

Hélice



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Reflexiones críticas sobre ficción especulativa



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Acogida

Fernando Ángel Moreno



Tras diez años de *Hélice*, no me parece correcto hablar sólo de la revista —como hice en el número anterior— y de cómo la levantamos, sino también de los cambios que se han producido en la ciencia ficción española. He hablado y hablaré más en otros espacios de la gran revolución estilística y temática que considero que cambió en esta década, quizás en torno al movimiento 15M y sus repercusiones. Por ello, no me extenderé con el contexto sociopolítico.

Sin embargo, sí quiero alabar una gran evolución que creo que ha ocurrido dentro y fuera del fándom.

Cuando comenzamos con *Hélice*, la ciencia ficción española era un coto muy cerrado con unas consignas bastante comunes pese a la ilusoria apariencia de heterogeneidad. Esto podía observarse tanto en las obras publicadas como en la actitud de editores y críticos, tanto dentro del fándom como fuera de él.

Considero que han cambiado muchas cosas, debido a la aparición de algunas figuras y movimientos imprescindibles.

Aunque voy a hablar de amigos y compañeros, aunque voy a ser un poco ombliguista, no puedo defender que el éxito de los géneros proyectivos en la sociedad actual partiera de esta humilde revista, de *Prospectivas* o de cuatro tertulias. No estoy tan loco.

Considero que el éxito se debe primero a las películas de *The Lord of the Rings*, por encima de todo, y luego a quienes crecieron leyendo a Harry Potter. Tampoco debemos desdeñar la influencia de *The Hunger Games* y, creo que más importante de lo que se cree, al impacto de la saga *The Matrix* entre los adolescentes. Todo ello ha terminado por fortalecer sus raíces mediante la avalancha de grandes series de televisión de los últimos quince años. Quienes han vivido todo ello han entendido perfectamente que el realismo y lo cotidiano son formas obsoletas y antinaturales (si se toman como exclusivas) de lo que han sido el arte, el teatro y la literatura a lo largo de la historia de la humanidad.

Estimo también que la mayoría de las personas que dominaron la Cultura de la Transición (CT) en España y que tanto peso institucional aún tienen hoy —en cine y literatura, principalmente— han quedado completamente obsoletas ante la nueva mirada de quienes nacieron entre 1991 y 2001. Se nota especialmente en lo mal que han sabido leer —esos representantes de la CT— los cambios políticos y culturales del país, así como sus constantes ataques contra estas nuevas formas narrativas.

Hace justo una semana —respecto al sábado en que escribo estas líneas— defendí en la Eurocón de Barcelona que la CF española hasta 2010 era de colegio de monjas, que no había sido audaz, que adolecía de falta de nervio y de contenido, lo cual se expresaba como síntoma en su mojigatería política. Algunos escritores se enfadaron mucho conmigo e incluso me insultaron por decirles aquello. Me faltó decir que yo era igual en los noventa.

Éramos ñoños. ¿Qué se le va a hacer? Así que cuando critico el mundo ciencia-ficcional de aquellos tiempos me tengo a mí en mente, además de a todos ellos.



Éramos Cultura de la Transición, por mucho que ya algunos hubiéramos vivido el activismo político o fuéramos algo provocativos en nuestras vidas cotidianas. Éramos ñoños.

Por suerte, casi todos hemos dejado de serlo.

Todo ello cambió a principios de esta década. Creo que el 15M fue al menos un canalizador o una herramienta mediática de muchas cosas que ya habían empezado con protestas como la de la guerra de Irak. No obstante, es cierto que durante los últimos seis o siete años el panorama ha cambiado.

A nivel editorial, Pablo Mazo levantó Salto de Página, editorial polémica dentro del fándom, pero que con sus autores, novelas y antologías introdujo los géneros proyectivos en el mundillo editorial madrileño externo al fándom. Otros lo habían intentado antes, pero quizás no con su mirada. También durante esos años vimos salir del armario friqui a editoriales como Nevsky (con Marian y James Womack) o Aristas Martínez (con Sara Herculano y Cisco Martínez), entre otras. Acantilado publicaba una edición de *En las montañas de la locura*, calificando a Lovecraft en la solapa como «uno de los mejores escritores del siglo xx». Valdemar apostaba no solo por el fantástico clásico, sino también de vez en cuando por autores contemporáneos.

