature, a rational essence that grants individuals their capacity to choose. In contrast, for Fish the self is inextricably constituted by previous commitments, values, frames of mind, etc., that individuals learn from their particular contexts. When making choices, when judging and speaking, human beings are, consciously or not, working towards purposes that they did not always choose, or at least not always entirely consciously (Robertson 230-288).

To see why Fish reaches this conclusion, and to grasp its consequences, it is necessary to understand why a strong free speech position needs to assert the existence of a universal and rational self. I already mentioned how this assumption is connected, in

2 This is why in *There's no Such Thing as Free Speech*, Stanley Fish, whilst his natural enemy would seem to be the constitutive position, rather directs his critique against the strong argument, in general.

the liberal framework, with the general defence of autonomy. Now, it seems to me that, from a universalist perspective, there are three strong arguments as to why liberty of the press, in particular, is an essential precondition of freedom in general: *1) Tolerance.* All opinions should be permitted to be published, so that a diversity of points of view may spring, amongst which free individuals can make decisions. To restrict this plurality is to impose limits on the exercise of personal autonomy. *2) Neutrality*. This means that the government shall make no distinctions as to whether something is right or wrong, harmful or valuable, and thus should be published or not. This judgement is the expression of the rational capacities of citizens, and hence is something for them alone to decide. To limit it is to put into question their status as responsible moral agents. This is the principle paradigmatically expressed in the United States Constitution, where it is prohibited for the government to forbid any publication on the basis of its content (Dworkin 217-219). *3) Negativity*. Free speech is considered to be a negative liberty, which means that its only function is to restrict the field of activity of governments, creating a space in which individuals can pursue, free of public interference, their own conceptions of what is good. That is, in this space governments cannot decide what is convenient or valuable for individuals to publish, to read, see and hear (Dworkin 215-216)[3].

So far, I have tried to show how Fish demonstrates that universalist premises are, at best, incoherent and utterly false at worst. Now let's turn out to analyse why and how, in my view, Stanley Fish rightfully demonstrates that in actual practice free speech, as understood from a universalist point of view, is far from realizing the above mentioned principles. So that free speech, rather than being an essential precondition of freedom, always implies a limitation of someone's freedom for the benefit of someone else.

The actual impossibility of universal free speech

1. Tolerance. To begin with, according to Fish, what liberals preach is a "false tolerance". It is a tolerance that can only be practised under the condition that it "cannot take seriously" the values it appreciates. This comes from the liberal understanding of the self in relation to its autonomy. We saw that every value, every conception of the good, in order to be considered as really worthy, must be the result of a rational election. Thus, nothing is valuable in itself, but only inasmuch as it is a result of the exercise of freedom. Which means that the individual, if he is to remain free, must be able to change his mind, to discard his present values and embrace others at every moment. However, it turns

3 This is Isaiah Berlin's definition of negative liberty, as opposed to positive liberty: the power of individuals to participate collectively in defining a common, public good (215-280).

out that for a lot of human beings belief is a quite different matter. For them their values might not be interchangeable, nor easy to discard, for they are embedded in their self. Their very self-conception is inseparable from those beliefs. As Fish has it, "a deeply religious person is precisely that, *deeply* religious, and the survival and propagation of his faith is not for him an incidental (and bracketable) matter, but an essential matter, and essential too in his view for those who have fallen under the sway of false faiths" ("Boutique Multiculturalism" 380)[4].

This way of believing and upholding values sits at odds with the kind of tolerance promoted by a universalist vision of liberty of the press. For disagreements will hardly be resolved by means of more speech and rational debates. The market of ideas is here of little help. The situation turns out even more uncomfortable, if those deeply embedded beliefs include contempt for equity and liberty, for human autonomy and free speech, in sum, for all those values dear to the advocates of liberty of expression. In this case, it seems all too natural to expect that the universalist will start resisting "the force of the culture he appreciates at precisely the point at which it matters most to its strongly committed members" (Fish, "Boutique Multiculturalism" 379).

Hardly could there be a more forceful demonstration of Fish's claims than the fact that even someone like Dworkin, one of the most notable advocates of a strong free speech position, recognises that the old liberal idea of an almost absolute tolerance was nothing but utopian thinking. The liberal illusion that all political virtues can be realized without conflict has proved to be false. The constitutive superiority of liberty of expression was based upon this hope. To be sure, now it is clear that freedom of speech and press can come into conflict with the values that it is supposed to enhance–autonomy, moral development of citizens, democracy, and debate (Dworkin 195-219). As Eric Barendt recalls, the experience of totalitarianism has shown the dangers of certain forms of political languages, the effects of which cannot always be countered with more speech, nor by rational persuasion; it also has shown that there might be much more greater evils than the restriction of the liberties of speech and press (172-175). Thus, even Dworkin (103) has come to accept what Fish says, that there are certain forms of expression that cannot be tolerated, not if they undermine the very purposes for which a society is constituted, the very reasons for its protection of free speech.

4 As a side-comment, it is somewhat strange and misleading that Fish talks about a "false tolerance", since it is difficult to imagine what an "authentic tolerance" would look like. If Fish's account of the "embedded self" is purported to be a general account of how humans acquire their values, and I think it is, it would seem that the only options left are either a "false tolerance" or no tolerance at all. And this ends up being an odd compliment to liberalism, though not a very flattering one.

In arguing this, Fish is doing nothing but describing what actually happens. It could be said that what seems to be universal amongst liberal democracies is not the absoluteness of their tolerance, but rather the fact that tolerance is everywhere limited. The extent of the restrictions, their constitutional shape and their particular targets vary according to the different legal traditions, histories, and political conflicts; it always depends on the context, past and present. The legal-political tradition in Europe seems to be defined by a proclivity to restrict dangerous forms of expression, yet how this tendency is interpreted and applied in each country varies greatly. Speech considered as harmful might be restricted either because it can cause violence, because it can be damaging for certain groups and stir hatred against them, or just because of its content; in most of the cases we find a combination of reasons weighted and shaped differently[5].

Despiteful of standing "alone, even among democracies, in the extraordinary degree to which its Constitution protects freedom of speech and of the press", as Dworkin says, the United States, too, restricts the freedom of the press to great extents. It does so in an overt manner, by leaving unprotected under the First Amendment expressions that convey a "clear and present danger", or publications that are utterly obscene and that harm the rights of others, as in the case of child pornography. But it does so, too, in more subtle ways, for instance when the jurisprudence of the Court establishes distinctions between what can be considered speech and what cannot: "fighting words", for instance, utterances made with the sole intention to cause harm to a certain group, can be prosecuted. What Fish shows is that these distinctions, far from being sustained in universal and rational principles, are at best based on fuzzy criteria, and at worst are clearly arbitrary. In any case, the function they fulfil is obvious: to actually judge, by classifying it, the content of speech and exclude what seems undesirable without saying so, for the sake of philosophical, universalist coherence. Which takes us to the topic of neutrality.

2. Neutrality. This is a principle that, seemingly, most mature democracies have decided to give up to a great extent. Contrary to what a strong free speech position

5 The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights requires its signatories to ban "any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination". Or, for instance, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forces of Racial Discrimination demands a ban on "propaganda or organisations based on theories of racial superiority and incitement to racial discrimination and acts of violence" (Parekh 213). Now those restrictions can be typified in each country as general categories or as special protections for particular communities. For instance, both Germany and France prosecute, in general, the denial of crimes against humanity, a criteria supported by the European Rights Commission. However, the former country prosecutes in particular the denial of Holocaust and goes as far as prohibiting public meetings in which this kind of speech is pronounced. One of the reasons for prosecuting Holocaust denial as a criminal offence is that in Germany false factual claims are not constitutionally protected as free political speech. In this country, as in United Kingdom, restrictions can be justified because of the consequences of speech–including generation of violence and the damage inflicted on certain members or groups of society–but also because of its content, when it is considered abhorrent and intends to cause hatred (Barendt 172-181).

prescribes, a lot of these countries have granted their governments the right to judge, in certain cases, about the content of some forms of expression and prosecute those they consider abhorrent, opposed to the indispensable values of a democratic society. So, in the United Kingdom, publications whose content intends to promote hatred are not protected, and in countries like Germany, France and Austria, Holocaust denial is prosecuted as a criminal offence, on the grounds that false factual claims do not benefit from the protection of freedom of publication. It must be noted that, generally speaking, liberal democracies grant greater protection to political speech, since it is considered essential to democratic life, but even in this case there are restrictions; neither tolerance nor neutrality stand as absolute principles (Barendt 172-175).

As expected, for advocates of universalism all this amounts to little more than an unacceptable heresy, and they find their last consolation in what they regard as the last standing exception, namely, the United States. There, government is supposed to be prevented by the Constitution from passing judgment about the contents of speech and, hence, the universal purity of freedom of expression is apparently preserved. At least to a certain extent. For it is only political speech that is granted universal constitutional protection; it is only this category of expression that is declared to be absolutely free form censorship on the grounds of content. When it comes to political ideas, the judgement of the government cannot be trusted (Dworkin 202-205).

To this claim Stanley Fish responds with the same argument that he has been putting forward all along: this is not how things work in reality. Here, too, someone has to draw the line as to what political expression is and what it is not, and there are no fixed, universal or rational criteria to do so. It only can be done, as always, by judging the content of the speech against certain beliefs about what is acceptable and valuable, what is abhorrent and worthless, beliefs that vary from one context to another (*There's No Such Thing* 102-108).

It is better to illustrate Fish's argument with an example. Take two very similar cases that occurred in different cities in the United States, with quite different outcomes. In one, *R. A. V. v. St. Paul*, the Court considered unconstitutional an ordinance issued by the city of St. Paul, according to which a citizen was prosecuted for burning a cross on a black family's lawn, on the basis that this action was intended to cause "anger, alarm or resentment on others" because of their race. "Fighting words", the Court reasoned, can be prosecuted, but not discriminated due to their content (Barendt 185). Quite the same episode occurred in Virginia, where it was prosecuted in obeyance of a statute that made an offense to burn a cross in another person's property or in a public place with an intimidating intention. This time the Court recognized the constitutional validity of

the statute, on the grounds that it prosecuted a form of expression on the basis of its intimidating character, but not of its content (Barendt 185). However, as Barendt argues, it is difficult to dissociate this decision from a history of strong and visible presence of the Ku Klux Klan in Virgina. Although it was not made explicit, this expression had indeed an implicit political content that was certainly considered by the Court. In spite of the philosophical, universalist coherence that the US Court wants to keep, the fact–as Fish argues–is that most of the time it is making judgements about the content of speech, considering its plausible consequences in particular contexts, balancing them against beliefs as to what is best for a concrete community (Barendt 185).

3. Free speech as a negative liberty. Finally, this discussion leads to the conclusion that free speech, in so far as its tolerance is always partial and its neutrality fictious, cannot be considered merely as a negative right. Ultimately, the function of freedom of the press is not only to allow individuals to be free from the restriction of governments to pursue their ends and embrace their ideas, so long as they do not deprive others of their capacity of choosing. Free speech is always something more, and this is not only referred to the fact that an uneven market of ideas often requires, as aforementioned, affirmative action (Fish, "Boutique Multiculturalism" 380). Liberty of expression is, in the end, nothing but a positive affirmation of value. It is never neutral, for it entails distinctions, classifications and judgements that distinguish what kind of utterances should be protected. And these choices can only be made against the background of what is considered valuable. Even when strong interpretations argue in favour of an unrestrictive vision of free speech, they are preferring certain consequences to others and, hence, making a political choice. They are declaring, i.e., their unwillingness to sacrifice a free press in order to preserve the dignity of a religious community, as in the Salman Rushdie case in UK[6].

Freedom of expression and of the press cannot be said to be constitutive of other values. Indeed, it can enter into conflict with them, as it often does,–i.e. with religious sensibility, equality, human dignity and so on and so forth. When strong advocates of liberty of speech declare the universal superiority of this principle, they are making a political choice not to privilege other values and to downplay the interests of certain groups. And there is nothing universal, nor neutral to it, and if there is tolerance in this, it is only partial. Freedom of expression always entails an act of exclusion and restriction

6 Here the Divisional Court in England declared that Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses*, had no intention of creating violence. Yet, in the United Kingdom some expressions can be prosecuted if their content is harmful for certain groups. It seems clear, according to Barendt, that in this case, as in most of them, the right to publish, the consequences and the content of the message were put in a balance (164-167). In any case, there was clearly a conflict.

(Fish, *There's No Such Thing* 102-108). The universalist arguments for a strong position lack any solid grounds. And when they insist on the fundamental superiority of free speech, they are doing nothing but defending an ideology, as defined by Schauer: "a prevailing idea existing within an environment in which adherence to the idea is more or less required, and challenge to the idea more or less discouraged" (Schauer 855). And, once again, there is little universal to it.

In the end, all of Fish's argumentation is devoted to showing how things actually work. So, when he says that there is no such thing as free speech, he is saying that free speech does not work as liberals say, it certainly does not follow their universalist assumptions. Freedom of speech can only work in consequentialist ways. Its restrictions are always a matter of balancing different values and interests, amongst which liberty of the press is only one. There is always a pragmatic consideration of "each situation as it emerges", of the particular context in which something is uttered and its plausible effects. This is, for Fish, a good thing insofar as it allows us to take into consideration a variety of contesting points of view. It allows us to assess whether the damage of a certain expression to the values that are upheld will be greater with more or with less regulation (Fish, *There's No Such Thing* 108-127). What is wrong about the ideological commitment to universalism is that it impedes liberalism to effectively pursue its objectives. Paradoxically enough, the liberal feels guilty to overtly attack the discourses he himself despises and fears. Ultimately, the self-defeating nature of universalism resides not in its philosophical contradictions, nor in its failure to see reality as it is, but in its inability to defend the form of life that it is committed to.

After universalism: some final remarks on the functions of fiction

Up to this point, I have explained Fish's criticism of the universalist myth and, while doing so, I have also tried to show why, in my opinion, he is right. Now, what seems much more dubious and difficult to support are the consequences that Fish draws from his conclusion that free speech is not a universal principle. This is due, in part, to the fact that he remains quite ambiguous on this point.

When Fish declares the inexistence of free speech he does not mean, of course, that liberty of the press does not actually exist, nor that it should be abolished. What he seems to suggest is a different way of defending this asset of liberal democracies, one that would rather use a partisan language than an abstract appeal to principles. His bet, it seems to me, is to abandon any defence of free speech as a neutral or universal–i.e. inexistent–value and, instead, to endorse it as a real principle. Though it is not obvious

what this means, Fish gives us a hint: the agenda would be "not to eliminate racism but to harass and discomfort racists" (*There's No Such Thing* 394). His suggestion would appear to be: defend the form of life that you appreciate, with the benefits it conveys, in an overtly partisan way and in a consequentialist fashion. The corollary of which might be: identify your enemies and fight them not with appeals to abstract reason, but with the means provided by practical reason.

If this interpretation is right, it is far from being unproblematic. Take for instance the case *R. V. v. Lemon*, in which a film depicting the erotic fantasies of St. Teresa was banned in the UK on the grounds that it was offensive to religious sensibility. The verdict was contended by the film producers at the European Court of Human Rights on the grounds that the blasphemy law was not equitable, for it only protected Christian faith. The European Court responded that nothing was wrong with that since each country had the right to define the values dear to it. And, besides, extending the protection to Muslims would bring unacceptable complications (Barendt 185). This argumentation seems consistent with the kind of reasoning that Fish supports. Certainly, it could be contested on the same consequentialist, partisan grounds. But there is more to it. For it is almost inevitable to have the feeling that there is something unfair in this resolution: that the blasphemy law is not neutral and universal enough, since it leaves other religious faiths unprotected.

So it might seem that those "neutral", fake principles that Fish asks us to abandon are not that easy to discard. We would like "to harass and discomfort racists", but maybe we also like the idea that they have rights. It might be that the idea of granting constitutional rights even to those we regard as enemies is part of the reasons why we consider valuable the form of life that Fish asks us to fight for. If this is the case, Fish's position ends up being, to a certain extent, incoherent and self-deceptive as well. It could be that those neutral principles that Fish wants us to discard are part of the form of life we value; in discarding them, we would be weakening our own position.

It appears to me that this problem arises from Fish's simplistic view of what a principle is and how it relates to practice. Since free speech has no real meaning, not universal substance, it is useless, except as a masquerade, a false justification of political struggles. It is an empty concept that can be filled with whatever political purposes, an ideological construction of a political agenda. And, Fish concludes, it is not that principles are inherently bad: "they are inherently nothing"[7].

7 He goes on to argue that "free speech principles don´t exist except as a component in a bad argument in which such principles are invoked to mask motives that would not withstand close scrutiny . . . Free speech, in short, is not an independent value but a political prize, and if that prize has been captured by a politics opposed to yours, it can no longer be invoked in ways that further your purposes, for it is now an obstacle to those purposes" (Fish, *There's No Such Thing* 102, 113).

But the fact that, as Fish had demonstrated, a principle has no essential meaning does not mean that it is useless. Take the infamous *Skokie* case in which, in the United States, the Court declared unconstitutional the banning of a demonstration by a Neo-Nazi group in a neighbourhood populated mainly by Holocaust refugees. One way of reading this episode is Fish's: as a self-defeating act in which a liberal democracy was unable to reject a political expression that it despises, because it is fanatically enamoured with the principle of free speech. Yet, after all, regardless of how abhorrent the judicial decision might be, there is something significant in the fact that a group of violent Neo-Nazis went to the Court to defend their interests (Schauer 858).

It is plausible that the function of these kind of principles comes from the very fact that they have no fixed meaning, and thus their definitions and limitations, their relation to other values, can be contested[8]. A conversation, which often involves fundamental and unsolvable disagreements, can thus take place. This is a view that I cannot explain further here, but it does not mean that we have to return to a universalist stand on freedom of speech. It could be said that freedom of speech has a more limited universality, as Scanlon argues. Its universality is recognized by all liberal democracies as a right every citizen is entitled to. The error is to follow from this that free speech has to be universal as a policy too (Scanlon 520).

As Barendt reminds us, in every legal controversy involving free speech, this liberty is considered a universal right, constitutionally recognised (88-162). This need not mean that it is unlimited. There can be very good reasons for restricting it. But it must be acknowledged that something is being sacrificed. This something is freedom of speech, and part of its function and value comes from the fact that it is considered as universal, in this restricted sense (as a right).

If we discard liberty of expression as a principle, it might become too easy for governments to affirm that, by limiting the freedom of speech and of the media, what they are doing is safeguarding liberal democracy. What they might be really doing is endangering the liberty of the press, a fundamental aspect of liberal democracies. Their real intention might be to harness free speech whilst using the defence of democracy as a political argument. In some contexts, it might be necessary and convenient to establish certain boundaries to what can be said, and yet, it is utterly important to name this sacrifice, to call it for what it is.

8 It has to be noted that, at some points, Fish seems to endorse a position like this. For instance, he notes that freedom of speech might have the function of advertising Courts' actions as following from general principles, while remaking those principles in accordance with the exigencies of the day. Hence Law, he writes, "does not remain what it is because its every detail survives the passing of time, but because in the wake of change society still looks to it for the performance of a particular task" (Fish, *There's No Such Thing* 20-23). However, Fish's position remains uncertain on this point.

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ON ARTISTS, MODELS AND ARTWORKS: BALZAC'S *THE UNKNOWN MASTERPIECE* AND IBSEN'S *WHEN WE DEAD AWAKEN* IN JACQUES RIVETTE'S ART THEORY

SOBRE ARTISTAS, MODELOS Y OBRAS DE ARTE: *LA OBRA MAESTRA DESCONOCIDA* DE BALZAC Y *EN EL DESPERTAR DE NUESTRA MUERTE* DE IBSEN EN LA TEORÍA ARTÍSTICA DE JACQUES RIVETTE

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Abstract: The artistic theory that French director Jacques Rivette (1928-2016) developed throughout his long career is concentrated in a very singular way in *La Belle Noiseuse* (1991). His reflection on issues such as the nature of the artist, the traumatic process of creation and the very essence of the artwork draws from many sources, most of them literary, which he links together very suggestively. Among the literary sources, Balzac's famous story *The Unknown Masterpiece* (*Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*, 1831), of which the film is a very free adaptation, and Ibsen's last drama, *When We Dead Awaken* (*Når vi døde vågner*, 1899), stand out most notably. Rivette's fruitful connection of both texts is a matter that has barely been addressed by critics, despite its crucial importance for the interpretation of the film's artistic theory. This article analyzes this connection, focusing on the reasons that led Rivette to choose one of Ibsen's most obscure and least known plays and on the subtle way it is interwoven with Balzac's text.