Fuera del mundo editorial, brillantes académicos como Sara Martín, Teresa López-Pellisa, Noemí Novell, Isabel Clúa, Mariano Martín Rodríguez, Mikel Peregrina o Cristina Martínez defendieron sin tapujos (y, lo que es más importante, ya sin apologías introductorias en cada puñetero artículo) el género ante cualquier catedrático casposo y polvoriento que se pusiera por delante.

¿Y el fándom? Bueno... En mi opinión, la lucha de Julián Díez dio sus frutos y cambió las cosas, con el impulso de Xatafi y siempre de las diferentes etapas de la AEFCT, así como de unas pocas tertulias, como la de Santander. Ayudaron muchas editoriales que pelearon contra toda esperanza, como las de Luis G. Prado, Víctor Gallardo, Gabriella Campbell, Pily B o Raúl González, por lo general con poca fortuna. Pero ahí estuvieron nuevas propuestas de premios, de tertulias, webs... con serios intentos por salir del circuito tradicional, del onanismo del fándom anterior. Creo que entre todos consiguieron mucho y que ese esfuerzo fue recompensado, puesto que cuando llegaron las películas y los libros de Harry Potter, *The Lord of the Rings* y *The Hunger Games*, teníamos el terreno abonado.

Y aquí estamos. Con una nueva CF, mucho más audaz, mucho más atrevida, mucho más gamberra y, quizás, con mucho más fondo.

La prueba de este cambio está en el reciente premio Ignotus a *Challenger*, de Guillem López. Gustará más o menos, pero debe celebrarse que el fándom haya mirado fuera para otorgar su premio más querido. Me parece una excelente noticia. Significa que podemos probar nuevas formas, nuevos proyectos... Que ya no hay tantas suspicacias entre el gueto y lo de fuera. Creo que es el buen camino.

¿Qué pasa con los «viejos»? Bueno... Confío mucho en ellos, en la inteligencia, las tablas y la imaginación de Eduardo Vaquerizo, Rodolfo Martínez, Juan Miguel Aguilera, Daniel Mares (por favor, ¡leed a Dani, que me lo vais a agradecer!),