Keywords: intertextuality; cinema; literature; painting; art theory; *La Belle Noiseuse.*

Resumen: La teoría artística desarrollada por el director francés Jacques Rivette (1928-2016) a lo largo de su extensa carrera se concentra de manera muy singular en *La Belle Noiseuse* (1991). Su reflexión acerca de asuntos como la naturaleza del artista, el traumático proceso de creación y la esencia misma de la obra de arte bebe de numerosas fuentes, muchas de ellas literarias, que Rivette conecta muy sugerentemente. Entre las fuentes literarias, destacan especialmente el célebre relato de Balzac *La obra maestra desconocida* (*Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*, 1831), del que la película es una adaptación muy libre, y el último drama de Ibsen, *En el despertar de nuestra muerte* (*Når vi døde vågner*, 1899). La fructífera conexión de ambos textos que Rivette lleva a cabo es un asunto que la crítica apenas ha abordado, pese a su importancia determinante para la interpretación de la teoría artística que se expone en la película. El artículo analiza precisamente dicha conexión, con especial atención a las razones que llevaron a Rivette a elegir uno de los textos más oscuros y menos conocidos de Ibsen y a la sutil manera en que se imbrica con el de Balzac.

Palabras clave: intertextualidad; cine; literatura; pintura; teoría artística; *La Belle Noiseuse.*

1. Introduction

In his long career, Jacques Rivette (1928-2016), one of the most singular members of the French Nouvelle Vague, developed a complex theory about the nature of art. In films such as *Paris nous appartient* (1961), *L'amour fou* (1968), *Céline et Julie vont en bateau* (1974) or *La Bande des quatre* (1988) Rivette thoroughly explores his interest in theater, improvisation and staging; his mixture of fiction and documentary-like sequences; his fascination with clues and cabalistic signs; his somewhat paranoid conception of fiction and settings; and his thoughts on the creative process. Of all his films, *La Belle Noiseuse* (1991) largely stands as his great discourse on art, the creative process and the artwork itself[1]. Its complexity lies not only in the elaborate reflection on pictorial and artistic creation, but also in other important elements such as the *mise-en-scène*, the symbolic use of space and the prolific network of literary and artistic intertexts connecting, among others, Balzac, Henry James, Poe, Zola, Bellmer, Balthus and Ibsen, whose specific presence is the focus of this study. In its four-hour running time, Rivette unfolds a theoretical reflection that largely encapsulates his artistic and filmic theory, while offer-

1 Rivette's film must be placed in the context of the interest of other contemporary filmmakers for the exploration of art and the figure of the artist. One might consider Maurice Pialat's Van Gogh (1991) and Jean Luc Godard's Histoire(s) du cinema (1988-1998), in which he addresses extensively the relationship between cinema, painting and literature.

ing the viewer an absorbing practical exhibition of those very same theoretical foundations through the painting, almost in real time and by the actual hand of painter Bernard Dufour, of the canvas giving the film its title. It is, in short, a work that fully meets Rivette's concern that his films should have "at least two or three interpretations–not fixed, but shifting" (Johnson 35).

Despite this challenging semantic uncertainty, the fact is that its theoretical grounds are based on a complex philosophy of art partially resting on several literary sources, among them Balzac's *Le Chef-d'*œuvre *inconnu* (*The Unknown Masterpiece*) and Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken* (*Når vi døde vågner*). These literary grounds are not at all surprising considering Rivette's productive relationship with literature from his early works to the very end of his career and his belief that "le roman du XXe siècle . . . a échoué à prendre la succession de celui du XIX^{e}; on sait aussi que cette succession, c'est le cinéma qui l'a assurée" (Rivette, "*Cahiers 'Gallia'*" 46)[2]. This essay does not propose an analysis of *La Belle Noiseuse* in specifically filmic or intermedial terms, but rather focuses on arguing that a significant part of the film's semantic wealth derives from the subtle blending of Balzac and Ibsen's intertexts as an essential component of its intellectual construction.

Before proceeding any further, it is worth recalling the plot of the film. It features the painter Édouard Frenhofer (Michel Piccoli), who lives in southern France with his wife Liz (Jane Birkin). There he is visited by his friend and former love rival, the chemist and art dealer Porbus (Gilles Arbona), who is accompanied by Nicolas (David Bursztein), a young admirer of his work, and his girlfriend Marianne (Emmanuelle Béart). The secret devouring Frenhofer soon comes to light: he hardly paints anything anymore and, above all, he has been unable to finish in ten years what was to be his masterpiece, *La Belle Noiseuse*, with Liz as his model. Encouraged by Porbus, Frenhofer decides to take up the painting again and Marianne reluctantly agrees to be the new model, spurred on by Nicolas, who is most of all eager to behold the final painting. After a series of strenuous posing sessions, Frenhofer finally concludes the work. During these sessions we have closely and for a long time contemplated Marianne's naked body as well as the subsequent preliminary sketches of the painting, first on paper and then on canvas, while witnessing the revelation of the characters' painful experiences and of the unexpected dangers resulting from the ongoing birth of an artwork. Once the painting is finished, Marianne looks at it in apprehension, if not in awe, and Liz draws an enigmatic black cross on the back of the frame. At the end of the film, the relationship between Frenhofer and Liz is strengthened,

2 "The novel of the twentieth century . . . failed to replace that of the nineteenth century; we also know that this replacement was ensured by the cinema" (my translation).

while that of Nicolas and Marianne, deeply shaken by the intensity of the experience they have lived, comes to an end. The artwork, fully beheld only by a privileged few, is forever withheld from all other gazes as Frenhofer himself walls it up in his studio.

2. The Balzacian intertext: *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*

Critics have pointed out the intertextual presence in the film of works by Zola (*L'œuvre*), Poe (*The Oval Portrait*), Henry James (*The Liar*, *The Madonna of the Future* and *The Figure in the Carpet*) and Wilde (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*). However, the main source is Balzac's well-known short story *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* (1831), of which *La Belle Noiseuse* is a "freely inspired" version, as explicitly stated in its credits. Unlike most Nouveau Roman authors, who erected Balzac as "epitome of an outmoded narrative tradition" (Schmid 28), for Rivette, as for other Nouvelle Vague filmmakers such as Truffaut, Chabrol and Rohmer, Balzac is a reference. As early as 1971, in *Out One. Noli me tangere*, he already adapted *Histoire des Treize*, and in 2007, with *Ne touchez pas la hache*, an adaptation of *La Duchesse de Langeais*, he completed a trilogy that is at the very core of his career. It cannot be argued that *La Belle Noiseuse* is a classical-type adaptation of *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*. Rivette himself, for whom "chaque mot est important chez Balzac" (L'art secret)[3], unambiguously assumes the "inadaptability" of his work (Rivette, *La Belle Noiseuse*). It is quite clear, however, that the Balzacian story not only provides much of the film's plot structure, but also, and above all, the theoretical underpinnings on artistic creation and the role of the creator, matters on which critics have dwelt at length (Dosi; Tavassoli). In this sense, since "the representation of painting, through cinema, is . . . the rarest motif and one of the greatest accomplishment of his [Rivette's] cinematic career" (Tavassoli 165), there are very convincing reasons to believe that, of all the works in the huge edifice of *La Comédie humaine*, *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* was the perfect story to make a film that, although focused on painting, could easily be projected on other expressions so much to Rivette's taste such as theater or, metafilmically, the very process of filmmaking.

Despite claiming to be a free adaptation, the fact is that Balzac's short story is reflected in the film through many plot elements that allow the viewer to easily recognize the original source. What is most relevant, however, is that the film also picks up the theoretical gauntlet thrown down by Balzac through Frenhofer's famous speeches. The comparison of these speeches with the artistic reflection found in *La Belle Noiseuse*, which will be addressed in this article, shows that Rivette closely follows

3 "Every word is important in Balzac" (my translation).

them, thus succeeding in solidly placing his film in the wake of the influential artistic reflection spawned by the Balzacian story since its publication in 1831.

3. The Ibsenian intertext: *When We Dead Awaken*

Henrik Ibsen's drama *When We Dead Awaken* (1899) is one of the most elusive intertexts in *La Belle Noiseuse*, for its brevity in such a long film is misleading in relation to its real relevance, as this study aims to illustrate. Here, it should be noted that Rivette, who jokingly admitted his pleasure in "inserting traps for the critics" (Johnson 34), is a director fond of playing with critical confusion and delusion through the insertion of a wide variety of intertextual elements. That is why it is always advisable for the critic to approach them very cautiously in order not to offer an exegesis that, as Johnson rightly states, moves "from the probable to the possible and . . . into the pointless" (34). What will be argued in the following pages is that the presence of Ibsen's work in *La Belle Noiseuse*, although explicitly limited only to a few brief moments in the four-hour film, is by no means a playful Rivettian trap to confuse the critics, but a conscious, substantial insertion, semantically connected to Balzac's intertext and contributing to strengthen the basis of Rivette's profound reflection on art.

The references to *When We Dead Awaken* in the film are made at precisely the moment when the artistic relationship between Frenhofer and Marianne, between painter and model, begins to take on a depth that will prove crucial to the genesis of the masterpiece:

> FRENHOFER. Do you know Rubek? The sculptor… [*Marianne shakes her head*] Dead now. Died in an avalanche in Norway… With his only model…
>
> MARIANNE. Never heard of him.
>
> FRENHOFER. He did two or three things that weren't bad. In marble. A Resurrection. He could've been great… It's a pity. You get stuck inside of what you're searching for. Possession. They're all after possession. They don't know it's impossible. Giving up everything is frightful [*contorting Marianne into several poses*]. Her name was Irene. Rubek and Irene. A strange girl. A little crazy, I think. I'd known her before him [*placing Marianne for a pose*]. This way you look a bit like her. I must have painted her exactly in this pose. One of my first paintings. So disconcerting, their death… Almost all the girls, the models before Liz, …there were so many… I forgot them all. I picked them up in the street. Every time a torture. (Rivette, *La Belle Noiseuse*, disc 1, 01:46-01:55)[4].

When We Dead Awaken is one of Ibsen's most peculiar and enigmatic works, not only because it is his very last play, but also because of its striking subtitle, "dramatic epi-

4 Quotations are taken from the English subtitles of *La Belle Noiseuse*. Minutes and seconds refer to the same edition.

logue". This subtitle hints at Ibsen's own perception of his last play not so much as an ending to his career but rather as a turning point from which his creative work would take a new course that he wished closer to poetry. In fact, *When We Dead Awaken* can largely be considered "poetic theater", a quality that can already be found in some of Ibsen's earlier works. In any case, as Moi (35) rightly sums up, the label "dramatic epilogue" is very ambivalent and its meaning as intended by Ibsen is not entirely clear. Despite being one of his least known and least performed dramas, it is a play that introduces many of the most outstanding issues of Ibsen's theater while offering features which may enlighten the reasons why Jacques Rivette chose such a peculiar text to insert in *La Belle Noiseuse* the short but very significant references referred above.

When We Dead Awaken introduces us to the renowned sculptor Arnold Rubek and his wife Maja, who return to their native Norway after a long period abroad. Despite his worldwide fame, Rubek has deeply realized that his genuine artistic inspiration vanished when he finished *Resurrection Day*, the sculpture that made him world-famous. In the work, through the ideal representation of the awakening, on the day of her resurrection, of a virginal young woman in the full splendor of her beauty and sensuality, Rubek sought to convey not only his artistic views, but also his longing for transcendence and perfection. After his great work, Rubek lives on trivial projects that nevertheless bring him significant financial wealth. Meanwhile, his marriage is falling apart, prey to boredom and routine. At the spa where they are staying, Rubek is attracted to a mysterious, almost spectral woman dressed in white. In fact, it is his former model, Irene, the muse who inspired his exceptional sculpture. Rubek admired her naked, as a sublime and unique model, but he never even touched her. After finishing the famous work, he abandoned her in search of other similar models that he never found. Irene, in turn, ended up on the verge of madness. Their reencounter reopens the old wounds of their intense past together and rekindles their stormy relationship, culminating in the play's shocking final scene, when they both climb a mountain only to consciously entomb themselves in the snow of an avalanche.

The peculiar subtitle "dramatic epilogue" can be connected, on the one hand, with this striking ending, in which the avalanche burying Rubek and Irene would be a symbol of the ending of an old time and the beginning of a new one. The title of the play itself, *When We Dead Awaken*, and even the title of the masterpiece, the sculpture *Resurrection Day*, would also be pointing in this very same direction. They are examples of the extensive Christological symbolism that critics have already noted. In this sense, Thomas states that "using the same words as the Devil to Christ, Rubek promised both Maja and Irene to take them up a high mountain and show them all the glory of the world,

provided they would fall down and worship him" (132) and Northam insists on the symbolic importance of Rubek and Irene's upward movement in the work, "derived from the same source, St. Matthew's gospel narrating Christ's temptation by the devil" (106). As Fuchs points out, these Ibsenian metaphors particularly emphasize the motif of Christ's death and resurrection, since "in three acts, it traces a three-day journey from light to dark to dawn, from low to higher to highest, mirroring the emancipatory death and resurrection pattern of the Christian narrative" (399). Rivette must have found such Christian symbolism to be very stimulating if we consider that equivalent images, which certainly do not derive from Balzac, operate as a key leitmotif in *La Belle Noiseuse*. The film is indeed punctuated by many such scenes, as a few selected examples show: Marianne, upon first entering Frenhofer's workshop, links it to a church; her poses sometimes recall either a crucifixion or the Christian representation of the Pietà; the action unfolds in an upward movement from the village to Frenhofer's *château* and takes place over three days, not by chance one being Good Friday. In short, the film hints at a symbolic artistic transposition of the Christian idea of the resurrection of the flesh happening in Frenhofer's mysterious painting.

On the other hand, the subtitle "dramatic epilogue" could also be connected to the play's shifting time perspective. This perspective includes the interaction between Rubek and Irene as they relive the turmoil of their intense past together and its repercussion in the present as well as the impact of that very present, in which artist and model meet again, on the perception of that past. Not surprisingly, critics have noted the striking treatment of time categories in Ibsen's play. While we are certain that not many years have passed between Rubek and Irene's separation and their present reencounter, we also feel the projection of that specific time into an indefinite eternity. In addition, as Gerland points out, "the present appears as . . . an empty receptacle in which the past is disgorged" (456), an idea that is clarified by Sorensen when he states that "throughout the play, the characters constantly refer to time, especially *past* time, to the extent that the past almost overshadows the play's present" (27). In any case, what is revealed is that, since their intense relationship, Rubek and Irene have lived and still live as prisoners of a condensed time and space that only ends with the symbolic final avalanche.

The singular perception of space-time coordinates is also a prominent feature of *La Belle Noiseuse*, since Rivette extensively explores this interaction of past and present in Frenhofer's complex and enigmatic relationships with both Liz, his wife and former model, and Marianne, the new model. In addition, the film clearly distinguishes between the viewer's perception of chronological temporal-

ity in the action outside Frenhofer's studio and the timelessness derived from the intense creative relationship between the painter and his model inside the artist's atelier. Considering all this, one may well think that, in his reception of *When We Dead Awaken*, Rivette could not help but notice Ibsen's striking treatment of these space-time categories.

Through the use of techniques echoing those of symbolist theater, such as minimal action, static scenes and symbolic dialogues, Ibsen explores the creative nature of the artist and its embodiment in a unique artwork, very much in line with Balzac, James and Zola's reflections on the subject, all of which are likewise important sources for Rivette's film. Furthermore, he ponders the very nature of art and its problematic interaction with the commercial concerns of bourgeois and capitalist society. These issues are also addressed by Balzac and Rivette. But, most of all, *When We Dead Awaken* is an exploration of the highly problematic bond between artist and model. Irene is thus portrayed as a slave-like character who consciously or unconsciously yields to the sculptor's dreamlike vision and surrenders her own self into his hands. All in all, there are in Ibsen's play both a portrait of the leading characters and a deep meditation on the nature of art and the artwork which, together with the elements coming from Balzac's story, could not but be of great interest to Rivette, as will be further discussed in the next three sections.

4. The artist

The portrayal of the artist that Rivette unfolds by means of the pivotal character of Édouard Frenhofer is largely shaped on that of Balzac's. However, the complexity of Rivette's character is also provided by elements coming from Henry James' image of the full artist as expressed in his *Notebooks*; from Rivette himself, who, just like Balzac, mirrors himself in his own character; and, most particularly, from Ibsen's Rubek, as this study argues.

In any case, the character of Frenhofer epitomizes a romantic conception of the artist as a demiurge and, in a Platonic sense, as a creator whose madness eventually gives birth to the artwork. In this sense, as mentioned, Rivette's Frenhofer owes much to Balzac's and is, in a broad sense, the type of mysterious, obsessive creator so dear to the French novelist, in line with characters like Balthazar Claës in *La Recherche de l'absolu*. Furthermore, Rivette's character is indebted to Balzac's for the elitist and even misanthropic attitude leading him to scorn the bourgeois view of art, an issue that Balzac clearly addresses through the confrontation between Frenhofer's ideas in *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* and those of Pierre

Grassou in the eponymous 1839 story. As a demiurgic, maniac being, the artist's obsession is focused on the search for a unique masterpiece encapsulating the quintessential mystery of art. Frenhofer's monomania, in both Balzac and Rivette, is also defined by a keen awareness that the act of achieving the ultimate masterpiece entails a particularly intense vital suffering. More precisely, Rivette's character links this suffering to the extreme risk that only exceptional creators must be willing to take in order to create something new and unique that will unveil the unknown and uncharted. The revelation of that mystery by the visionary artist is the grail pursued by both Balzac and Rivette's characters as well as by Ibsen's Rubek. The quest for this ideal is so intense that the artist, somewhat unexpectedly, may come up against an opposite and potentially fatal outcome: the exhaustion of the required creative drive. This is the state of the artist at the beginning of both *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* and *La Belle Noiseuse*: a mature being, weakened and overwhelmed in all aspects of his life by the unhappiness and frustration resulting from an abandoned or, at least, unfulfilled ideal.

Such is also Rubek's condition at the beginning of Ibsen's drama, a condition that fully justifies Rivette's interest: a mature, life-weary artist who, just like Frenhofer, believes he has lost genuine inspiration forever. In his case, the distance from his native Norway has resulted in a sort of vital isolation that has creatively annihilated him, a fact that his wife Maja repeatedly emphasizes: "You've been away so much, much longer than I have" (240); "And I think it's so sad that you've lost all appetite for work" (242); "You've got this look in your eyes now, something so tired, so resigned" (264). However, unlike Rivette's Frenhofer, who exhausted his creative power merely in the sketch of a masterpiece that, at the beginning of the film, lies buried in oblivion, Ibsen portrays an artist whose inspiration vanished after having achieved that very ideal of the one and only masterpiece. Thanks to an original intertextual game whereby the fictional Rubek and Irene become "real" characters in the fiction of *La Belle Noiseuse*, Rivette succeeds in making the viewer grasp the intimate connection between his Frenhofer and the Ibsenian sculptor. In fact, in both Rubek and Frenhofer can be found a thorough analysis of the artist and his innermost nature as a creator. On the one hand, such nature unfolds through their relationship with a unique, irreplaceable model, be it Irene or Marianne; and, on the other, through the embodiment of that relationship in a work that is also unique and irreplaceable: the sculpture for Rubek, the painting for Frenhofer. The explicit references to Ibsen's drama in *La Belle Noiseuse* are aimed precisely at drawing a parallel between the Rubek-Irene couple and the problematic (*noiseuse*) relationship between Frenhofer and Marianne as well as with the disturbing (again *noiseuse*) artworks resulting from the intensity of such encounters.

5. The artist and the model

As mentioned above, Rivette inserts the intertextual references from *When We Dead Awaken* just at the moment when the relationship between Frenhofer and Marianne is reaching a level of intensity that will prove decisive for the creative process and for the achievement of the masterpiece. These references clearly lead the viewer to establish a plausible and suggestive analogy between Rubek's relationship with Irene and that of Frenhofer with Marianne. In fact, it seems more than likely that Rivette approached the play because, in the story of Rubek and Irene, Ibsen thoroughly dissects not only their creative relationship, but also the boundaries of affectivity and sensuality between artist and model. The exceptional nature of his bond with Irene is made clear by Rubek's blunt response at his wife's insistence on knowing details of his relationships with his previous models: "Oh, no, my little Maja. I've only really ever had one model. One single model– for everything I've created" (249). And, when speaking of the sculpture he has created, he admits to Irene herself that "it was to be the world's most noble, pure, ideal woman, awakening. Then I found *you*. I was able to use you for everything" (258).