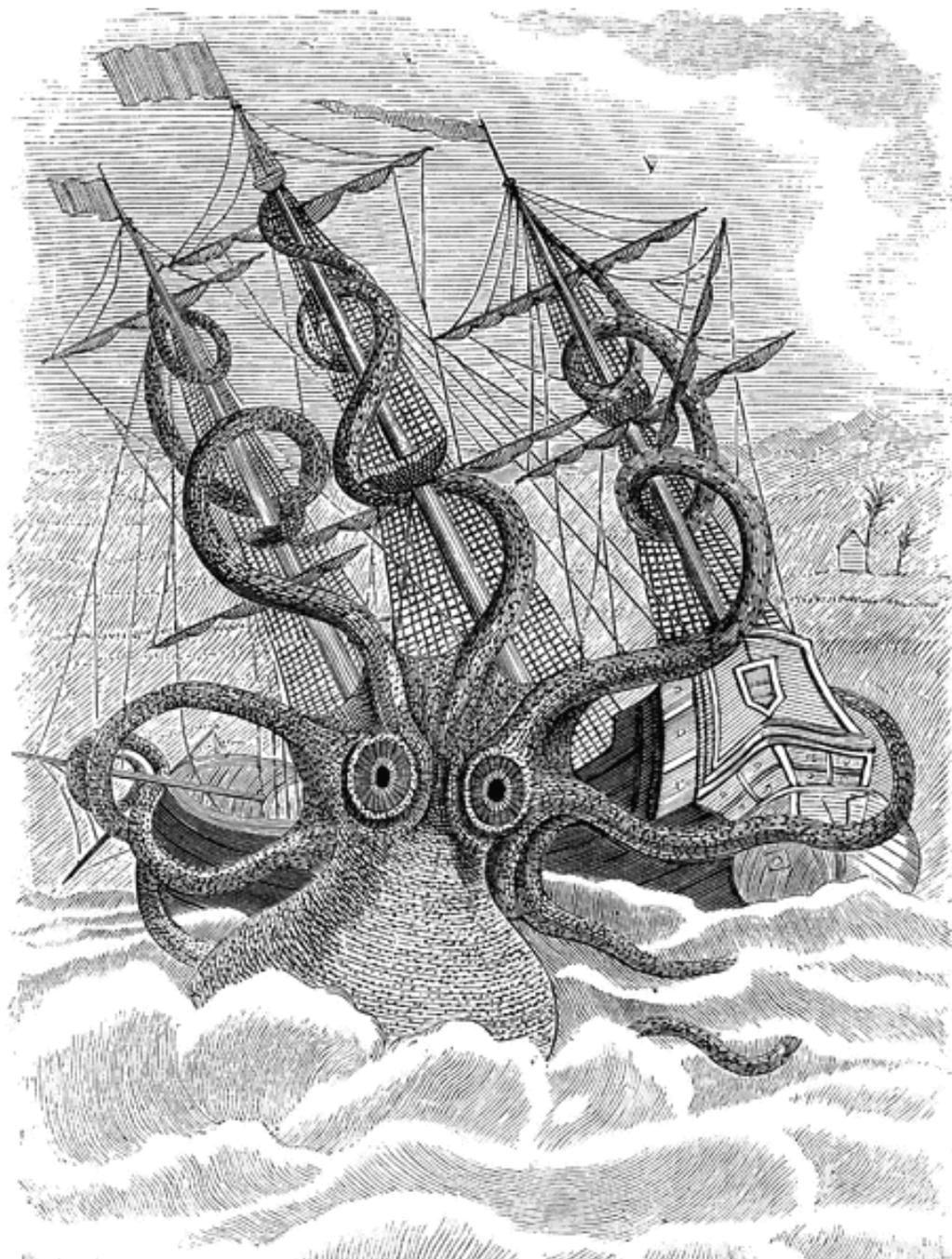
Elia Barceló, César Mallorquí, Rafael Marín... Para explorar este nuevo mundo friqui que vivimos, más friqui ahora que nunca.

Mientras tanto, aprendamos de los «de fuera» y que ellos aprendan de los «de dentro»: Jorge Carrión, Colectivo Juan de Madre, Ismael Martínez Biurrun, Guillem López, Francisco Javier Pérez, Óscar Gual y, por supuesto, más que nunca, Lola Robles, Susana Vallejo, Felicidad Martínez, Sofía Rhei, Cristina Jurado. Creo que la CF española será feminista o no será.

No me gusta cada escritor de esta lista, pero sé algo de todos ellos: han cambiado nuestra ciencia ficción y tienen muchas cosas que decir. Hay que leerlos.

Si hace diez años me hubieran dicho que nos encontraríamos en la situación en que nos encontramos ahora, habría firmado. Más aún..., me habría mordido las uñas por tener que esperar tanto tiempo para correr a la librería.

¡Bienvenidos a bordo!



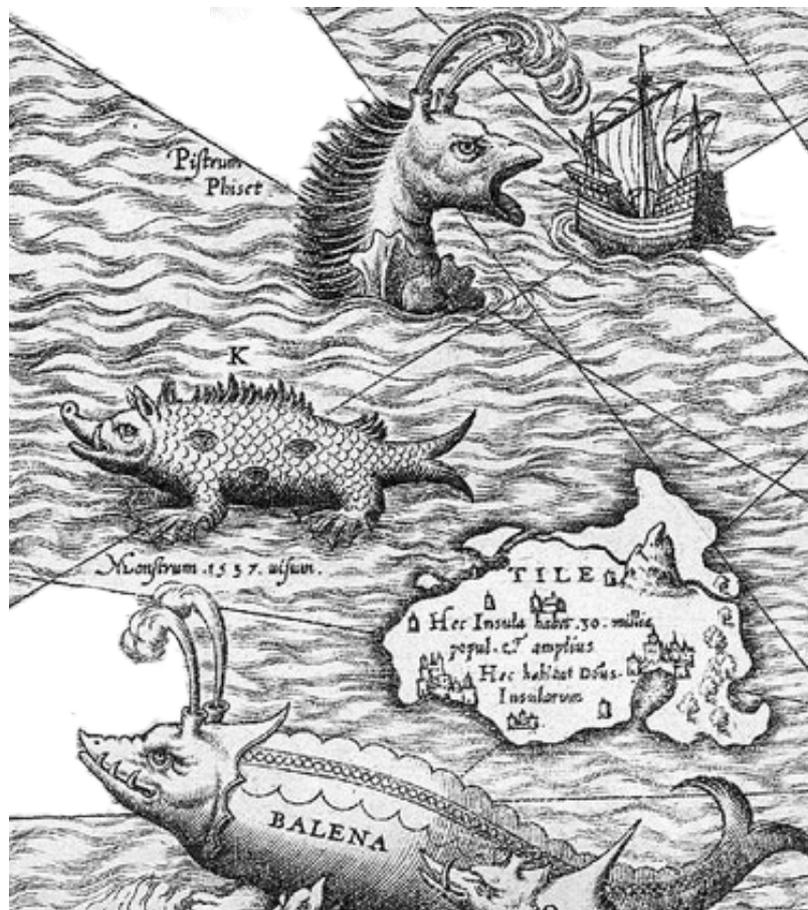
The ArchAndroid: Cyborg Consciousness in Janelle Monáe's Cindi Mayweather Saga