Here, it is worth noting that such a dissection of the artist-model relationship is something that Rivette certainly could not find in Balzac's story. On the whole, it is quite accurate to say that Balzac shows in *La Comédie humaine* a penchant for exploring the artist's relationship with love, as Guise rightly notes in regard to *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*:

> Deux fois déjà, en variant les effets, dans *La Maison du chat-qui-pelote* et dans *La Vendetta*, il l'a abordé par le biais du problème des rapports du peintre avec son modèle . . . Le regard de l'artiste se mue en regard de l'amoureux, et l'artiste connait ainsi, provisoirement du moins, le bonheur de l'amour. Dans *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* . . . Balzac inverse les données : Poussin découvre un modèle dans la femme qu'il aime et dont il est aimé; c'est le regard de l'amant qui se mue en regard de peintre. Et cette métamorphose luit vaut de perdre l'amour (408-409)[5].

These are words that could easily be applied to the relationship between Nicolas and Marianne in *La Belle Noiseuse*. However, Balzac barely suggests the relationship between Frenhofer and Gillette and, in any case, it is not essential for a masterpiece that was almost finished before the encounter between them. In this sense, Gillette appears as the yardstick against which Frenhofer will confirm the exceptional greatness of his

5 "Twice already, by varying the effects, in *La Maison du chat-qui-pelote* and in *La Vendetta*, he approached it by the means of the problem of the relationships between painter and model . . . The artist's glance is transformed into the lover's glance, and the artist knows thus, temporarily at least, the happiness of love. In *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* . . . Balzac reverses the data: Poussin discovers a model in the woman he loves and by whom he is loved; it is the lover's glance which is transformed into the painter's glance. And this transformation means the loss of love" (my translation).

work. But the reader never gets to grasp what really happened during the time that painter and model spent together in the studio and the real impact of that encounter on the mysterious painting.

Unlike *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*, both *La Belle Noiseuse* and *When We Dead Awaken* clearly argue that the artwork is the result not only of the artist's creative power but also of the model's crucial contribution. In this way, she is claimed as an active creative agent and not as a mere passive subject. Thus, artist and model end up in a sort of "vampiric" relationship whereby the artwork gradually becomes "incarnated" (Didi-Huberman) and full of life in contrast to the symbolic death it causes to its creator(s). Like Marianne, Irene is torn between her utter surrender to the artist's will and her self-awareness of her decisive role for the creation of Rubek's great work:

> IRENE [*without answering*]. And the child? The child too is well? Our child lives on after me. In honour and glory.
>
> RUBEK [Smiles as though in a distant recollection]. Our child? Yes, that's what we called it–at the time (253).

And, as such child, the work bears the essence of its parents, especially that of its mother, the model. Without drawing on this particular filial image, Marianne, like Irene, also feels at a very disturbing moment in the film that something of her innermost essence has been transferred to Frenhofer's painting: "A thing which was cold and dry. It was me" (Rivette, *La Belle Noiseuse*, disc 2, 1:21).

Both in *When We Dead Awaken* and in *La Belle Noiseuse* we are presented with a deeply troubled relationship between artist and model, based as it is on a mutual and highly toxic interaction. On the one hand, the model faces the contradiction between her crucial status for the artistic creation and, at the same time, her complete surrender to the artist's demands; and on the other, the artist is well aware that, in the absence of the model, his inspiration will never happen. So it is with Rubek, who, after *Resurrection Day*, spends his life making busts with an artistic transcendence not even slightly comparable to that of his great masterpiece. In Frenhofer's case, the completion of the painting results in Marianne's disappearing and in his never again creating a work of such intensity.

The problematic relationship between artist and model can be described as "agonistic" inasmuch as it is presented as a combat that eventually gives birth to the artwork. Accordingly, both Irene and Marianne angrily and even violently express their feeling of being or having been prostituted by the artist. The issue of the model's prostitution is already addressed in Balzac's story. There, "la Belle Noiseuse" is Catherine Lescault's nickname, a courtesan who, somewhat paradoxically, is the model for the virginal figure

in Frenhofer's painting and it is the painter himself who calls prostitution the mere possibility that eyes other than his own might behold the painting. In addition, Gillette feels betrayed and sold (in other words, prostituted) by Nicolas and finally loses her sincere love for him just when she realizes that the young painter is trading her body to fulfill a hidden ambition: the contemplation of the masterpiece. Nicolas himself will eventually share the feeling that he is prostituting Gillette when she finally enters Frenhofer's workshop. Another subtle reference to the prostitution issue can be detected at the beginning of Balzac's story, when Frenhofer masterfully retouches Porbus' *Marie* égyptienne, a portrait of the ascetic saint who withdrew to the desert after having renounced her life as a prostitute.

Rivette's reading of *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* wisely identifies the symbolic relevance in Balzac's story of the topic and conveys it in different ways to his film. First of all, through the title itself, since he chooses the very nickname given to the courtesan Catherine Lescault in the Balzacian story. Besides, Liz, as the former model, complains about Frenhofer's disdain for having replaced her in the painting with Marianne: "You put some buttocks in place of my face" (Rivette, *La Belle Noiseuse*, disc 2, 01:06). Her bitter accusations suggest a feeling of an almost commercially humiliating transaction, a feeling further enhanced by the fact that, when she posed for Frenhofer, she was paid for it (*La Belle Noiseuse*, disc 1, 01:58). In addition, it is worth remembering that, in the aforementioned conversation about Rubek, Irene and the models that preceded Liz, Frenhofer blatantly admits to Marianne that "I forgot them all. I picked them up in the street" (01:55).

Last but not least, Marianne's case is particularly relevant when addressing the prostitution issue in the film. On the one hand, she feels betrayed and sold by Nicolas, to whom she says: "You sold my arse" (00:46); and, on the other, she considers herself used and somewhat treated as an object by Frenhofer, who, as if she were a doll, physically twists her in his desperate attempt to get the artistic essence he pursues. However, it should be remembered that, at a given moment in the film, Marianne gains some freedom of action and asserts her own presence: "Look me in the face . . . Let me be myself" (*La Belle Noiseuse*, disc 2, 00:24-00:31). She thus becomes an active being who will eventually control Frenhofer and guide him along the path leading to the achievement of the masterpiece.

The prostitution elements, already present in Balzac's story, also appear in Ibsen's drama. On the one hand, in the merely instrumental role that Rubek, like Rivette's Frenhofer, seems to have attributed to all his models, as he unambiguously admits to his wife:

> MAJA [*sits up*]. Do you forget so easily, Rubek?
>
> RUBEK [*curtly*]. Yes, extremely easy. [*Adds brusquely*] When I *want to*.

> MAJA. Even a woman who's been your model?
>
> RUBEK. When I no longer have any use for her, then (265).

And, on the other hand, in the character of Irene, who is deeply hurt by Rubek's abandonment after finishing the sculpture. In fact, she reproaches the sculptor for having considered her a mere "episode" (279), thus throwing her into a life where she ended up posing nude–and prostituted, we could say–for other minor artists:

> RUBEK. Have you travelled round the world much?
>
> IRENE. Yes. Travelled to many realms and lands.
>
> RUBEK [*looks compassionately at her*]. And what have you been doing with yourself, Irene?
>
> IRENE [*turns her eyes on him*]. Wait a moment; let me see. Yes, I have it now. I've stood on revolving platforms in variety-shows. Stood like a naked statue in *tableaux vivants*–made a lot of money. I wasn't used to do that when I was with you; you didn't have any. And I've been with men I could drive insane (255).

To this it should be added that Irene also feels belittled and sold out inasmuch as the original masterpiece, the unique "child" of her union with Rubek, was defiled by the sculptor himself when he modified its original design by replacing the model's centrality with his own.

In the relationship between artist and model, the latter's nude plays a key role, as it becomes a symbolic gateway to creative transcendence, the essence of which will eventually be incarnated in the tangible nature of the masterpiece. It can be argued with Wærp that "it is by means of the female naked body that he [Rubek, but also Balzac and Rivette's Frenhofers] claims to be able to allegorically portray his vision of a new life" (156). The matter is only sketched in Balzac's story, where the reader can only imagine what in the context of the fiction (the seventeenth century) and of the writing of the story (the nineteenth century) was clear: that Gillette poses naked for Frenhofer, a fact that Nicolas guiltily admits when Porbus tells him what is undoubtedly happening behind the closed door of the atelier: "Ah ! elle se déshabille. Il lui dit de se mettre au jour ! Il la compare !" (434)[6]. Here, it is worth mentioning that, at least until well into the nineteenth century, the studio operated as an exceptional place where the artist, an exceptional being himself, had the privilege of beholding the naked body of a woman, a privilege forbidden to most mortals. Besides, the ban on the female nude in the French Académie, which had the aim of preserving young artists from immoral influences and avoiding their collective gaze on the female body, shifted any possible sexual or merely

6 "Ah! she undresses. He tells her to get into the light! He compares her!" (my translation).

sensual tension to the private sphere of the studio (Wettlaufer 212). In the 1830s, when *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* was written, the matter was still somewhat immoral, which is probably why Balzac sets the action in a far-off 1612. But Balzac's account does not challenge such convention and therefore the reader assumes that Frenhofer's claims are part of the privileges of the artist's unique social status at the time, be it the seventeenth or the nineteenth century. However, all of this does not prevent Gillette from feeling prostituted by Nicolas, who clearly prioritizes the contemplation of the artwork over his love for her.

Unlike what happens with Gillette in *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*, Marianne's nudity is placed in the very foreground of *La Belle Noiseuse*. Undoubtedly, this is a conscious and highly motivated decision by Rivette, who succeeds in exposing the model's nudity in a way that never appears as fetishist or lustful. In fact, unlike Nicolas, who is tormented by his "prostitution" of Marianne, the viewer never feels her prolonged nudity as a pornographic exposure, but rather as an artistic interpretation of the female body as a means to the accomplishment of beauty's highest ideal. It is thus clear that the artist interprets the model's nude in a way that is far removed from any kind of coarse sensuality or sexuality, as Rubek declares at his wife's insistence: "[nudity] means nothing–not to us artists" (265).

Rivette's treatment of the model's nude is an insightful exploration of a crucial issue that Ibsen addresses in *When We Dead Awaken*: the "aesthetic distance" between artist and model as a necessary condition for the creation of the longed-for masterpiece. In fact, Ibsen's reflection on aesthetic distance can be considered one of the main reasons for Rivette's interest in his play. Already in Balzac's *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*, the incompatibility between art and loving affection is made clear in Gillette's bitter words to Nicolas: "Si tu désires que je pose encore devant toi comme l'autre jour, reprit-elle d'un petit air boudeur, je n'y consentirai plus jamais ; car, dans ces moments-là, tes yeux ne me disent plus rien. Tu ne penses plus à moi, et cependant tu me regardes" (428-429)[7].

Such aesthetic distance implies an utter rejection of any affective or sexual bond between artist and model. As Knápek rightly explains, "Rubek did not in any way want to see Irene as an object of lust, but rather saw his work on 'The Day of Resurrection' as both aesthetically uplifting and morally liberating. The role of the woman was in his eyes exclusively in service to the artist and his project" (3). In Ibsen's drama, this question is crucial in the conversation between Rubek and Irene on the subject: "There *had* to be

7 "If you want me to pose in front of you again as I did the other day–she said with a sulky look–, I will never agree to it again, because, in these moments, your eyes do not tell me anything. You do not think of me anymore, and yet you look at me" (my translation).

a distance between us" (257). When Irene reproaches him for not having even touched her, Rubek's response is blunt: "I was an artist, Irene" (258). "An artist, just an artist–not a man!" (275) is her bitter complaint. For Rubek, this aesthetic distance calls for an utter annihilation of desire, a kind of ascetic renunciation that eventually defines the nature of the artwork. The artist's need to scrupulously observe this distance from the model only fuels Irene's resentment in her troubled and contradictory relationship with the artist.

The overexposure of Marianne's naked body in *La Belle Noiseuse* has the unexpected effect of the model's actual desexualization, a fact that highly emphasizes the aesthetic distance so necessary for Frenhofer's creative inspiration. What the brief but intense conversation between Frenhofer and Liz suggests is that, if Frenhofer gave up ten years before on the difficult task of accomplishing the masterpiece, it was largely because the aesthetic distance with his current wife and former model was either broken or never really achieved: "I couldn't do it differently. I can't go on with the work if I keep recollections, regrets… I just had to do it [*effacing Liz's face*]" (Rivette, *La Belle Noiseuse*, disc 2, 01:06-01:11). The emotional-sexual bond between them completely ruined the artistic process, as Liz well acknowledges: "First, he wanted to paint me because he loved me, and then… Then because he loved me he didn't want to paint me. It was me or painting" (01:13).

6. The masterpiece

The intensity of the creative symbiosis between artist and model is conveyed through the creation of a work that, being the fruit of such intensity, is matchless. Certainly, *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* is Rivette's main source for the masterpiece motif, but he also draws on a variety of elements from the aforementioned works of Zola, Wilde, Poe, Henry James and, of course, Ibsen. All of them contain elements enriching the film's plot and contributing to the characterization of the unique masterpiece.

In Balzac's story, the masterpiece is referred to as "unknown", an adjective that proves to be ambiguous, since we never really know the exact reasons why the painting is unknown. Firstly, as Poussin and Nicolas' glances seem to suggest in the final pages of the story, the work does not really seem to exist except for a chaotic mixture of colors, the famous "muraille de peinture" (436), and the splendor of a magnificent foot emerging from such chaos, all of which seems to imply that the work could have existed, but has been almost erased by the alienated artist himself. It is also possible to guess that the masterpiece only exists in Frenhofer's mind or that it ceases to exist from the very moment it is sullied ("prostituted") by any gaze other than that of its own

creator. Eventually a simpler and more obvious reason could also be invoked: the work is unknown simply because it physically disappears, the victim of the fire that also kills its creator. In any case, Balzac's deliberate ambiguity allows for all these interpretations.

Rivette largely constructs the portrayal of the masterpiece in *La Belle Noiseuse* following Balzac's model. However, as has already been mentioned, unlike the painting in *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*, that of Frenhofer in *La Belle Noiseuse* is, at the beginning of the film, a mere sketch which suggests that the creative process was interrupted, fatally affected by the emotional connection between artist and model and the lack of the required aesthetic distance between them. The mysterious painting in the film is also an unknown masterpiece not because its real existence is questioned, as it is in Balzac's story, but rather because its factual existence is not revealed beyond the small circle of four privileged people: Frenhofer himself; Liz and Marianne, the models; and little Magali, who, unaware of the painting's relevance, helps the artist to hide it forever. The enigmatic cross that Liz draws on the back of the painting's frame and its subsequent walling up suggest a symbolic burial. It is a burial that is felt as necessary so that the work, forever free from any defiling gaze, may preserve the intensity derived from the creative encounter between artist and model.

However, when compared to those of Balzac and Rivette, the masterpiece in Ibsen's drama appears to be very singular. *Resurrection Day*, Rubek's celebrated sculpture, is by no means unknown but quite the opposite, since it is its worldwide fame that largely underpins his artistic prestige. However, this fact is actually misleading once it becomes clear that what the world really knows is an extended, adulterated version of the original work, which at some point evolved from a representation of Irene to a sculptural group with the model's presence in the background, overshadowed by the addition of several other figures, including the sculptor himself in a central position. Therefore, what in fact the world knows is nothing but an adulteration of the intense, genuine work, which thus remains "unknown", since only the sculptor and the model shared their original knowledge. This prostitution of the artwork, of their only "child", is, as has been said, one of Irene's main reproaches to Rubek.

Finally, it is also worth noting that the masterpiece is equally unknown to the reader/viewer, who in all three cases only reaches a very partial and biased knowledge of it. In Balzac's story, the ekphrasis of the work is only indirectly constructed from Porbus and Nicolas' account of what they see. In *La Belle Noiseuse*, the viewers only reach a fragmentary knowledge of the mysterious painting. In Ibsen's play, the ekphrasis is also elusive and the only information that the reader/spectator gathers comes from the scattered allusions to the sculpture and from the intense scene in which Rubek and

Irene talk about the figurative evolution of *Resurrection Day*, which, to the model's great frustration, was eventually defiled by Rubek's utter worldliness:

> RUBEK. I was young then. Completely inexperienced in life. I thought that the resurrection should be depicted in its most beautiful and lovely form, as a young, untouched woman–without any experiences of life on this earth–one who awakens into light and glory without anything ugly or impure to rid herself of.
>
> IRENE [*hurriedly*]. Yes–and that is how I now stand there in our work?
>
> RUBEK [*hesitantly*]. Not quite like that, actually, Irene.
>
> IRENE [*in mounting tension*]. Not quite? Aren't I just the way I was when I posed for you?
>
> RUBEK [*without answering*]. I became more worldly in the years that followed, Irene. I began to conceive of *Resurrection Day* as something more, something–something more complex. The small circular plinth where your image stood, solitary and erect–was too limited for everything I wanted to compose–
>
> IRENE [*fumbles for the knife but leaves it be*]. So what did you add? Say it!
>
> RUBEK. I added what I saw with my own ayes in the world around me. I had to include it all. Couldn't do otherwise, Irene. I enlarged the plinth–made it big and spacious. And on it laid a section of the bulging, heaving earth. And now, swarming up out of the cracks in the earth there are people, people with animal faces concealed beneath the skin. Women and men–just as I knew them in life (276-277).

At any rate, in all three cases the masterpieces, because of their extreme intensity, appear as highly complex, since they concentrate, as in an artistic black hole, all the creative energy arising from the unique encounter between artist and model.

7. Conclusion

In *La Belle Noiseuse*, Jacques Rivette unfolds a complex artistic theory that has only been partially addressed in the preceding pages. Attention has been paid exclusively to its connection with Balzac's ideas in *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* and, in particular, to its complementarity with those of Henri Ibsen in his last work, *When We Dead Awaken*. However, a more in-depth approach to the film would require, for example, analyzing the relevance for the intellectual construction of the film of extra-literary references such as Bellmer's Doll or the paintings of Balthus and Dufour, whose real hands can be seen throughout the film. On a strictly literary level, although critics have discussed the obvious importance of the Balzac's intertext or the film's relationship with Henry James' *Notebooks*, it would also be worth analyzing the direct or indirect connection of *La Belle Noiseuse* with a broad group of works including, among others, Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Poe's *The Oval Portrait* and Zola's *L'œuvre*, as well as other texts by Balzac such as *La Peau de chagrin*, *La Grande Bretèche* and some of his stories centered on

art and artistic creation, for it is the combined influence of all these intertexts that contributes to the film's complex artistic theory.

What the preceding pages have attempted to illustrate is that Rivette fully succeeds when he increases the hermeneutic depth of *La Belle Noiseuse*, whose cornerstone is undoubtedly Balzac's *Le Chef-d'*œuvre *inconnu,* with the integration of Ibsen's drama. The analysis of *When We Dead Awaken* clearly shows that Rivette opted for such a little-visited text from Ibsen's repertoire because of the affinity of the Norwegian playwright's ideas about artistic creation with his own and because of their complementarity with those of Balzac's influential story. As has been shown, both texts thoroughly explore, through the figures of Frenhofer and Rubek, the nature of the artist, his triumphs and frustrations, and his obsession with the achievement of a unique masterpiece that eventually remains, to some extent, unknown. Furthermore, both *Le Chef-d'*œuvre *inconnu* and *When We Dead Awaken* address the model's role in the creative process. At this point, Ibsen's influence becomes more relevant for Rivette than Balzac's, since issues such as the required aesthetic distance for the culmination of the creative process and the model's active role are barely sketched in Balzac's story. Therefore, the choice of Balzac and Ibsen's works cannot be seen as random but as the happy result of Rivette's deep understanding of both authors and the integration of their ideas on art in his own complex artistic theory.

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HABITAR EN LA PALABRA. ROSE AUSLÄNDER Y LA POESÍA DESPUÉS DE AUSCHWITZ

DWELLING IN THE WORD. ROSE AUSLÄNDER AND POETRY AFTER AUSCHWITZ

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Resumen: Hay palabras que entrañan misteriosamente un destino. En el caso de Rose Ausländer (Czernowitz, 1901-Düsseldorf, 1988), el apellido libremente asumido tras un breve matrimonio parece unir el *fatum* personal con el del pueblo judío, la inveterada extranjería (*Ausländer* significa en alemán *extranjero*) de quien nunca habitó una patria (*Vaterland*) a la que pudiera llamar suya con el exilio ancestral de los hijos de Judá. Obligada a dolorosos desarraigos, Rose es consciente desde muy pronto de que "Dios nos dio / la palabra / y nosotros habitamos / en la palabra", y que ésta es, frente a las movedizas fronteras trazadas por la arbitrariedad del poder terreno, el único *locus* del ser humano, su país materno, su *matria* (*Mutterland*) en la diáspora.

Palabras clave: Rose Ausländer; *Mutterland*; palabra; diáspora; poesía; Auschwitz.

Abstract: There are words that mysteriously entail a destiny. In the case of Rose Ausländer (Czernowitz, 1901-Düsseldorf, 1988), the surname freely assumed after a brief marriage seems to unite the personal *fatum* with that of the Jewish people, the inveterate foreignness (*Ausländer* means *foreigner* in German) of one who never inhabited a homeland (*Vaterland*) she could call her own with the ancestral exile of the children of Judah. Forced into painful uprooting, Rose is aware from very early on that "God gave us / the word / and we dwell / in the word", and that this is, in contrast to the shifting borders drawn by the arbitrariness of earthly power, the only *locus* of the human being, his maternal country, his *motherland* (*Mutterland)* in the diaspora.

Keywords: Rose Ausländer; *Mutterland*; word; diaspora; poetry; Auschwitz.

Und Gott gab uns
das Wort
und wir wohnen
im Wort
Rose Ausländer

1. Palabra

La *Torá*, el texto que contiene la ley del pueblo judío –y que en la *Biblia* cristiana coincide con los cinco primeros libros del Antiguo Testamento o *Pentateuco*–, describe la creación del mundo como una serie de declaraciones divinas. De actos ilocucionarios, diríamos ahora: "Y dijo Dios: Hágase la luz; y la luz se hizo". Si queremos comprender la naturaleza de la realidad creada debemos examinar el poder conformador de la palabra.

Hay palabras que entrañan misteriosamente un destino, que son como el mandato encriptado de una divinidad impía. En el caso de Rose Ausländer, el apellido libremente asumido tras un breve matrimonio parece unir el *fatum* personal con el del pueblo judío, la inveterada extranjería (*Ausländer* significa en alemán *extranjero*) de quien nunca habitó una patria (*Vaterland*) a la que pudiera llamar suya con el exilio ancestral de los hijos de Judá.

Obligada a dolorosos desarraigos, Rose es consciente desde muy pronto de que

Dios nos dio
la palabra
y nosotros habitamos
en la palabra (*Hinter allen Worten. Gedichte* 136)

y de que ésta es, frente a las movedizas fronteras trazadas por la arbitrariedad del poder terreno, el único *locus* del ser humano, su país materno, su *matria* (*Mutterland*) en la diáspora:

> Mi patria está muerta
> ellos la enterraron
> bajo el fuego
>
> Vivo
> en mi matria
> palabra (*Gedichte* 269).

Este poema de carácter epigramático funciona como un apretado manifiesto de la obra auslanderiana posterior a la Segunda Guerra Mundial y da nombre a un libro entero de su etapa más prolífica[1]. En él aparecen la pérdida del país geográfico del que Rose es oriunda (*Vaterland*), el encuentro con los perpetradores, a los que solo se alude a través del pronombre personal "ellos", la imagen del fuego asociada a palabras que connotan muerte y que evocan claramente la Shoah, su propia (super)vivencia, y, finalmente, la declaración de pertenencia a un territorio íntimo, a un nuevo país natal no geográfico (cf. Helmut 231).

La poeta nacida en el norte de la Bucovina, al tiempo que dice el *kaddish* por la patria ahogada bajo las cenizas, pronuncia la bendición por el *Niemandsland*, la tierra de nadie, de la matria, de la lengua materna (y de la madre) que se ofrece como único refugio posible, expresada con un solo nombre final: *Wort* (palabra) (cf. Morris 49-50).

2. Ruth

Rose Ausländer nace el 11 de mayo de 1901 como Rosalie Beatrice "Ruth" Scherzer en Czernowitz, la capital del ducado de Bucovina –en los confines orientales del Imperio austro-húngaro–, en el seno de una familia pequeño-burguesa de judíos asimilados germano-hablantes que ofrece a sus hijos –Rose tiene un hermano cinco años menor– cariño y formación para que puedan forjarse un futuro.

Czernowitz, esa ciudad barroca a la que por su filiación cultural y pasado glorioso apodan "la pequeña Viena", es descrita así en 1958 por uno de sus hijos más ilustres, el poeta Paul Celan, "bohemiado alemán judío y judío-judío de la Bucovina del norte" (*Microlitos* 43): El paisaje del que yo vengo –¡por cuántos rodeos! ¿pero existen acaso los rodeos?–, el paisaje del que yo vengo hasta ustedes debe de serles, a la mayoría, desconocido.

1 La primera edición de *Mutterland* en la Literarischer Verlag Helmut Braun KG, de Colonia, es de 1978.

> Es el paisaje en el que vivía una parte no poco importante de aquellas historias jasídicas que Martin Buber nos ha vuelto a contar en alemán. Era –si se me permite completar este apunte topográfico con algo que surge ahora ante mis ojos desde muy lejos– era un lugar en el que vivían hombres y libros ("Discurso con motivo de la concesión del Premio de Literatura de la Ciudad Libre Hanseática de Bremen" 497).

Durante la Primera Guerra Mundial, la familia de Rose huye por Budapest hacia Austria. Acabará en Viena. En 1919, concluida la contienda y desmoronada la monarquía austriaca, los Scherzer regresan a la capital de la Bocovina, que, situada en una encrucijada geográfica de interés sociopolítico, había pasado a formar parte de Rumanía. "Con diecisiete años empecé a escribir notas, ocurrencias, versos en un diario. Pronto descubrí que la poesía era mi elemento vital", dirá más tarde (*Gedichte* 9). Y lo escribirá también poéticamente:

> Cuando estoy desesperada
> escribo poemas
>
> Si estoy contenta
> se escriben poemas
> en mí
>
> Quién soy yo
> cuando no
> escribo (Helmut 78).

De 1919 a 1921, Rose visita el *Ethische Seminar*, un círculo de estudiantes y letraheridos de Czernowitz, creado por el profesor Friedrich Kettner, donde se leen y comentan las filosofías de Platón, Spinoza, Freud y Constantin Brunner, que le interesa especialmente e influye tanto en su cosmovisión como en su poesía. Sobre esos autores escribe ensayos. "Todo se perdió en el gueto", le confiesa a Peter Jokostra en una carta fechada en Düsseldorf el 20 de enero de 1966 (*Deiner Stimme Schatten* 67). En ese seminario conoce al que será su marido, Ignaz Ausländer.

Después de la muerte de su padre, en 1920, Rose ha de interrumpir sus estudios de Filosofía y Literatura en la Universidad de Czernowitz y, al año siguiente, emigra con Ignaz Ausländer a los Estados Unidos. Ha de ayudar económicamente a su familia.

3. Diáspora I

"Norteamérica es la lejanía. Norteamérica significa la libertad. En Norteamérica siempre vive algún pariente. Es difícil hallar en el Este una familia judía que no tenga algún

primo o algún tío en Norteamérica" (103), escribe Joseph Roth en *Judíos errantes*, un libro publicado en esa misma década.

Hasta 1922, Rose e Ignaz se alojan en casa de unos parientes en la pequeña ciudad de Winona, en Minnesota, donde encuentra un puesto de secretaria del redactor jefe del *Westlicher Herold*, un periódico en alemán:

> Bucólica urbe quieta
> colonos alemanes en el Oeste Medio
> campesinos que compraron la tierra por un grano de anís
> la vendieron a precio centuplicado
> y vivieron cual jubilados
> y buenos cristianos (*Mi aliento* 112).

De la ribera del Prut a la del Misisipi y, desde allí, hasta la del Hudson.

En 1923, Ignaz y Rose contraen matrimonio en Nueva York. Ella trabaja en un banco. En 1926, el matrimonio consigue la nacionalidad americana y viaja por primera vez a Czernowitz, donde Rose conoce al grafólogo y escritor Helios Hecht. A finales de 1928, Rose regresa a Nueva York con Hecht. La relación entre ambos conducirá a la separación de su marido en 1930.

Entre 1929 y 1930, algunos poemas de Rose Ausländer ven la luz en alemán en el *New Yorker Zeitung* y en *Vowärts*. En 1931, regresa a Czernowitz para cuidar de su madre, gravemente enferma. Publica poemas, ejerce el periodismo en *Der Tag* y *Czernowitzer Morgenblatt*, traduce del inglés y da clases de ese mismo idioma. En 1934 pierde la nacionalidad americana por estar tres años fuera de los EE.UU. En 1935, se separa también de Hecht. En 1939, aparece su primer libro, *Der Regenbogen* (*El arco iris*), con poesías de los años 1927-1933.

4. Gueto

Después del pacto de no agresión germano-soviético y del estallido de la Segunda Guerra Mundial en septiembre de 1939, Rumanía se ve forzada a ceder el norte de la Bucovina a la URSS, y en junio de 1940 las tropas del Ejército Rojo ocupan Czernowitz. El 22 de junio de 1941 Hitler rompe el pacto y lanza la invasión del territorio soviético. Los soldados fascistas rumanos toman el control de la Bucovina, "sorprendiendo al ejército alemán por sus salvajes ataques a los judíos" (Felstiner 38). Entre el 5 y el 6 de julio, un comando del *Einsatzgruppe D* de las SS, que actuaba en el sur de Ucrania y el Cáucaso, llega a Czernowitz. Los nazis incendian la Gran Sinagoga, imponen el distintivo amarillo con la estrella de David e internan a los judíos en un gueto. La "gue-

tización", uno de esos neologismos nazis que infestaron la lengua alemana en el Tercer Reich, era el paso previo a las deportaciones masivas y al exterminio seriado en los campos del Este[2]:

> Los nazis ocuparon la ciudad, permanecieron hasta la primavera de 1944. Gueto, miseria, horror, transportes de muerte. En aquellos años, los amigos nos reuníamos en secreto de tarde en tarde, a menudo arriesgando nuestras vidas, para leer poemas . . . Y mientras esperábamos la muerte, algunos de nosotros habitábamos en palabras de ensueño –eran nuestro hogar ilusorio en medio del desarraigo. Escribir era vivir. Sobrevivir (*Gedichte* 10).

Uno de esos desarraigados es Paul Antschel, que después se llamaría Celan, anagrama de su verdadero apellido, al que conoce en el gueto, adonde había regresado después de haber realizado trabajos forzados hasta febrero de 1944 en la construcción de carreteras en Tabaresti, una pequeña ciudad al sur de Moldavia. Para Rose fue una revelación:

> Ataviada
> de la estrella amarilla
> corrí donde amigos
> a enseñarles
> poemas de Celan.
>
> Una hora de olvido
> y dicha
> antes de que se cerraran las puertas
> detras
> de nuestro sueño (*Mi aliento* 193).

5. Diáspora II

En diciembre de 1946, acabada la guerra, Rose emigra otra vez a Nueva York, donde residirá hasta 1961. Deja atrás "una ciudad hundida. Un mundo hundido" :

> Emigración a los Estados Unidos. Lucha por la existencia. Cambio de orientación. Provocación. El nuevo mundo de la literatura moderna americana e inglesa fue un estímulo más fresco e impetuoso. Tras varios años de silencio, me sorprendí a mí misma unatarde escribiendo en inglés (*Materialien zu Leben und Werk* 10).

Su bloqueo para seguir escribiendo en la "lengua de los asesinos" (*Sprache der Mörder*), como ella misma llama al alemán, se inicia en 1947, coincidiendo con la muerte

2 "De los 75.000 judíos deportados, solo sobreviven 9.000" (Cozic 226).

de la madre en Rumanía, y dura hasta 1956. En ese tiempo, no solo cambia de idioma, sino que, tras el trauma vivido y en contacto con la literatura americana moderna de Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams o e.e. cummings, que altera el canon poético de la poesía del siglo XIX, abandona las formas clásicas y adopta el verso irregular, sin rima, que aquilata la expresión de sus vivencias en pocas, pero muy depuradas y escuetas, imágenes poéticas.

Marianne Moore –poeta que, según Auden, "tiene todas las cualidades de Alicia: la aversión al ruido y al exceso", más la "meticulosidad", "el amor por el orden y la precisión" y una "punzante e irónica agudeza" (295-297)– había escrito en el poema de connotaciones metapoéticas titulado "A un caracol":

> Si "la concentración es la principal gracia del estilo",
> tú la tienes. Lo contráctil es una virtud
> como la modestia es una virtud.
> No es la adquisición de algo
> que sirve de adorno,
> ni la casualidad fortuita que surge
> acompañando la frase brillante
> lo que valoramos en el estilo,
> sino el principio oculto:
> en ausencia de pies, "un método de conclusiones";
> "un conocimiento de los principios",
> en el curioso fenómeno de tu cuerno occipital (119).

Y es ella precisamente la que, en julio de 1956, persuade a Rose Ausländer, con la que ha trabado amistad, para que deje de escribir en inglés y retome el uso literario de su lengua materna[3]. En *Mutterland* (1978), uno de los libros más emblemáticos de la última fase de su producción, Rose le dedica este poema que lleva el nombre de la poeta de Saint Louis: concentrado, despojado, contráctil:

> Con pluma de ave
> dibujado
> su rostro
>
> Cada línea
> un modelo matemático
> trazado
> por una mirada incorruptible

3 "Rose Ausländer escribió sus poemas desde 1947 hasta mediados de 1956 exclusivamente en inglés; 21 de ellos se publicaron en revistas de los Estados Unidos. En el legado de la poeta hay 260 poemas en inglés, algunos en diversas versiones" (cf. *Mi aliento* 15-16).

Fría imagen poética
y por tanto
cada figura reanimada
por la sangre de su idea (41).

En 1964, jubilada ya tres años de su trabajo como intérprete en la Spedition Freedman & Slater de Nueva York, y después de descartar la posibilidad de intalarse en Israel, Rose decide retornar definitivamente a Europa. Algunos amigos le aconsejan que se vaya a vivir a Düsseldorf, la capital del milagro económico alemán bañada por el Rin, en cuya comunidad judía no escasean los oriundos de Czernowitz y otros lugares de la Bucovina.

A lo largo de su vida, Rose Ausländer se hubo de exiliar tres veces: en 1916, debido a la Primera Guerra Mundial, a Viena; en 1921, para colaborar económicamente al mantenimiento de su familia, a los EE.UU; y en 1946, tras la ocupación de Czernowitz por el ejército soviético, nuevamente a los EE.UU.

6. Poesía

La poesía de Rose Ausländer, teselada de referencias autobiográficas, ofrece una enorme variedad de motivos acerca de lo vivido y lo pensado; de lo mucho padecido; del amor, la dicha o la esperanza a pesar de lo sufrido; que el poder de la palabra rescata o transfigura, pero nunca adereza ni sentimentaliza. A su obra se le podría aplicar lo que ella hace decir de sí mismo a Rembrandt en un monólogo ficcionado:

Yo extraigo luz
de lo oscuro (*Aún queda mucho por decir* 78-79).

Rose Ausländer –igual que Hannah Arendt, Paul Celan o Nelly Sachs– vivió en tiempos oscuros, la "leche negra"[4] de esos tiempos la amamantó –como a ellos–, pero a pesar del profundo dolor infligido por la persecución, la guetización y el exilio consiguió trans-

4 Acaso la metáfora más celebrada de "Todesfuge / Fuga de muerte" y la que acompasa el ritmo del poema (se repite cuatro veces) que Paul Celan escribe probablemente en 1945: "Leche negra del alba la bebemos al atardecer / la bebemos al mediodía y a la mañana la bebemos de noche / bebemos y bebemos / cavamos una fosa en los aires allí no hay estrechez" (*Amapola y memoria* 57). Como metáfora poética, "leche negra" aparece con anterioridad en "Ins Leben", un poema de Rose Ausländer contenido en *Der Regenbogen*: "*mit schwarzer Milch und schwerem Wermutwein* [con leche negra y pesado vermut]" (cf. Aperecida Nauroski 92). El traductor José Aníbal Campos apunta otro posible origen de la que, según él, "no es una metáfora": "Se sabe que esa realidad fue tomada de un artículo de periódico en el que se resumían los 'Procesos de Auschwitz'". Uno de los acusados, Josef Klehr, explicó allí cómo él era el encargado de conseguir, mediante trapicheos internos del campo, la leche de todos los días: *Meine Milch war schwarz*, decía Klehr ("'Mi leche era el resultado del trapicheo, de una especie de mercado negro dentro del campo', podría traducirse ahora esta declaración" (Campos 32-33)). En el poema "In Memoriam Paul Celan", que Rose Ausländer le dedica tras su muerte, recupera la controvertida "metáfora": "No volvió al hogar / la madre // jamás renunció / a la muerte // alimentada por el hijo / con leche negra" (*Mi aliento* 192).

mitir la reconfortante sensación de que la vida sigue importando y la poesía aún puede expresar sus claroscuros después de ese inmenso hachazo al que, por sinécdoque, damos el nombre de *Auschwitz*:

> ¿Mis temas preferidos? Todo –lo uno y lo único. Lo cósmico, la crítica contemporánea, el paisaje, las cosas, los seres humanos, los estados de ánimo, el lenguaje– todo puede ser asunto poético . . . Escribir es un instinto. El poeta, el escritor tiene que comer, moverse, descansar, pensar, sentir y escribir –escribir lo que le prescriben sus pensamientos y su imaginación (*Gedichte* 11-12).

Y su "plan" era decirlo "como realidad poética", le explica a Peter Jokostra en la carta ya citada de 1966. Acerca de cómo deviene "poética" dicha "realidad", había declarado en un texto emitido en 1959 por la emisora de radio WEVD de Nueva York:

> La sustancia y esencia de un poema, ésta es mi opinión, no es el así denominado "contenido", sino el tratamiento poético de aquel contenido; en otras palabras: la afortunada distribución de palabras y metáforas para la consecución de una visión poética intencionada. Naturalmente, el poeta tiene que emplear la técnica que cada poema necesite para alcanzar la forma deseada. Yo no identifico técnica con forma. Forma es la configuración de la visión poética del poema; técnica puede ser solo el medio para obtener forma (*Deiner Stimme Schatten* 71).

Este esfuerzo de "configuración" lo realiza el poeta pensando en el lector. El poeta escribe para sí, pero publica siempre con el lector *in mente*:

> El poema necesita amplitud, anchura, profundidad, resonancia. El poema quiere hablar, interpelar, expresar, expresarse. El poema no es un lugar de quietud; es inquieto, también la poesía silenciosa tiene una voz y quiere hablar con ella, para que muchos, si es posible todos los seres humanos, la oigan. Yace tranquilamente él solo, no muere –duerme el sueño de las rosas silvestres, cada uno que lo lee como el poema pretende, como ha surgido de la Nada celestial, el que ve su verdadero semblante, el que lo ama, es el príncipe redentor, lo resucita. El poema es resucitado continuamente, posee incontables vidas (*Deiner Stimme Schatten* 61).

Cada lectura es una palingenesia, el fruto de un ejercicio de redención.

7. Auschwitz

Como el Ser aristotélico, la masacre industrializada perpetrada por los nazis en los campos de concentración y de exterminio que salpicaron de muerte los territorios bajo su mando se ha dicho de muchas maneras. Elie Wiesel la llamó *Holocausto* (sacrificio por fuego); Paul Celan, *Churban* (destrucción causada por los hombres); Claude Lanzmann le dio el nombre de *Shoah* (catástrofe), enfatizando su carácter único y no

sacrificial. Theodor W. Adorno, y con él muchos otros desde mediados de los cincuenta, se refirió a ella como *Auschwitz* (usando el nombre como epónimo de la *Shoah*, de la *Churban*, del *Holocausto*), por ser este complejo concentracionario erigido en la región de Cracovia el más grande y mortífero del asesinato "planificado, sistemático y total" (*Minima moralia* 262). Pero Auschwitz no fueron solo las cámaras de gas, también fueron los pasos del proceso que condujo a ellas y sus secuelas. El antes, el durante y el después: el señalamiento previo ("el trapo amarillo que llevaba la palabra 'judío' impresa en negro" (Klemperer 241), la segregación de los judíos en guetos, las deportaciones masivas a los campos, el exterminio y una invisibilización destinada a obstruir la posibilidad del recuerdo.

Es un consenso bastante extendido actualmente, que cuando Adorno escribe al final del ensayo *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* (1951) su famosa sentencia según la cual "escribir un poema *después* de Auschwitz es un acto de barbarie" (49) (que matizaría a lo largo de los años, pero de la que nunca abjuraría), no lo hace con la intención de lanzar una interdicción absoluta, sino de trazar los límites de una imposibilidad relativa: la de escribir poemas como *antes* de Auschwitz, pues esta quiebra civilizatoria transformó "el material mismo de la creación poética, la relación del lenguaje con la experiencia" (Traverso 134).A principios de los cincuenta, cuando el mundo de la cultura alemana estaba aún lejos de haber alcanzado conciencia plena de lo ocurrido (los conocidos como Procesos de Auschwitz se celebrarán en Fráncfort entre el 20 de diciembre de 1963 y 19 de agosto de 1965 contra 22 acusados por su papel en ese campo de concentración y exterminio), Adorno da un aldabonazo que obliga a la poesía de la segunda mitad del siglo XX a interrogarse sobre sí misma. Así lo supo ver también Jacques Derrida en su *Discurso de Fráncfort* (2001); para él, el mérito fundamental del "después de Auschwitz" de Adorno estribaría en "haber apelado a tantos pensadores, escritores, profesores o artistas, a su responsabilidad ante todo aquello de lo que Auschwitz debe seguir siendo *tanto* el irreemplazable nombre propio *como* la metonimia" (*Acabados* 33).El testimonio de Günter Grass resulta elocuente a este respecto. En *Escribir después de Auschwitz*, un texto de 1990 en el que hace balance de 35 años de escritura, afirma que "las agudezas espigadas de Adorno" no hay que "entenderlas como prohibición sino como criterio" (19):

> Acabar con las metáforas de genitivo floridamente hinchadas, renunciar a los vagos ambientes pretendidamente rilkeanos y al cuidado tono de la literatura de cámara (26).

"La jerga del Tercer Reich sentimentaliza; eso siempre resulta sospechoso", había advertido Klemperer (59). La contrapropuesta de Grass y otros autores, como Celan y Ausländer, es el "ascetismo", la "desconfianza hacia todo tintín-retintín" (Grass 26). En

una de sus anotaciones poetológicas, Celan expresa irónicamente sus reservas ante el *dictum* adorniano entendido como proscripción de una forma de poetizar que no siente como suya, tampoco de otros como Nelly Sachs, poetas que saben de primerísima mano lo que significa Auschwitz:

> Ningún poema después de Auschwitz (Adorno):
>
> ¿Qué idea de poema se supone aquí? La presunción de aquel que se permite de modo hipotético-especulativo considerar o poetizar Auschwitz desde la perspectiva de los ruiseñores o de los mirlos cantores (*Microlitos* 93).

Tampoco es ya la de Rose Ausländer, para quien lo que había irrumpido sobre ella y los suyos

> era tan carente de rima, una pesadilla tan angustiosamente opresiva que –a la hora del efecto ulterior, en el shock padecido plenamente a posteriori– la rima se quebró. Las palabras en flor se marchitaron . . .
>
> ¿Por qué escribo de nuevo en alemán desde 1956? Misteriosamente, igual que apareció, desapareció la musa del inglés. No hubo ningún motivo externo que ocasionase el retorno a la lengua materna. Misterios del inconsciente. Solo en 1957 trabé conocimiento con la poesía alemana contemporánea. El mundo hundido volvió a emerger transformado: bajo otra luz. Las formas anticuadas habían pasado a la sombra. Muchos de esos poemas modernos tuvieron para mí un significado imperecedero (*Gedichte* 9-11).

En 1957, en el curso de un largo viaje por Europa, Rose se reencuentra con Paul Celan:

> Dos semanas en París. Paul Celan me invitó varias veces a su casa, me recitó mucho de lo nuevo que había compuesto, poemas . . . La muerte había llamado a la vida a su mejor poeta (11).

En "Biographische Notiz (Nota biográfica)", un poema de mediados de los años setenta, Rose dejará claro que, igual que el Celan de *El meridiano*, su yo del poema es el de alguien que solo "habla bajo el ángulo de incidencia de su existencia, el ángulo de existencia de su condición de criatura" (*El meridiano* 506) (cf. Cuesta Abad 108):

> Hablo
> de la noche en llamas
> que extinguió
> el Prut
> de sauces llorones
> hayas de sangre
> canto enmudecido del ruiseñor
>
> de la estrella amarilla
> en la que nos
> moríamos hora a hora

en el tiempo de la horca

no es de rosas
de lo que hablo (*Gedichte* 145).

8. Heimat

Heimat es una palabra alemana que se utiliza para designar la tierra natal, la patria chica, el lugar en el que nos sentimos en casa. *Heim* es el hogar y *heimlich*, hogareño, doméstico, conocido o familiar. Precisamente por eso, el que se aleja de ese territorio que alberga y protege experimenta la amarga sensación de la nostalgia, ese sentimiento de pena por la lejanía, la privación o la ausencia al que los alemanes llaman *Heimweh*. El *Vaterland*, con todas sus connotaciones masculinas relativas a la figura del padre (*Vater*), es más bien la patria entendida como nación.

Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori (*Es dulce y honorable morir por la patria*), rezaba el conocido verso de Horacio. En su versión nacionalsocialista, la patria remite a la pertenencia a una raza y un solar (*Blut und Boden*): los de los arios.

En la Segunda Guerra Mundial, explica Victor Klemperer en su obra sobre la lengua del Tercer Reich:

> Gran parte de los caídos dio durante la mayor parte del tiempo su vida "por el Führer y por la patria". (Esta analogía con el antiguo "por el rey y por la patria" de los prusianos, muy digerible gracias a la aliteración [*für Führer und Vaterland*], estaba sumamente extendida desde el primer día de la guerra) (182).

Para Rose Ausländer, la Bucovina es la *Heimat*:

País de las cuatro canciones

Gente tranquila
cuya mirada circular
gira
alrededor de la multiforme
tierra natal [*Heimat*] (*Gedichte* 23).

La Bucovina es un lugar de convivencia en la diferencia, de armonía en la diversidad. Es el "país de las cuatro canciones":

Canciones
en cuatro lenguas hermanadas
en un tiempo destrozado (*Aún queda mucho por decir* 178-179).

Canciones en alto alemán, en rumano, en el ucraniano de Rutenia y en yidis, la *lingua franca* de los judíos de Europa oriental.

En una de las múltiples respuestas a la pregunta "¿Por qué escribo?" contenidas en el texto de 1971 *Todo puede ser asunto poético*, Rose Ausländer se expresa en términos muy parecidos a los utilizados por Celan en el *Discurso con motivo de la concesión del Premio de Literatura de la Ciudad Libre Hanseática de Bremen* al referirse al país natal:

> ¿Por qué escribo? Quizás porque vine al mundo en Czernowitz, porque el mundo vino a mí en Czernowitz. Aquel paisaje singular. Los singulares seres humanos. En el aire flotaban cuentos de hadas y mitos, se les respiraba. La cuatrilingüe Czernowitz era una ciudad de musas, que albergaba a muchos artistas, poetas, amantes del arte, de la literatura y de la filosofía (*Gedichte* 8).

Perdido el hogar, el *hortus conclusus* de la *Heimat*, la Arcadia "cuatrilingüe" de la infancia, la poeta se halla en un permanente *status viatoris*, en el que *vive*, pero no *habita*, porque habitar significa –y perdónesenos la digresión heideggeriana– "haber sido llevad[a] a la paz […]: permanecer a buen recaudo en lo libre (*Frye*), es decir, en la esfera libre que resguarda cada cosa en su esencia" (Heidegger 21):

> Volando
> en un columpio aéreo
> Europa América Europa
>
> yo no habito [*wohne*]
> yo vivo [*lebe*] (*Gedichte* 145-146).

Son los versos finales de *Biographische Notiz*. La palabra poética es su habitáculo, su espacio de libertad, porque "*fry* (libre) significa preservad[a] de daños y peligros, preservad[a] de algo, es decir, resguardad[a]" (Heidegger 19).

9. Matria

El único lugar persitente para una extraterritorial como Rose, extranjera hasta en el nombre, es la palabra. Ella es su *matria*. Y, preferentemente, la palabra que se dice en la lengua materna:

> Cuando me preguntan si me satisface más escribir en alemán o en inglés, he de decir honradamente que la lengua alemana y, en consecuencia, la poesía alemana se halla más cerca de mi mundo emocional. Pero todo lo que yo hago es seguir mi impulso poético, él me dice cuándo debo escribir en inglés y cuándo en alemán. Dejo que la lengua me elija, en vez de elegir yo la lengua (*Deiner Stimme Schatten* 70).

La idea de la lengua materna como lugar de memoria, de verdadera residencia, de resistencia y aun de resurrección la encontramos en otra de las grandes escritoras judías

del exilio y poeta ocasional, Hannah Arendt: "La lengua alemana, en todo caso, es lo esencial que me ha quedado y que he mantenido siempre conscientemente" (55), le confiesa en una conocidísima entrevista de 1964 a Günter Gaus.

Sin embargo, esa lengua natal, profanada por quienes victimizaron a su pueblo con eufemismos de muerte, es con la que ha de llevar a cabo el proceso de sanación poética. Así lo reconoce en "Nachher (Después)", un poema que se encuentra en su copioso legado (*Nachlaß*):

> Después de la hora cero
> se descongelaron
> las palabras heladas
>
> Nuestra respiración
> se volvió profunda
>
> La vieja lengua
> regresó joven
>
> sanado
> el alemán (Bower 94).

Un alemán –ahora– saneado, descontaminado, ascético, des-sentimentalizado. Un idioma capaz de expresar sin patetismo las huellas del sufrimiento, pero también de abrirse a la esperanza:

> Pende una bandera arcoíris
> sobre tu esperanza
> que peina pacientemente
> la tozuda cabellera del futuro
> y canta una canción
> que incita a muchos
> a acompañarla (*Mutterland* 36).

10. Düsseldorf

En 1966, un año después de mudarse a Düsseldorf, Rose obtiene una compensación económica y una pensión gubernamental por haber sido perseguida por el régimen nazi. Entre 1965 y 1971 viaja a menudo. Helmut Braun calcula que no pasa más de tres meses al año en la capital renana, parece que no tiene un especial apego por la ciudad y que baraja la posibilidad de trasladarse a Múnich. En sus poemas nombra a Czernowitz, a Minona, a Nueva York, a Aviñón, a Tubinga o a Venecia. Nunca a Düsseldorf (cf. Wollmann-Fiedler). En 1972, en una caída accidental, se rompe el cuello

del fémur. Después de una larga estancia hospitalaria, consigue una habitación en la *Nelly-Sachs-Haus*, la residencia de ancianos de la comunidad judía de la ciudad. No sale del cuarto, por lo que tampoco hace amigos nuevos.

En 1975, Helmut Braun, que busca autores desconocidos para su editorial, entra en contacto con ella. Es el principio de una fructífera colaboración entre la poeta septuagenaria y el joven editor. Los últimos dos lustros de su vida, entre 1978 y 1988, Rose los pasa encamada. Es su etapa de máxima productividad literaria. Cada viernes la visita Braun y recoge los poemas que Rose ha compuesto. En los últimos años, cuando ya no puede escribir a causa de la artrosis, se los dicta. Dejará 2.500.

11. Hölderlin

Hölderlin siempre estuvo entre los poetas preferidos de Rose Ausländer. "Muchos poetas y escritores fueron importantes para mí, pero de Hölderlin y Kafka brotaron los impulsos de más largo aliento" (*Gedichte* 9), escribe en *Todo puede ser asunto poético*. El poeta alemán que vivió recluido casi la mitad de su vida en la casa torreada de un carpintero de Tubinga y el judío de lengua alemana y patria inconcreta.

Como el eremita griego Hiperión, que escribe cartas a Belarmino –el bello Arminio, el buen alemán– en las que reflexiona acerca de su excéntrico periplo vital, Rose poetiza incansablemente sobre el suyo en el último tercio de su existencia, recluida en la habitación de una residencia cuyo nombre homenajea a otra poeta, judía como Kafka y amiga de Celan, igual que ella[5]. También escribe cartas:

> El mundo viene a trozos
> a mi ventana
> chopos gorriones nubes
>
> Cartas de amigos antiguos y extraños
> me visitan a diario
>
> El tiempo
> una conversación (*Mutterland* 31).

5 Nelly Sachs había llamado a Celan "Hölderlin de nuestro tiempo" (Celan, *Correspondencia* 32).

12. Rose

Entre las cuatro paredes de su habitación, la vida de Rose, contraida como el caracol de Moore, se fue agostando como una de aquellas rosas que Rilke –una de las voces preferidas de su juventud, el poeta errante y apátrida "quien a Dios crea" – había convertido en símbolo de su poesía:

> Una sola rosa es todas las rosas
> y es ésta: el irreemplazable,
> el perfecto, el dócil vocablo,
> que encuadra el texto de las cosas. (*Aún queda mucho por decir* 68-69)

Rose Ausländer muere en Düsseldorf el 3 de junio de 1988. En el cementerio judío de Nordfriedhof reposan sus restos.

El suyo, como el de tantos otros descendientes de Ahasverus supervivientes de la Shoah, había sido un destino de errancia: "de palabra en palabra" (*Aún queda mucho por decir* 273-274)."Al caminante no se le pregunta adónde va, sino de dónde viene. Sin embargo, lo que a un caminante le importa es su destino, no su punto de partida", advierte Joseph Roth (12). Y Rose Ausländer, extranjera en tantas naciones, fue a buscar la paz postrera al país que había dado nombre a su lengua materna.

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RAÍZ CELAN. POEMA - LENGUA - ABISMO

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[Cuesta Abad, José Manuel y Carlota Fernández-Jáuregui Rojas. *Raíz Celan. Poema – Lengua – Abismo.* Madrid, Trotta, 2022].

Resumen: En *Raíz Celan. Poema – Lengua – Abismo* José Manuel Cuesta Abad y Carlota Fernández-Jáuregui Rojas observan la obra poética de Paul Celan a partir de su propio pensamiento poético en torno a la experiencia límite del lenguaje en la lírica moderna. Este estudio se proporciona un acercamiento teórico y literaria exigente, según el cual la realidad poética será la respuesta de un diálogo imposible con lo extrahumano, con lo indecible que desde un lugar inalcanzable llama al habla, experiencia que constituye el desastre del lenguaje. Con esto, Cuesta Abad y Rojas abordan temas de la poética y hermenéutica de Celan, así como eventos vitales y encuentros con grandes nombres de la filosofía como Adorno o Heidegger, alejándose de interpretaciones explicativas o biografistas para centrarse en cómo cada uno de estos elementos alimentaron la construcción de la lírica del desastre celaniana.

Palabras clave: Celan; lengua; dirección; poema; abismo; lírica del desastre; realidad poética.

Abstract: In *Raíz Celan. Poema – Lengua – Abismo* José Manuel Cuesta Abad and Carlota Fernández-Jáuregui Rojas observe the poetic work of Paul Celan from his own poetic thinking about the borderline experience of language in modern poetry. In this study, an approach of great theoretical and literary depth is elaborated, according to which poetic reality will be the response of an impossible dialogue with the extra-human, with the unspeakable that from an unattainable place calls for speech, experience that constitutes the disaster of language. With this, Cuesta Abad and Rojas address issues of Celan's poetics and hermeneutics, as well as vital events and encounters with great names in philosophy such as Adorno or Heidegger, moving away from explanatory or biographical interpretations to focus on how each of these elements fed the construction of the Celanian lyric of disaster.

Keywords: Celan; language; direction; poem; abyss; lyric of disaster; poetic reality.

En *Raíz Celan. Poema - Lengua - Abismo* (2022) José Manuel Cuesta Abad y Carlota Fernández-Jáuregui Rojas aúnan voces para reelaborar ideas presentes en sus trabajos previos sobre Paul Celan, ofreciendo así una perspectiva inédita. La propuesta de lectura de este libro se aleja del afán explicativo tan frecuente al abordar ideas del pensamiento poético de Celan en torno a la experiencia límite del lenguaje en el poema. En la introducción "Lectio desiderata", se establece como punto de partida que la oscuridad propia de los poemas de Celan requiere ser abordada como una realidad en la que se suspende toda experiencia preconcebida. Por tanto, se propone un modelo de lectura *desideral* que parta de dicha suspensión del sentido para observar la palabra del poema tanto desde lo expresado en sus palabras como desde su vacío, es decir, como una realidad defectiva donde lo real ya no guarda relación con el valor comunicativo de la literalidad de las palabras. Por tanto, la propuesta del estudio se aleja de las lecturas críticas tradicionales de la obra de Celan, centradas en el biografismo, el intencionalismo o la relación de sus construcciones poéticas con la estructura sígnica tradicional (referente, significado, significante). En cambio, se centra en el lenguaje poético no desde su significado o su sentido sino desde su dicción deíctica, desde su mostrar (más que decir) una realidad unida a su indecibilidad.

El primer capítulo de la primera parte, que recoge las aportaciones de Cuesta Abad, parte de la afirmación del poeta de que su poesía es "una lengua más gris" (Celan, *Obras completas* 482), siendo este color un matiz diferenciador respecto a la premisa de oscuridad que ha definido a la lírica de autores como Mallarmé, Rimbaud

o T.S. Eliot. La lírica moderna será, por un lado, oscura estructuralmente en tanto que porta cierta negatividad que hace extraña la lengua. Por otro lado, será oscura en tanto que no coincidirá con el principio cartesiano de claridad y distinción, otro rasgo de negatividad que se refleja en la desrealización (la sustracción de referencia objetiva en un mundo exterior que es representado) y la despersonalización (la distracción de una interioridad subjetiva que se muestra al mundo a través de un lenguaje expresivo). A continuación, Cuesta Abad vuelve a pensar el adjetivo de "moderno" desde las ideas de shock y desastre. Lo propio de lo moderno será la angustia del lenguaje, la pérdida originaria de lo que se llamará a lo largo del libro *lengua madre,* un trauma que es inherente a la poesía en tanto que experiencia radical de la palabra. Con esto, define la poesía de Celan como lírica del desastre, que no remite al shock del Holocausto sino al desastre mismo del lenguaje, un shock que actúa sobre la propia capacidad comunicativa del habla. La poesía no representa: constituye una realidad, se dirige hacia una realidad no dada. En el poema hay a la vez una interpelación desde y de lo extrahumano, por ello el desastre del poema será lo no-enunciable y lo no-anunciable, pues el poema no declara nada: solo dice su propia decibilidad, su propio deseo de decir.

Una vez determinadas las premisas que han rondado la idea de oscuridad asociada a la lírica moderna, el segundo capítulo explora la noción de oscuridad propia del ideario poético de Celan. Partiendo de su verso "la palabra de ir-a-lo-profundo" (Celan, *La rosa de Nadie* 153), la oscuridad se entenderá como una experiencia de descenso realizada en la escritura y cuyo rastro queda como presencia viva en el poema. Si en la mística sanjuanista la noche oscura remitía a un oscurecimiento del alma en el encuentro con lo indecible, en Celan el propio poema será lo oscuro, una oscuridad de las cosas que tiene la *potencialidad* de mostrarse en su realidad existencial, es decir, la claridad de su presencia, su singularidad en el aquí y el ahora del poema. Lo diáfano de la palabra poética residirá no en un indecible que es preexistente o extralingüístico como sucede en la mística, sino en la posibilidad de mostrarlo como parte inherente a lo decible en tanto que potencia. El poema solo habla de sí, de su decibilidad, pero no como tema sino como dirección, un hablar en dirección a sí que será la marca de extrañamiento del habla del poema. La palabra surge oscura por esa singularidad, por su "estar presente", lo cual lleva a Cuesta Abad a rescatar la sintonía de Celan con el pensamiento de Heidegger. Volviendo a la idea de potencia, Celan tomó de Heidegger la idea de que el silencio es otra posibilidad esencial del habla: es el acontecimiento de la retracción de la posibilidad de decir. Para Celan el poema responde a la llamada del *Otro* extrahumano (que es silente) al mismo tiempo que lo apela. De este modo, la dirección del poema es un ir hacia el Otro y desde el Otro. Para poder apelar al *Otro*

hace falta su llamada, es decir, su voz; lo que hace hablar en el poema es lo que no puede ser hablado pero, aun así, nos llama: una voz que viene de la *lengua-madre*.

Esta lengua madre será precisamente la "Dicción-raíz", en la que se centrará el tercer capítulo a través de una diseminando verso a verso del poema "Radix-Matrix" (*La rosa de Nadie* 170-171), un poema que habla de su lengua madre y a su lengua madre, es decir, de su propio modo de hablar, de una dicción radical. En el poema se entrelazan cuestiones, por tanto, de la raíz étnica-religiosa judía con la lengua materna de la tradición cristiana, dicho de otro modo, la lengua de la fe que se traspasa en el amamantar el habla materna. Lo judío en Celan no se reducirá a una cuestión identitaria, sino que apelará, como raíz de errancia y desarraigo, a la participación humana de lo Otro, a lo radicalmente distante o extraño. La palabra es el lugar donde los hombres pueden relacionarse con lo radicalmente extraño, es decir, con lo indecible, con el tú que es Nadie. Esta Raíz de Nadie (la propia del poema) no se refiere a una impersonalidad sino a la simultánea cercanía y lejanía del tú al que apelamos y que nos llama, de ese Otro que es la *lengua madre*. El diálogo poético es un diálogo imposible, un hablar "como se habla a una piedra" (171), una interacción comunicativa donde lo único que se comunica es la propia posibilidad de decir. El habla poética es en Celan un dirigirse hacia el Otro silente (la piedra) para cederle la palabra en un posible encuentro entre el yo llamado y el tú apelado.

La segunda parte, elaborada por la profesora Rojas, retoma los conceptos presentados en la primera parte. En el primer capítulo, vuelve al verso "cómo se habla a una piedra" para tratar el extrañamiento de la voz en la palabra poética, observándolo a la luz del texto de Celan *Diálogo en la montaña* (1959). El camino que emprende el judío en el *Diálogo* será el mismo camino que realiza el lenguaje del poema: una dirección simultánea hacia sí mismo y hacia el silencio extrahumano. Como dice Celan, la palabra "sube oscureciéndose", realiza el mismo camino vegetal que requiere, para ascender, extender simultáneamente sus raíces hacia la oscura profundidad de la tierra. Retomando la cuestión de cómo el acontecimiento afecta a la palabra, Celan defendía que lo que sucede siempre se interpone en el ser de las cosas, por tanto, las palabras no pueden volver a ser las mismas después de cada acontecimiento. Rojas analiza este ser interrumpido en su análisis de los poemas de *Reja del lenguaje* (1959) y *La rosa de Nadie* (1963) a través del uso constante en la poesía de Celan del apóstrofe y la repetición. El apóstrofe sirve como aproximación a lo absolutamente Otro hacia el que se dirige el poema, un camino que llega hasta los límites de la palabra, hasta su abismo. Por ello, la dirección del poema, al igual que el descrito en *Diálogo en la montaña* (1959), es un viaje de ida y vuelta, una dirección que es dar nombre, dirigirse

a lo extremo para, en el límite, retroceder y emprender un viaje de vuelta solitario. La repetición será, en este sentido, la propia relación con la soledad en el poema, la cual puede enlazarse con la tradición poética amatoria: un habla desiderativa que persigue y repite el nombre de lo que no es posible alcanzar. La estructura de repetición emerge entonces ante la falta de respuestas y, además, resulta ser materialización de la imposibilidad de que el poema trate sobre algo, sobre un tema. La lengua del poema no es un doble de una realidad externa, no diferencia entre un interior y un exterior de sí misma, solo muestra. Ante la experiencia lírica del desastre, la lengua aparece en la repetición para dar calma ante la pérdida y atestigua para reflejar la llamada de aquello que queda siempre inalcanzable, radicalmente Otro.

El segundo capítulo del trabajo de Rojas observa la cuestión de la escritura poética de Celan a partir del ensayo de Derrida "El monolingüismo del otro o la prótesis del origen" (1997), un ejercicio de deconstrucción de lo que se ha entendido por incuestionable en la idea de "lengua materna". Derrida plantea la paradoja de que uno puede ser monolingüe y, a su vez, hablar una lengua que no sea propia, como sucede en lugares donde por procesos de violencia (como la colonización o el exilio) se ha impuesto un habla "impropia" que se va heredando en las siguientes generaciones como lengua materna. Una lengua nunca puede poseerse y, a la vez, siempre proviene de otro. Por tanto, "la lengua de uno" es contradictoria pues, en su centro, se inserta lo imposible, lo inter-dicto, lo silenciado, el espacio de lo incomunicable. La lengua de uno, en su contradicción, se injerta e impide alcanzar la lengua del radicalmente Otro, es una interjección incomunicable, desde la cual puede interpretarse la expresión de Celan de la "poesía como interjección" (Celan, *Microlitos* 233). La contradicción del lenguaje poético es que podemos estar a la vez dentro y fuera del lenguaje, de modo que el monolingüismo del otro se introduce en la línea teórica de la obra para nombrar a la *lengua-madre*, el extraño-cercano que siempre co-habla en el hablar del poema. La lengua madre se muestra como aquello de lo que nunca dejamos de hablar pero que nunca hablamos, aquello que rige la dirección de la dicción del poema. Es una lengua que se tiene pero, sin embargo, es inalcanzable, algo que está en origen perdido y cuya pérdida se nombra en el poema. Por tanto, la lengua materna se experimenta en dos tiempos contradictorios y simultáneos: el de lo más próximo y lo más lejano a nosotros.

El capítulo que cierra el libro, "Palabra sagitaria", plantea la idea de lectura que emerge a raíz de la propuesta poética del estudio. Si la escritura es el ejercicio de la repetición, la lectura deberá realizar el mismo movimiento silente del poema, alcanzar al poema en su apertura para poder escuchar lo que en él se hace presente. Al ser lo

desconocido, lo radicalmente otro, la materia propia de la lengua hacia la que se dirige el poema no puede leerse desde lo conocido; hay que evitar la respuesta que agote la pregunta para que, de este modo, la búsqueda sea el destino único de la lectura, del ir al encuentro confidente del poema.

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UNA DEFENSA DE LA DIALÉCTICA

DIALECTIC: A DEFENSE

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[Julián Jiménez Heffernan, *La Dialéctica. Variaciones sobre un tema de Fredric Jameson.* Madrid, Abada Editores, 2021, 148 págs.]

Abstract: This essay critically analyzes the complex evolution of the notion of dialectics in the work of Fredric Jameson. The author clarifies concepts and systematically reorders the chosen topic. Likewise, he makes a brilliant defense of dialectical praxis against its critics.

Keywords: Dialectic; Jameson; Post-theory; Philosophical Deconstruction; Adorno; Marxism; Hegel; Idealism.

Resumen: El ensayo analiza críticamente la compleja evolución de la dialéctica en la obra de Fredric Jameson. El autor aclara conceptos y reordena de modo sistemático el tema elegido. Del mismo modo, realiza una brillante defensa de la práctica dialéctica frente a sus críticos.

Palabras clave: dialéctica; Jameson; post-teoría; deconstrucción filosófica; Adorno; Marxismo; Hegel; idealismo.

Fredric Jameson puede ser considerado uno de los mejores y más activos defensores de la Dialéctica y de *lo dialéctico* en el panorama filosófico actual. Este ensayo es una apasionada reivindicación de esta defensa. Es decir: Jiménez Heffernan propone una inteligente apología de una apología. De hecho, no duda en sobrepasar a Jameson –sirviéndose pudorosamente de una cita de Deleuze– en la coda que cierra el texto ("Más Dialéctica"): no hay tanto que redefinir una y otra vez qué es y qué no es dialéctica sino *dejar que ocurra*, servirse de ella *sans souci et sans compliment* (139). Se percibe, en esta reivindicación final, el signo de la generación a la que pertenece el autor. Nacido en 1968, Jiménez Heffernan es obviamente un observador crítico y un tanto desapasionado de polémicas remotas que llegan hasta nuestros días en forma de rescoldo. Le importan porque –parafraseando a Hölderlin– el autor no pertenece al club de los que sienten pudor en ir a la fuente. Analiza admirablemente los entresijos de la *Querelle* sobre el estatuto y alcance de la Dialéctica a través del prolongado combate de Jameson con los detractores del formidable (re) invento de Hegel. Pero el autor se sabe en gran medida ajeno a este combate. Los enemigos de la Dialéctica y de lo dialéctico son hoy muy diferentes a los que combatió Jameson desde la década de los 70 (y cuyos epígonos sigue combatiendo hoy: *genio y figura*): se trata de esa combinación de "cognitivismo latente, puritanismo estridente y sociología barata" (10) que impregna el debate contemporáneo sobre cualquier asunto. Es éste un adversario tan formidable como estúpido. Cabe pensar, además, que Jiménez Heffernan ha comprendido que el ubicuo *wokismo* transteórico no puede ser combatido con armas *teóricas* (pues se presenta a sí mismo como ajeno a cualquier forma de teorización), sino con una *praxis* intelectual rigurosa que no renuncie –cuando proceda– a la ironía o al sarcasmo. Una praxis que no tema, por supuesto, a *haters*, escraches y cancelaciones. Así, el autor reivindica –evocando a Jameson– la *persistencia* de la Dialéctica como único modo de acercamiento razonable a procesos socio-históricos (12). Es el *aggiornamento* del hegeliano "trabajo de lo negativo": serio, doloroso y paciente. Y habría que añadir, con Hegel, que este trabajo nunca debe pretender ser edificante.

Aunque el autor se atiene, en gran medida, al despliegue cronológico de la defensa jamesionana de la Dialéctica, no renuncia a una estructuración temática de la misma. Los tres primeros capítulos son preliminares. En primer lugar, se sitúa la Dialéctica (más como estrategia inquisitiva eficaz que como método) frente a esos dos grandes obstáculos contra los que se estrellan una y otra vez las alternativas teóricas más o menos *positivistas* en Ciencias Sociales: el carácter proteico y procesual del marco empírico (lo "social") y la paradójica relación entre las distintas "totalidades" y

los "hechos" que dichas totalidades categorizan. En el segundo capítulo ("Jameson, dialéctico"), se evoca la *conversión* del filósofo (y su silencio de diez años, tan kantiano) a raíz de la aparición, en 1960, de *Crítica de la razón dialéctica* de Sartre. El tercer capítulo ("La clarificación teórica de la dialéctica"), en fin, anticipa el decurso posterior del ensayo: de la clarificación del sentido de Dialéctica frente a estructuralistas y deconstructivistas hasta sus últimos ensayos sobre Hegel y Marx, el *Züruckgehen* de Jameson.

En los capítulos siguientes, el autor se ocupa de recorrer, de hito en hito, la evolución del problema en la obra de Jameson. Se señala, en primer lugar, la asunción parcial por parte del filósofo del Sartre dialéctico ("Sartre"). Se trata de un largo capítulo repleto de inteligentes observaciones analíticas. Jameson, como se sabe, somete a crítica la filosofía de Sartre en su tesis doctoral (*Sartre: The Origins of a Style,* 1961). Jameson aún es un dialéctico incipiente y entusiasta que reprocha a Sartre cierto rebajamiento o dilución de lo dialéctico: Sartre sería el filósofo de la "dialéctica detenida, o imitación de la dialéctica" (38). En principio, cabría pensar que el tratamiento jamesoniano de la filosofía de Sartre es radicalmente contrapuesto al que, diez años después de este su primer libro, le dedica en *Marxism and Form* (1971). El autor rechaza este tópico interpretativo y muestra convincentemente la afinidad evolutiva entre ambos textos: la crítica del existencialismo en 1961 ya contenía elementos que apuntaban a futuras connivencias teóricas con el Sartre de la *Crítica de la razón dialéctica*. "Jameson –escribe el autor– celebra la valentía de Sartre al emplear un término, "totalización", que constituye, todavía hoy, un absurdo motivo de sonrojo para hegelianos de todo signo. Es dialéctica la necesidad de pre-comprender el todo (social) antes de comprender la parte (la vida subjetiva), pero también la negación implícita en el proyecto como destrucción de la resistencia que el mundo inerte ofrece a nuestro empeño" (43). Cabría añadir, en este punto, que Jameson tuvo (y tiene) un mérito añadido: en el mundo académico anglo-norteamericano (analítico o no), "hegeliano" es casi un insulto. Como apunta irónicamente el autor algo más adelante, "Jameson nunca se ha sentido cómodo ni con la fruta (útil) ni con la cáscara (prescindible) de la fronda hegeliana". Podríamos añadir que, a estas alturas de su trayectoria académica, es posible que Jameson prefiera incluso la cáscara hegeliana al torpe aliño escriturario de los post-teóricos de hogaño. Hegel –digámoslo a modo de provocación– es como Bach: hasta sus constantes repeticiones son asombrosas. Su tardío y brillante regreso a Hegel (*The Hegel Variations. On the* Phenomenology of Spirit, 2010) quizá se explique como un auto-ajuste de cuentas biográfico: durante décadas, no se podía regresar a Hegel

à corps perdu. Lo impedían sólidas cautelas construidas por sus continuadores, desde Marx a la Escuela de Francfort.

Se ocupa luego el autor del diálogo teórico de Jameson con Adorno ("La persistencia de Adorno"). En 1990, Jameson publica *Late Marxism, or the Persistence of the Dialectic.* El contexto intelectual es muy distinto al de 1971. Triunfa la deconstrucción. Derrida dedica ensayos vitriólicos al marxismo "tardío", especialmente representado en la figura del Adorno de *Dialéctica negativa*. Es evidente que las bases teóricas del marxismo y de la deconstrucción son, en gran medida, antitéticas. Coinciden, sin embargo, en un ámbito que le importa especialmente a Jameson: la *crítica inmanente* (piénsese en los textos jamesionanos y adornianos sobre el arte del siglo XX). Dicha crítica exige, en primer lugar, una "percepción diferencial" que permita "discriminar lo progresivo de lo regresivo en el proceso interno de una forma artística". Y, en segundo lugar, exige cierta concepción de la totalidad que envuelve el proceso sometido a crítica. Ambas exigencias están por completo ausentes de las estrategias deconstructivas de Derrida. Y no es posible negar la apabullante brillantez de sus textos, auténticos ejercicios de *crítica (re)creativa* (usamos el adjetivo sin ánimo irónico alguno). Jameson, dicho de modo un tanto simplista, conserva la primera exigencia y reformula la segunda al modo adorniano: lo universal está siempre diferido u ocluido: "leer es permitir el diálogo (dialéctica) entre dicción (particular afirmado) y contradicción (particular superado y negado –es decir, contradicho– en el universal" (59).

Los siguientes dos capítulos se ocupan de los esfuerzos de Jameson para clarificar (y, en lo posible, sistematizar) el concepto de dialéctica. El primero de ellos ("La crítica dialéctica") refiere al primer Jameson, el de *Marxism and Form*, empeñado en desproveer lo dialéctico de contaminación hegeliana. Al Jameson de 1971 le preocupa resolver el problema de la "correcta identificación de la unidad mínima de análisis dialéctico", un problema clave, en efecto, en la "sociología de orientación especulativa" (63) más o menos marxista. El autor señala acertadamente cómo Jameson se acerca a Hegel en numerosas ocasiones, aunque a manera de un *lapsus* o acto fallido. En todo caso, se trataría de "marxificar" a Hegel, anticipándose décadas a uno de los *Leitmotive* de la obra de Žižek.

El segundo de ellos (el más extenso de este ensayo) se ocupa de la más elaborada –hasta la fecha– propuesta jamesionana de clarificación y elaboración conceptual de la noción de dialéctica. Se trata del capítulo "Three Names of the Dialectic" incluido en *Valences of the Dialectic* (2009). La Dialéctica como "único horizonte viable, en cierto modo insuperable, del pensamiento crítico" (83). El autor señala acertadamente cómo Jameson conjura ya a Hegel como un espíritu benéfico o protector, aunque con-

serve cierto pudor al hacerlo; ciertamente, en el mundo académico anglo-norteamericano aún pesan –a modo de inercias intelectuales– las invectivas liberal-popperianas contra la obra del Gran Suabo. "A mi juicio –escribe el autor– Jameson pierde demasiado tiempo pidiendo disculpas por ocuparse de algo que sus colegas académicos consideran ya muerto y enterrado" (85). Así Jameson "le pasa a la dialéctica un test de buena conducta con el fin de tratar de demostrar que está vacunada contra muchos de los males detectados por la intelectualidad moderna y posmoderna" (89). El autor advierte también cómo el Jameson de 2009 no acierta a resolver la *Querelle* con el deconstructivismo. Jameson no aprecia suficientemente –escribe el autor– la lógica que rige el acercamiento, no siempre hostil, de Derrida al término, al nombre de Dialéctica" (101).

El autor se ocupa, en fin, del regreso analítico de Jameson a la obra de Hegel, esto es, de su libro sobre la *Fenomenología del Espíritu* (2010), el "desafío de leer la *Fenomenología* y, al pensamiento hegeliano en general, como un todo conceptual articulado por una dialéctica caracterizada ya en términos sausserianos como sistema 'sin términos positivos'"(129). Ciertamente, el Hegel al que regresa Jameson no es ya el Hegel petrificado de la primera edición de sus obras completas compiladas por sus discípulos. Jameson se sumerge en uno de los libros más extraños, desmesurados y fascinantes de la historia del pensamiento. Y descubre que la esencia de lo dialéctico es la mediación, no la "síntesis". Simplificando *grosso modo*, diríamos que el Hegel "sintético" es un laborioso invento de sus epígonos escolásticos. Casi la mitad de los volúmenes que integraron la edición del *Club de Amigos del Difunto* con los añadidos posteriores de Nohl, la *Gesamte Werkausgabe* son sus *Lecciones* de Berlín. Y es inimaginable que Hegel las hubiera publicado en vida en el formato en que aparecieron. En todo caso, el Hegel "sistemático" sería el de la *Enciclopedia de las Ciencias Filosóficas*, un libro mutante en sus tres ediciones que puede ser leído hoy más como un cuaderno de bitácora intelectual que como una imagen petrificada del Sistema. De hecho, en sus últimos años berlineses, Hegel practica justamente esa forma de *crítica dialéctica inmanente* que Jameson reivindica desde sus primeros escritos. Es el caso, por ejemplo, de su largo artículo sobre el *Reform Bill*, brillante antecedente de uno de los mejores textos *performativos* de Marx, *El Dieciocho Brumario de Luis Bonaparte*. Y es que "la dialéctica no está en sus contenidos, tampoco en sus conceptos. Está tan sólo en sus realizaciones, ejecuciones, ejercicios singulares –es decir, históricos–. La dialéctica, diríamos, pasa (...) sucede, no es (...) Y sucede sólo cuando ella es reflexivamente consciente de su decurso, su suceder" (136).

En este ensayo, Jiménez Heffernan ha ido más allá de su objetivo inicial. Más allá de la exploración meticulosa del tema central de la obra de Jameson. Como decíamos *supra*, nos hallamos ante la reivindicación –implícita a lo largo de sus páginas– del hegeliano "duro trabajo de lo negativo", tan distinto y distante del ubicuo uso y abuso de torpes *ideologemas* que impregna buena parte de los "debates" (las comillas son imprescindibles) contemporáneos.

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THEORYNOW
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UN DEBATE CON EAGLETON

A DEBATE WITH TERRY EAGLETON

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Resumen: Con ocasión de la investidura de Terry Eagleton como doctor honoris causa por la Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, en diciembre de 1999, un grupo de estudiantes de posgrado y de jóvenes profesores del Departamento de Filología Inglesa, dirigidos por J. Manuel Barbeito Varela, organizaron el Seminario Internacional "Terry Eagleton, o hacia una crítica revolucionaria". Una de las sesiones del seminario consistió en una mesa redonda presidida por el propio Terry Eagleton en la cual respondió a todas las preguntas que le formularon los participantes.

Los temas tratados en la mesa redonda habían sido discutidos en los numerosos encuentros que habíamos organizado en los meses previos al seminario. Los participantes en la mesa redonda trabajaron juntos durante casi un año en diferentes aspectos de la obra de Eagleton como crítico y como dramaturgo. La mesa redonda estuvo estructurada en tres secciones denominadas "Teoría marxista", "El papel del crítico y la institución académica" y "Literatura y crítica literaria".

Palabras clave: Ideología; emancipación; feminismo; teoría y crítica marxista; Irlanda.

Abstract: On the occasion of Terry Eagleton's award as doctor honoris causa by the Universidade de Santiago de Compostela in December 1999, a group of graduate students and young professors of the Department of English, led by J. Manuel Barbeito Varela, organized the International Seminar *Terry Eagleton, or towards a revolutionary criticism.* One of the seminar sessions consisted of a round table chaired by Terry Eagleton himself, in which he answered all the questions put to him by the participants.

The topics covered in this panel had been jointly discussed by all the participants in the numerous meetings regularly held in the months previous to the celebration of the International Seminar. They worked together for almost a year on different aspects of Eagleton's work as a theorist, a critic and a playwright. The roundtable was structured in three sections entitled "Marxist Theory", "The Role of the Critic and the Academic Institution" and "Literature and Literary Criticism".

Keywords: Ideology; emancipation; feminism; marxist theory and criticism; Ireland.

1. Teoría marxista

JORGE SACIDO ROMERO: Como marxista, la lucha por la emancipación es tu principal objetivo. En *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990), te mostrabas de acuerdo con la opinión de Jürgen Habermas de que "una sociedad futura deseable es de alguna manera inmanente al presente sistema" (407), pero no estabas de acuerdo con buena parte de su teoría. Habermas sitúa ese potencial emancipador, específicamente, en el consenso inmanente a todo acto de comunicación entre interlocutores. ¿En qué aspectos del presente puedes ver indicios de un futuro deseable? ¿Quién ha de llevar a cabo la emancipación? ¿El grupo de individuos unidos por la raza, el género o la nacionalidad, quizá?

TERRY EAGLETON: Respondiendo a tus preguntas acerca de las relaciones entre las ideas de Habermas sobre el futuro que tiene que estar de alguna manera implícito en el presente, y las de Marx, por un lado, y, por otro, mis propias actitudes hacia eso: sí, estoy de acuerdo con Habermas cuando afirma que el futuro debe estar ya de alguna manera, en algún sentido implícito en lo que hacemos, y, en este sentido, que el futuro debe ser un futuro factible. Si el futuro que proponemos no es factible en términos políticos, entonces tendemos a hacer que la gente desee inútilmente. Y a caer enfermo de desear inútilmente es a lo que Freud se refiere como *neurosis*. Así que, para evitar que uno se vuelva neurótico, necesitamos ser capaces de concretizar el futuro, en eso estoy de acuerdo con Habermas. En lo que no estoy tan de acuerdo con Habermas es en que eso se ha de encontrar principalmente en lo que él llamaría

la "racionalidad comunicativa", aunque esta sea una parte necesaria. Pienso que el futuro está presente en el presente, en forma de esas modalidades de exigencias políticas que, aun siendo muy específicas y perteneciendo al presente, al final además no pueden ser satisfechas por el presente. Hay un tipo de exigencia política que es y simultáneamente no es parte del propio sistema presente cuyas implicaciones suponen una transformación del sistema. Y yo pienso que es ahí, en vez de, por ejemplo, en la oposición entre ideología y conocimiento emancipador, donde se puede ver esbozado el futuro.

Y en cuanto a quién ha de llevar a cabo el proyecto emancipador, bueno, me temo que la respuesta banal y simplista, simplona, que los socialistas tienen que dar es: quienquiera que esté más oprimido por el sistema. Es decir, se trata de la idea de que las personas solo pueden emanciparse auténticamente a sí mismas. La emancipación no es algo que puedas hacer por otras personas, igual que no puedes comer o dormir por ellas. Y esto no lo pienso simplemente para evitar, por así decirlo, las alternativas liberales, aunque sirva para eso además. También es para decir que sin autoemancipación no habría una emancipación de verdad, pienso yo.

JOSÉ MANUEL ESTÉVEZ SAÁ: Me gustaría llamar la atención sobre la situación del llamado "experimento marxista" a las puertas del siglo XXI. Eric Hobsbawm, en su libro *Age of Extremes* (1997), considera el desmoronamiento de la Unión Soviética como el fin del experimento del "socialismo realmente existente" (497). El problema que ahora surge –como mencionas en tu introducción a *Marxist Literary Theory* (1996)– es que, si de verdad hoy en día el socialismo ya no es una alternativa plausible, en el capitalismo una gran mayoría de hombres y mujeres aún viven "en un estado de privación material y espiritual" (5). La praxis marxista contemporánea ¿ha quedado reducida a las respuestas circunstanciales a situaciones particulares?

TERRY EAGLETON: Tu argumento implica en parte el problema, muy importante, de lo que yo llamaría el "estalinismo" realmente existente en el socialismo y qué piensa de todo eso un marxista. Esa es una cuestión extraordinaria, aunque sumamente central. Ahora mismo no puedo decir mucho sobre ella, salvo que una de las tragedias de nuestro siglo, pienso, ha sido que el socialismo se haya revelado menos posible allí donde ha sido más necesario, donde ha habido condiciones reales de necesidad y la gente lo necesitaría; el socialismo se ha desplegado en territorios atrasados y explotados donde la tarea de construir el socialismo es más difícil. Pienso que merece la pena recordarnos a nosotros mismos que para el propio Marx, y realmente para todos los discípulos importantes de la tradición marxista hasta Stalin, solo se podía construir el socialismo sobre el hecho de la sociedad civil liberal desarrollada que desarrollase las

fuerzas de producción, lo cual no implicaba generalizar sin más la escasez, y, como digo, una de las trágicas paradojas de nuestro siglo ha sido que en aquellos países era más difícil construir el socialismo, y que se ha demostrado más fácil construirlo en los lugares donde era menos útil intentarlo.

En cuanto a la cuestión de cómo pasamos de la teoría a la praxis, si lo supiese no estaría aquí, porque tendría otras cosas mucho más importantes que hacer. Sin embargo, permíteme decir dos cosas al respecto. En lo que concierne al presente, un crítico cultural como yo no tiene nada específico que decir. En eso estamos en la misma situación que cualquier rival político que debata la estrategia histórica, que siempre debe variar de un lugar a otro. Lo segundo que quiero decir es que aunque ahora nos hacemos la pregunta de cómo vamos de la teoría a la práctica, no podemos olvidar que en este mismo siglo hubo épocas muy emocionantes en que era al revés, en que las cosas pasaban tan rápido, la historia pasaba tan rápido delante de las narices de la gente, por así decirlo, que era la teoría la que tenía que ponerse a la altura de la práctica: uno piensa por ejemplo en los años del modernismo anglosajón, del bolchevismo, de la República de Weimar; no han sido demasiados los años de nuestro siglo en los que la teoría haya tenido dificultades para dotar la práctica de sentido. Las propias relaciones entre la teoría y la práctica varían históricamente.

ÁNGEL OTERO BLANCO: La relación entre objetividad y subjetividad exige una transformación radical. La teoría puede ayudar a convertir la subjetividad pasiva en agencia subjetiva, es decir, a resistir las fuerzas externas que predeterminan y manipulan nuestros deseos individuales y nuestras aspiraciones personales. Una teoría, sin embargo, ¿no tiene siempre efectos ideologizantes? Además, me gustaría sugerir que los elementos de una ética del diálogo, el silencio, el habla y la voz deberían ser incorporados a cualquier teoría materialista de la ética. ¿Estás de acuerdo en que esta clase de teoría se puede combinar dialógicamente con una ética de la agencia subjetiva?

TERRY EAGLETON: Un asunto sumamente importante, este de la subjetividad, la ética y la objetividad material, y de la relación, extraordinariamente difícil, tensa, entre ellas.

¿Debería la teoría posibilitar que la gente resistiese las fuerzas externas que la manipulan? Bueno, sí, si la teoría es parte de la autocomprensión; y yo pienso que la mejor manera de ver la teoría es como una suerte de autorreflexión sistemática. La teoría tiene lugar cuando necesitamos con urgencia reflexionar sistemáticamente sobre nuestra situación. Sin embargo, eso no siempre es así. A veces no necesitamos hacer eso. A veces necesitamos tirar para adelante, ya sabes, razonablemente bien,

con espontaneidad. Pero llegan momentos en que una disciplina intelectual de pronto tiene que empezar a pensarse a sí misma, tiene que volverse hacia sí misma, por así decirlo, y pensar sobre sus propias condiciones de posibilidad, y cómo podría ser el transformarse a sí misma. Y hemos estado viviendo uno de esos momentos en un ámbito particular, el ámbito de los estudios culturales o políticos. Aunque habiendo dicho que la teoría, comprendida como autorreflexión, autorreflexión crítica, tiene un papel que desempeñar para que resistamos las fuerzas que nos determinan, no pienso que eso sea solo cosa de la teoría, o *principalmente* de la teoría. De hecho, la gente tiene que resistir esas fuerzas de maneras mucho más prácticas. Y la teoría espera a que intentemos encontrar esas maneras.

En cuanto a la pregunta sobre la relación entre la teoría y la ideología: ¿puede haber alguna teoría que no tenga efectos ideológicos? Y entonces, si toda teoría se ve de alguna manera atrapada en la ideología, ¿hay alguna teoría de verdad fiable? Bueno, démonos cuenta, antes que nada, de que la palabra *ideología* tiene diferentes significados. En cierto sentido, decir que la teoría está presa en la ideología, que la ideología limita o distorsiona la teoría, podría decirse, como se sugiere aquí, como algo negativo. Pero en realidad hay otros significados de *ideología*, significados menos negativos: visiones del mundo, modalidades de experiencia, maneras de vivir…. Tal y como nos recuerda Heidegger, empezamos estando vinculados a nuestra limitada relación con el mundo; y entonces la teoría se da de una manera secundaria, y eso la conforma totalmente. Pero esa relación con el mundo no siempre tiene por qué ser ideológica en el sentido negativo. Así que, para responder a esa pregunta, pienso que necesitamos diferenciar distintos significados de *ideología.*

Finalmente está la cuestión ética de hasta dónde hemos o hasta dónde debemos haber basado el materialismo en la subjetividad. El psicoanálisis, ¿va a ser importante en ese sentido? Sí, pero déjame decir una cosa: solo para generalizar mucho, en la manera en que pensamos ¿que? solo ha habido una pregunta ética, una manera importante de enmarcar esto. En Filosofía ha habido tres grandes preguntas: *¿Qué podemos saber?*, que es la pregunta de la epistemología; *¿qué deberíamos hacer?*, que es la pregunta de la ética o, si se quiere, de la ética política; y *¿qué nos gusta?, ¿que encontramos atractivo?*, la pregunta estética. Y todo ocurre en la interrelación entre ellas. Aquí trataremos de la segunda pregunta. Esa pregunta, ese eslogan resuena, por ejemplo, a lo largo de la historia de Rusia: *¿Qué se ha de hacer? ¿Qué es lo que deberíamos hacer dada la situación?* No simplemente *¿qué sería bonito hacer, o posible, o deseable?*, sino, *dada esta situación material concreta, ¿qué se ha de hacer?* Pienso que esta es la forma en que el problema político, ético, ha sido formulado. Otra manera

de expresarlo es decir que de lo que trata la ética es de las condiciones materiales que necesitaríamos para alcanzar la felicidad. La ética, por supuesto, tiene que responder a la pregunta *¿qué hace falta para que seamos felices?*

ROSARIO PATIÑO EIRÍN: El marxismo y el feminismo comparten el objetivo "épico" de cambiar el mundo, pero las diferencias históricas y los malentendidos recíprocos los mantienen separados. En *Walter Benjamin, or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (1981), adviertes contra los efectos trágicos de la falta de unidad entre el marxismo y el feminismo. A la luz de los logros del feminismo, ¿cuál piensas que es su poder transformador desde un punto de vista marxista? Para un marxista, ¿es posible considerar el feminismo como revolucionario? ¿Podemos reconciliar la idea feminista de que las relaciones en casa entre los hombres y las mujeres están determinadas socialmente con la idea marxista de que las relaciones sociales de producción están en la base de todas las otras relaciones sociales? Finalmente, ¿la combinación de socialismo y feminismo es necesaria para cambiar el mundo?

TERRY EAGLETON: La relación entre feminismo y marxismo: este es un ámbito extraordinario y absolutamente importante. "Para el marxismo, ¿es posible ver el feminismo como revolucionario?" ¡Desde luego! Pero, por supuesto, lo que los y las feministas están intentando practicar es feminismo, y lo que los y las marxistas están intentando practicar es socialismo. Pero al intentar ponerse manos a la obra con lo que es fundamental para nosotros y con diversas cuestiones acerca de la transformación de todo, eso es lo que los socialistas varones a menudo han eludido con nerviosismo.

Hay un cierto sentido en el cual el feminismo, como he dicho, es (parafraseándome) "la revolución dentro de la revolución". "¿Qué tienen en común el marxismo y el feminismo?" Sí, tal y como lo expresas, son *épicos*, aventuras épicas. O, para expresarlo de otra manera, ambos son *metarrelatos*. Aunque se podrían nombrar numerosos metarrelatos, parece haber, por lo menos, dos. Uno es el relato de la producción y reproducción materiales humanas –y eso es de lo que trata el marxismo–, y el otro es el relato de la producción y reproducción sexuales –y eso es de lo que trata el feminismo–. ¿Qué es lo que tienen en común estos metarrelatos? Antes que nada, son la condición previa para cualquier otra cosa que podamos hacer. Ambos son "meta" en el sentido de ser la condición previa para otras clases de relatos que podríamos contar. Lo segundo que tienen en común es que ambas historias son, por supuesto, trágicas. Ambas son historias de apoderamiento, combate, conflicto, antagonismo y demás. Y tanto el marxismo como el feminismo lo que dicen es: "¿Tiene que ser así?" "¿Qué tienen la reproducción material y la sexual que las convierte rigurosamente en una lucha?" "Las cosas, ¿simplemente son así?" O "¿Qué tendríamos que hacer para

emanciparnos de esas esclavitudes tan prolongadas y desdichadas?" Para reflejarlo en lo que dices, deseamos encontrar afinidades y alianzas entre diferentes movimientos porque somos de izquierdas y nos gusta tener los pies en la tierra.

El período en que estas cuestiones –el marxismo y el feminismo– fueron planteadas de manera más elocuente –digamos que los primeros años 70– fue también el período, en cierto sentido, en que creímos que podíamos ir a nuestro aire y permitirnos ser un poco exclusivos y puristas y decir: "A menos que hayas dicho X e Y entonces no vienes con nosotros o nosotros no vamos contigo". Pues bien, ahora ya no decimos eso, la verdad. Ya no podemos permitirnos una acción de esa clase. Por otra parte, al buscar afinidades estrechas quizá estemos practicando el fetichismo de la unidad. Sin embargo, no toda unidad o identidad es deseable. Hay sentidos corporativos fundamentales en que el feminismo y el marxismo son cosas diferentes.

Las preguntas que planteé el otro día: "Qué es lo peculiar del marxismo", "¿qué tiene que decir el marxismo que el socialismo, en general, no dice, quizá?" Me atrevería a decir que –permíteme que use esa palabra horrible, *esencia*– la "esencia" del marxismo es que en realidad es una teoría muy específica y bastante técnica de cómo se dan los cambios sociales que marcan una época. Todo lo cual tiene que ver con las relaciones sociales de producción y las fuerzas sociales de producción. Si quieres decir lo que el marxismo hace específicamente, eso hace. Ahora bien, lo interesante es que el feminismo no pretende ser esa clase de teoría. No es que el patriarcado haya pasado por esas transformaciones que marcan una época, cada una de ellas generada por una población específica en cada época. Así que pienso que tendrás que recordar que las alianzas políticas no quieren decir necesariamente unidades teóricas.

2. El papel del crítico y la institución académica

JOSÉ MARÍA DÍAZ LAGE: Sin el respaldo sólido de una clase trabajadora revolucionaria, los esfuerzos del crítico marxista –potencialmente muy útiles– corren el riesgo de quedarse en lo meramente académico o, quizá, más en lo analítico que en lo constructivo. Si la política revolucionaria se encuentra paralizada de esta manera, ¿qué papel les queda a los teóricos y críticos marxistas?

SUSANA M.ª JIMÉNEZ PLACER: En *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (1976), sugieres que hay una brecha insalvable entre la crítica marxista y la institución académica. El marxismo ¿no podría trabajar dentro de esa institución sin quedarse en "un nuevo enfoque académico"? Además, en este libro afirmas que "los críticos (habitualmente) también son profesores universitarios contratados por el Estado para que preparen a

los estudiantes ideológicamente para sus funciones en la sociedad capitalista" (59). ¿No es posible que la crítica marxista revolucione y transforme la institución académica, la cual (pareces olvidar) es también una "forma de producción social y económica" compleja, determinada por una serie de reglas económicas y sociales?

TERRY EAGLETON: Abordaré vuestras preguntas y comentarios juntos, porque giran en torno al mismo tipo de tema: la cuestión de la institución académica y los teóricos, y demás.

Creo que, quizá, ahí estoy manejando mis propias palabras de modo más bien confuso, por la manera estereotipadamente izquierdista de desdeñar en exceso la institución académica. En realidad, pienso, Susana, que tienes razón al traer el hecho a colación. Pero, ya sabes, en cierto sentido, cuando los radicales hablan de la institución académica como de una torre de marfil o un mundo aparte, lo que en realidad reflejan es que están hablando el mismo lenguaje que los conservadores, solo que a los radicales no les gusta y a los conservadores sí.

Por supuesto, tienes toda la razón: las universidades no son objetos extraterrestres. Quiero decir que están absolutamente vinculadas a la reproducción material e ideológica, intelectual; son industrias, cadenas de producción, así que en ellas no hay nada en absoluto que no sea materialista. De hecho, en los Estados Unidos cuesta mucho más que un profesor universitario cometa este error, por supuesto, porque por los campus estadounidenses pasa un número extraordinario de personas, millones de ellas, así que los profesores universitarios no se están volviendo una elite ínfima de la población. Montones y montones de gente intentan leer el *Ulises* y demás, o lo que quiere que sea.

Así que, pienso, no se debería establecer –como quizá yo he hecho a veces– una distinción demasiado tajante entre el teórico y el profesor universitario. El mundo académico –supongo que esto servirá– puede ser un obstáculo deliberado a la emancipación, pero no olvidemos que también puede ser parte de ella. No quiero ponerme sentimental ni echar una lagrimita por los años 60, ya sabes, hablando de Paul McCartney y Daniel Cohn Bendit y demás, pero de una manera muy extraña, de hecho muy atípica, en los 60 los campus universitarios, nada menos, fueron el vivero de un cambio social y político que luego llegó mucho más allá. Las relaciones de la institución académica con la sociedad política son muy variables. Lo que se puede hacer de una manera radical o revolucionaria dentro de la institución académica sin duda dependerá no de ella como tal, sino de la situación más amplia en que nos encontremos. Y hay épocas en que, en lo que concierne a la institución académica, es una situación muy positiva.

¿Cuál es el papel del teórico en una situación de retroceso, situaciones tan desoladoras como la que estamos viviendo? No un papel único, sino muchos diferentes. Uno de ellos es no dejar que las ideas radicales se enfríen, asegurar su existencia, porque en realidad una de las ambiciones de nuestros gobernantes es erradicar a esos mismos profesores universitarios, no para asegurarse sin más de que en la práctica esas ideas nunca se llegan a realizar, sino para liberar, de un plumazo, a las mentes jóvenes de todas ellas. Así que la simple tarea, en realidad, de argumentar y extender ese tipo de pensamiento, pienso que es muy importante.

En segundo lugar, obviamente no necesitamos preguntarnos cómo se han de justificar nuestras teorizaciones. Quizá no deberíamos apresurarnos en atender a justificaciones de esa clase. ¿Por qué debería la teoría ser siempre un instrumento de algo más? Bertolt Brecht dijo una vez que, si querías que la teoría fuese una especie de placer sensual, ¿por qué no iba el pensamiento a ser entonces una defensa, una justificación tanto como cualquier otra cosa? ¿O estamos buscando una sociedad en la que la gente tendría que seguir justificando sus pensamientos con razones utilitarias? Es el capitalismo el que siempre te pide que des el valor monetario, el valor de utilidad de tus actividades, y es el socialismo el que insiste en que al final no hay necesidad de que los hombres y las mujeres tengan que andar defendiendo estas actividades que pertenecen a su ser genérico. Deberían volverse fines en sí mismos. Así que hay una especie de respuesta estética a eso.

Pero en cuanto al papel que el teórico tiene que desempeñar, me temo que –usando un cliché espantoso de la izquierda– es la historia la que nos lo dice, no nosotros. La historia hace que la mente se concentre maravillosamente. Ciertas tareas se les ofrecen a los teóricos cuando se dan –como, digamos, en los casos de Bertold Brecht o Walter Benjamin– ciertas situaciones políticas. Esas tareas no siempre pueden ser formuladas o programadas de antemano. Tú, Susana, me citas diciendo, y con toda la razón, que los críticos, habitualmente profesores universitarios, son contratados por el Estado para que preparen a los estudiantes ideológicamente para sus funciones en una sociedad técnica: es lo que se conoce como "funcionalismo burgués", funcionalismo sociológico. Sí, eso es verdad, pero, por supuesto, ahí hay una contradicción. ¿En qué sentido puede eso existir así en ciertos momentos y en ciertos lugares?

LAURA MARÍA LOJO RODRÍGUEZ: Después de leer *Criticism and Ideology* (1976), me gustaría hacerte dos preguntas relacionadas: un texto ¿es un lugar no solo de obediencia sino también de resistencia a la ideología? ¿Es tarea del crítico literario mostrar cómo es que esto es así?

Una de las limitaciones de la teoría y la crítica marxistas es su tendencia a centrarse en los géneros narrativo y dramático en detrimento de la poesía. ¿Es porque entre el modo en que la poesía y la teoría están constituidas hay tanta distancia que la poesía excluye lo político, lo discursivo y lo analítico? La poesía ¿no refleja, aunque de manera diferente, las condiciones materiales en que es producida, o ha de ser considerada como una mera expresión de la particularidad sensual de poeta?

TERRY EAGLETON: Estas son cuestiones muy importantes. De nuevo, cuestiones de resistencia y complicidad al mismo tiempo. Has preguntado primero si un texto puede no solo mediar la ideología en un sentido negativo sino también ser una estrategia de resistencia frente a ella. Desde luego, pienso que sí, que ese enfoque doble, dividido, es lo que necesitamos. Los textos no son solo herramientas, a veces son estrategias para rodear, transformar, resistir ciertas ideas. Pienso que la crítica marxista siempre ha tenido al menos dos corrientes. Una de ellas es descaradamente positiva y utópica, y la otra es escéptica, desmistificadora y crítica – en cierto sentido, es la distinción entre Marcuse, por un lado, y Macherey, por otro. Yo soy pluralista, pienso que ambas corrientes son muy importantes. El intento utópico, de vanguardia, de contemplar nuevas posibilidades más allá y acerca del presente es una parte importante de la estética marxista. Pero también la demistificación del presente, ese tipo de mirada mucho más fría, esa forma escéptica de arte que demistifica el presente. Pienso que *Criticism and Ideology* pertenece a un período en los años 70 en que corrimos el peligro de olvidar la corriente más afirmativa y positiva. Estábamos aprendiendo un montón de ideas nuevas y emocionantes sobre cómo demistificar el poder, cómo desenmascararlo. Pero no es solo ese saber el que a veces te lleva a olvidar la cuestión, y desde dónde llegas a los estudios ingleses. Hacer una cosa así es algo muy intelectualista, porque la gente corriente, por supuesto, muy a menudo descubre funciones, elementos utópicos –en el sentido amplio– en el poder; y los intelectuales pasan eso por alto a riesgo de perder el contacto con ello, incluso aunque llamemos a las utopías "culebrones" o algo así.

En cuanto a la segunda pregunta que has hecho sobre la teoría y la poesía: sí, la poesía es la prueba más complicada para la teoría. Los teóricos no deberían ponerse las cosas demasiado fáciles escribiendo siempre sobre Brecht o Balzac. ¿Por qué es la poesía una prueba tan exigente para la teoría? ¿Porque la teoría es discursiva y analítica y la poesía no lo es, o no parece serlo? Recordemos que esa manera de definir la poesía es históricamente muy reciente, es decir, la idea de que la poesía es lo contrario mismo de lo cotidiano, lo analítico, lo perceptual. Casi podrías precisar el momento histórico exacto de la literatura inglesa en que surge: en algún momento del siglo XIX,

en algún momento entre Blake y Shelley, por un lado, y Tennyson, por el otro. Ha tenido lugar una nueva división del trabajo discursivo, de manera que ahora lo poético es todo aquello que lo teórico no es. Con eso, se recuerda la particularidad sensual de la poesía, pero se olvida que ahora también ha perdido ciertas capacidades evidentes. Esta definición implícita de la poesía sería probablemente ininteligible para Chaucer, o Dante, o Shakespeare, o Milton, o Pope. Es muy reciente, y nosotros, como buenos posrománticos, la hemos heredado. Pero, dicho esto, la poesía es la prueba más complicada, y fuerza a los críticos como yo a pensar en lo que me gusta llamar la "política de la forma". Todos sabemos de la "política del contenido": ¿cuántos personajes de clase trabajadora hay en una novela? Todos sabemos contar. Mucho más complicado es hablar de la política, o la ideología, de un modo de narración, de una forma de caracterización, de una forma de aliteración, incluso de una forma de metro. Y la poesía pone una y otra vez nuestras categorías ante ese tipo de prueba, ante la particularidad.

3. Literatura y crítica literaria

MARÍA FRANCISCA LLANTADA: En el "Posfacio" a la edición de 1996 de *Literary Theory: An Introduction,* argumentas que si la literatura importa hoy en día, es sobre todo porque a muchos críticos les parece uno de los pocos lugares que quedan en que, en un mundo dividido, fragmentado, aún se puede encarnar un sentido del valor universal, y en que, en un mundo sórdidamente materialista, aún se puede alcanzar a vislumbrar la transcendencia. Personalmente, como crítico y autor literario, ¿suscribes esta opinión?

En tu libro *The Illusions of Postmodernism* defines la posmodernidad como un estilo de pensamiento que sospecha de las nociones clásicas de verdad y razón. Contra estos valores ilustrados, el posmodernismo ve el mundo como carente de fundamento y diverso; ha dado voz a los humillados e injuriados, y al hacerlo ha amenazado con hacer temblar –a través de un rico volumen de trabajo sobre el racismo, la etnicidad y el pensamiento identitario– la imperiosa identidad propia que el sistema alimenta. Los intelectuales nacionalistas, sin embargo, a veces adoptan posiciones relativistas extremas. ¿Apoyas la idea de que la identidad cultural puede convertirse fácilmente en una nueva forma de racismo? ¿Crees que particularismos tales como la nacionalidad y la raza son una amenaza tan grande para el individuo como la globalización?

TERRY EAGLETON: Citas el final de mi *Literary Theory*, donde de nuevo encuentras la cuestión del utopismo en la literatura, de encontrar en la literatura un lugar en el que aún se pueda ver alguna clase de unidad en un mundo dividido y fragmentado.

Preguntas si suscribo, yo mismo, esta opinión. Y quiero dar una respuesta firme a eso, que es sí y no. Y eso, la verdad, es lo que ya dije acerca de cómo la crítica marxista tiene y necesita, pienso, una dimensión utópica, pero también tiene que mantenerse escéptica frente al utopismo, tal y como lo era, por supuesto, el propio Marx. Necesita ser utópica y de alguna manera, al mismo tiempo, demistificar eso.

El segundo punto que planteas –¿trato la identidad cultural hoy en día como una nueva forma de racismo?– ya lo he tocado, en cierta manera, en la ponencia que hice el otro día. Puede ser, por supuesto, que no todas las formas de identidad cultural sean formas de racismo. Algunos posmodernistas que celebran la carencia de identidad y el hibridismo y el sujeto descentrado, y demás, a veces olvidan que hay un cierto grado de privilegio y de lujo en hacer eso. Algunos de ellos son capaces de celebrar la fluidez en sí misma quizá porque están tras la barrera. Pero para aquellos a los que no se les permite ser quienes son o quieren ser, tener una identidad es mucho más importante. No hay nada malo en tener una identidad siempre que no la conviertas en un fetiche, o siempre que no sea, como sugieres, demasiado excluyente o demasiado racista.

¿Qué pienso que es una amenaza mayor, lo globalizante o lo particularizante? Bueno, no lo sé. Quiero decir, lo que quise recalcar en mi charla es que me parece que pertenecen a la misma lógica, son las dos caras de la misma situación. Cuanto más global se vuelve la situación, más localmente a la defensiva se pone lo particular. Y necesitaríamos, por así decirlo, encontrar alguna manera de excluir completamente esa lógica. Pero pienso que eso no lo podemos hacer simplemente con el pensamiento; no pienso que pudiese resultar, simplemente, más inteligible. Esa es la clase de problema intelectual, de impasse ("¿es cosa del globalismo?, ¿del particularismo?"), del cual podemos ver que es más que un problema intelectual y que requeriría más medios que los intelectuales para solucionarlo. Este problema nos dice, ya sabes, "Busca en otra parte la resolución; esto, simplemente, no puede ser resuelto intelectualmente".

ANA MARÍA SÁNCHEZ MOSQUERA: Mi pregunta viene motivada por tu libro *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës,* y tiene que ver con la noción de poder y verdad en la esfera de lo literario y en conexión con la práctica de la crítica marxista.

La idea de Antonio Gramsci de que las revoluciones tienen que ser culturales además de críticas y políticas me lleva a concluir que la literatura es uno de esos espacios simbólicos en que se podría llevar a cabo "una revolución ideológica". En *The Rape of Clarissa* aseguras que "la verdad es siempre una cuestión de posición, una función de las relaciones sociales, un efecto de discursos particulares en condiciones particulares" (133). Si la literatura es por definición "ficcional" y si también es "tradicional" en

el sentido de que reproduce las relaciones de poder del momento histórico en que es concebida, ¿cómo puede la crítica marxista llevar a cabo su tarea de extraer los valores revolucionarios que hay en ese espacio cultural? En otras palabras: ¿cómo puede encontrar un espacio para la revolución cultural, si la ficción está cimentada en una mentira y la verdad responde a los intereses de la clase que tiene el poder?

TERRY EAGLETON: Tus comentarios sobre la ficción y la revolución cultural, las mentiras y la verdad, son muy útiles. Si la literatura es ficcional, ¿en qué sentido puede proporcionar un espacio para este tipo de tarea gramsciana, la de la revolución cultural? Ahí tenemos una verdadera dificultad, solo que yo pienso que quizá, en cierto sentido, las ficciones son lo que guía nuestra vida. Con eso no quiero decir necesariamente las "mentiras". Intentamos no guiarnos por las mentiras, no guiarnos por la falsedad, pero no podemos evitar guiarnos por ficciones de alguna manera; una de las revelaciones del pensamiento radical, supongo –estoy pensando en gente como Brecht y la vanguardia–, es que las sociedades son como obras de arte en el sentido de que la mayoría de las convenciones son hasta cierto punto arbitrarias. Pensar en la sociedad como una obra de arte puede ser otra manera reaccionaria de pensar la sociedad como un organismo misterioso. Hay otra manera de pensar en las sociedades como ficcionales y por tanto como mudables, una manera brechtiana que, pienso, es mucho más útil.

Citas mi afirmación en *Clarissa*: "la verdad es siempre una cuestión de poder y posición, un efecto de los discursos…" y dices: ¿cómo se puede introducir la verdad si está basada en una mentira? Verdaderamente, pienso que esa cita es demasiado foucaultiana y nietzscheana, una aberración momentánea, un momento de recaída en un "la verdad es la posicionalidad" bastante en boga, que por supuesto es básicamente nietzscheano. No quiero ver la verdad simplemente como una respuesta refleja al poder, como sugería ahí. Eso sería simple reduccionismo, como lo son muchas otras maneras de ver la verdad. Aunque la verdad, como tú recalcas, siempre está vinculada al poder, no es simplemente reducible a él. Ese es el error que comete cierto pragmatismo burgués, y también ha habido pragmatismos de izquierdas que en su momento no me impresionaron demasiado.

MARGARITA ESTÉVEZ SAÁ: Me gustaría sacar a colación tu especial interés por Irlanda y la cultura irlandesa, en relación con las obras de teatro que has escrito.

En la introducción a la edición de tus obras de teatro publicada por Blackwell en 1997, afirmas que "por su naturaleza colaborativa, experimental, de ensayo y error, poner en escena una obra de teatro es el equivalente en las humanidades al laboratorio

de las ciencias" (1). Y el medio cultural que pareces usar en tres de ellas es Irlanda o, en general –si incluimos *Disappearances*– la condición del colonizado. ¿Cómo fueron recibidas las obras, por el público y la crítica? Te hago esta pregunta, aparentemente sencilla, porque los asuntos en que se centran las obras me parecen muy delicados y polémicos.

También admites que "al escribir tu segunda obra de teatro, empiezas a descubrir lo que te fascina de manera constante, qué estilos y preocupaciones aparecen de nuevo en un contexto diferente" (5). En tus obras de teatro nos presentas de modo recurrente la figura del revolucionario fracasado y pareces adoptar un tono ambivalente, extremadamente cómico, incluso provocador, hacia cualquier clase de revolución por parte de los colonizados, en particular los irlandeses. ¿Es una manera irónica y distanciada de proyectar tus propias angustias e incertidumbres en cuanto crítico marxista revolucionario? ¿O más bien te propones analizar de una manera extremadamente cómica las causas de esos fracasos a fin de proponer una revuelta potencialmente exitosa?

Además, me parece que hay una inquietud y un cuestionamiento recurrentes en relación con el poder emancipador del lenguaje. Así, Kaman, en *Disappearances*, defiende el poder liberador del lenguaje (128, 139), y Connolly, en *The White, the Gold and the Gangrene*, postula la capacidad destructiva del lenguaje, al que debería darse un mejor uso (113).

Resumiendo, hay una preocupación constante por la utilidad o inutilidad de la actividad intelectual en general y del socialismo en particular, una preocupación manifestada por personajes muy diferentes en la mayoría de las obras. Por ejemplo, Bracken en *God's Locusts* afirma que en política lo intelectual carece de valor (215). Y también encontramos varias alusiones a la futilidad de los posicionamientos socialistas: MacDaid en *The White, the Gold and the Gangrene* denuncia el elitismo de algunos supuestos marxistas (111). De modo similar, Oscar Wilde, en *Saint Oscar*, declara que no tiene intención de poner el socialismo en práctica –"Encuentro el simple apoyo al socialismo agotador, ya no digamos el tener que hacer cualquier otra cosa por él" (30)–, pero en la conversación con Wallace parece indicar que la futilidad es un rasgo inherente al propio socialismo.

TERRY EAGLETON: Encuentro tus preguntas perturbadoramente perspicaces. ¿Como fueron recibidas mis obras? Bien, en general; bien, claro está, para un profesor universitario. Recuerdo una de mis citas favoritas de Samuel Johnson, acerca de un perro que caminaba sobre sus patas traseras: incluso aunque no lo haya hecho muy

bien, lo sorprendente es que lo haga siquiera. Bueno, esa fue una de las reacciones a mis obras, lo más sorprendente es que lo haga un intelectual, un profesor universitario. Por otro lado, tienes que recordar que la mayoría de mis obras fueron representadas primero en Irlanda, donde, para empezar, hay una tradición de teatro político. ¿Recuerdas a la policía entrando en avalancha en el Abbey Theatre durante la representación de *The Playboy of the Western World* de Synge? Yo no veo como un obstáculo que la policía entre en avalancha en un teatro. Piensa, por ejemplo, en Derry, una ciudad muy dividida, en la cual, siempre que una compañía estrenaba una obra, el ejército británico enviaba sus helicópteros para que hiciesen ruido durante los primeros diez minutos, solo para recordarles quién mandaba allí. El ejército británico solía hacer eso cuando se presentaba una obra nacionalista en Derry. La otra cosa por la que el teatro irlandés es bien conocido, famoso, es por su verbosidad, sus florituras. Si piensas en Wilde, Synge, Yeats y O'Casey, es un teatro de la palabra, de una cierta sociedad que se ha visto, en cierto sentido, condenada a vivir de la palabra porque ha carecido de agencia política para gobernar. En la sociedad irlandesa hay una relación profunda entre la celebración del lenguaje y un cierto sentido de fracaso, y un cierto sentido de impotencia, por decirlo de alguna manera. Así que, como yo soy profesor universitario y como mi profesión es tratar con las palabras, Irlanda es de lejos el mejor lugar en el que se pueden representar mis obras. Porque allí no les importa si la gente hace discursos muy largos. Mi problema es siempre hacer que pasen cosas en escena. Puedo hacer que alguien hable, pero no puedo hacer que alguien vaya de la ventana a la puerta.

Desde luego, me resulta muy interesante descubrir, gracias a tus observaciones, mi obsesión con los revolucionarios fracasados, de la cual no me había dado cuenta. La verdad, no se me había ocurrido de esa manera y es un tema muy interesante. El fracaso es una especialidad irlandesa. Los irlandeses son verdaderamente buenos, son maravillosamente sensibles al fracaso. Estudias las diversas batallas contra los británicos en sus canciones populares, y luego, diez años más tarde, descubres que en realidad perdieron la batalla. Es un tema muy importante. Los irlandeses comprenden perfectamente –de una manera que, pienso, naciones más metropolitanas, la mayoría de las naciones postimperiales de la Unión Británica, no lo hacen– que el fracaso, en cierto sentido, es muy importante. Si no comprendes el fracaso, entonces, hablando en términos políticos, no has aprendido mucho, y ese triunfalismo es propio de nuestros gobernantes, mientras que los desposeídos son expertos en el fracaso. Lo saben todo sobre él. Piensa, por ejemplo, en Samuel Beckett, un irlandés y un gran poeta del fracaso humano. Por supuesto, este sentido del fracaso, en la sociedad irlandesa y en otras partes, puede volverse mórbido y autocomplaciente, un culto al fracaso. Pero pienso

que el fracaso también tiene un aspecto más positivo: el comprender que solo con el reconocimiento de la debacle llegarás a alguna parte, por lo menos en términos políticos. Solo mirando el fracaso, y no barriéndolo bajo la alfombra, convertirás el fracaso en algo más positivo. Pienso que hay una comprensión profunda de eso quizá no solo en la cultura irlandesa, quizá en las culturas colonizadas en general. Soy consciente de que hay un montón de cosas que no sé sobre mis obras de teatro y siempre agradezco mucho que se me muestren. Porque las cosas más importantes que uno hace en las obras son inconscientes, por supuesto. Pero es verdad que hay esta cuestión de si la debacle puede ser potencialmente transformada en algo mejor, lo que estaría bien.

Y sí, para acabar con el tema del socialismo y la inutilidad, has estado muy aguda al ver que en mis obras hay, por un lado, un sentido de la responsabilidad política y, por otro, lo que, pienso, es una especie de irresponsabilidad que en realidad viene de serie con el arte y el lenguaje mismos. No es solo que ciertos usos del lenguaje o ciertas clases de arte podrían ser responsables pero no pueden. Lo que resulta más interesante es una cierta irresponsabilidad inherente o constitutiva en la agenda del artista. Yo mismo soy muy consciente de eso, y, repito, pienso que mis obras intentan, por un lado, medir los límites de lo que hay de negativo en ello, y, por otro, ver en esa inutilidad los aspectos utópicos potenciales políticamente, en el sentido de que uno no tenga que estar justificando constantemente algo en términos utilitarios, de que se pueda discernir la forma de un futuro no utilitario o post-utilitario. Como dice Wilde, "la única finalidad del marxismo es la inutilidad", o, como podrían haber dicho los románticos, la única finalidad del arte es no tener finalidad, la única finalidad del arte es recordarnos cierta especie de falta creativa de finalidad que la sociedad burguesa no puede comprender, que, desde su lógica del intercambio y la utilidad y la mercancía y demás, carece absolutamente de fuerza. Pienso que Wilde sabía de ambos aspectos en él mismo. Sabía hasta qué punto su utopismo era una especie de tapadera para su autocomplacencia y su irresponsabilidad, y también sabía por eso que alguien tenía que plantarse y decir: "¡Pues yo no voy a mover ni un dedo!". Y, por supuesto, obtuvo la respuesta que esperaba: "¡Qué cómodo para ti!" Y eso lo sabía, pero aun así lo dijo.

4. Pregunta final

JORGE SACIDO ROMERO: En tu opinión, la teoría marxista debe ayudarnos, a cada uno de nosotros, a realizar nuestro potencial como miembros individuales de la especie humana. En relación con esto, me gustaría que dijeses algo sobre el papel del psicoanálisis en tu proyecto de cambio social, en particular teniendo en cuenta la fuerte

presencia de las ideas psicoanalíticas en tu trabajo, y el hecho de que en el transcurso de esta entrevista solo hayas mencionado el psicoanálisis de pasada.

TERRY EAGLETON: Quizá se debería decir que el psicoanálisis tiene una teoría de las construcciones sociales de la subjetividad, y que por eso en los años 70 y 80 se volvió tan importante para la izquierda: la famosa teoría que faltaba sobre cómo se constituía el sujeto humano. El psicoanálisis parecía llenar ese hueco. Eso fue muy valioso y aún lo es, pienso. Lo que se olvida son las noticias más bien desoladoras que el psicoanálisis, por lo menos en su forma freudiana, tiene para los proyectos de transformación social. El propio Freud era profundamente escéptico acerca de la transformación humana. Buena parte del psicoanálisis vendría a mostrarnos esas fuerzas que amenazan con disolver y socavar nuestros intentos constructivos, fuerzas que al final Freud llama la "pulsión de muerte" o Tánatos. El psicoanálisis nos recuerda nuestra fragilidad, la precariedad de cualquier empresa idealizante. Freud no está contra los ideales, sino que quiere recordarnos una vez más las raíces, muy solitarias y precarias, que tienen. Por otro lado, hay puntos de contacto obvios entre Freud y los freudianos socialistas y los materialistas plenos, aunque no los materialistas históricos. Pienso que no es verdad, al contrario de lo que antaño se consideraba, que a Marx le interesase lo colectivo y a Freud le interesase lo individual. En absoluto. En primer lugar, en muchos sentidos Marx es muy individualista, y, en segundo lugar, de lo que Freud trata es de fuerzas transindividuales que son profundamente impersonales. Para Freud el deseo es verdaderamente impersonal, verdaderamente implacable, y cuando Freud oyó la noticia de que su antiguo discípulo Jung estaba emocionado por haber descubierto algo llamado el "inconsciente colectivo", Freud comentó con desdén que "el inconsciente es colectivo, en cualquier caso". Así que hay abundantes conexiones. Pero mientras que en los años 70 la izquierda se servía de Lacan y Freud casi en exclusiva para una teoría de la ideología, lo cual fue útil, en el psicoanálisis hay, por supuesto, mucho más que no encaja fácilmente en ese marco.

Traducido por Jesús Saavedra Carballido

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