Jana Baró González

We the undersigned star senators have found the alleged recording *The Electric Lady* to contain ungodly messages, revolutionary counter-voodoo, and harmful wondervibes... Therefore, this project is duly unfit for proper customary distribution and consumption at this time... Any droids found jamming to said recordings will suffer instant disassembly in accordance to Code 909. And any human good citizen, male or female, found guilty of distributing, owning or consuming these ungodly messages will be found, captured, and forced to join the harem of the Dark Park Zizzer King. (Stelling 2013)

Donna Haraway's essay "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century", written at the end of the Cold War¹, challenged binary identity categories with some measure of optimism and belief in the potential of technology for positive change. Haraway wrote that

1. A first version of "A Cyborg Manifesto" appeared in the West German journal *Argument* under the title "Liber Kyborg als Göttin", or "Rather Cyborg than Goddess", in 1984. The 1985 version, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s" as published by the American journal *Socialist Review* was much changed (Gandy 2010: 43). This paper is based on the 1991 revised version, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" as it appears in Haraway's *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*.





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“a cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (Haraway 1991: 149); although it is the result of patriarchal, capitalistic schemes, it can also challenge modernist perspectives on subjectivity and consequently undermine binary thought and its resulting oppressions. Haraway is now seen as one of the main inspirations for cyberfeminism, a current that focuses on the Internet as a way to create and communicate. Cyberfeminism has been criticised for its “lack of rigorous definition, something which [...] is aggravated by—and aggravates—its lack of political and historical agency” (Gillis 2004: 186). Similarly, the ambiguity and abstraction of Haraway’s cyborg as a subject—that is, the difficulty of embodying it—has also been the focus of criticism.

Almost three decades later, with the Cold War left behind and the post-gender promises of the Internet mostly unfulfilled, R&B singer-songwriter Janelle Monáe Robinson (Kansas City, 1985)² released her album *Metropolis, Suite I of IV: The Chase* (2007). This was next followed by *The ArchAndroid: Suites II and III* (2010) and *The Electric Lady* (2013), which includes suites IV and V.³ Monáe’s musical saga, aspects of which had appeared in her previous self-produced album *The Audition* (2003), tells the story of the 28th Century android Cindi Mayweather, played—and thus embodied—by Monáe herself in the videos and art that accompany each album release. Cindi’s story is deliberately confusing and non-linear, but its main aspects are simple enough:

Good morning cy-boys and cyber girls!

I’m happy to announce that we have a star-crossed winner in today’s heartbreak sweepstakes.

Android no. 57821 otherwise known as Cindi Mayweather has fallen desperately in love with a human named Anthony Greendown!

And you know the rules?

She is now scheduled for immediate disassembly!

(Irvin II and Joseph III⁴ 2007)

2. While in her song credits she appears as Janelle Monáe Robinson, and this paper will consequently cite her works under her last name, she is known professionally as Janelle Monáe.

3. The number of planned suites has expanded since the original four, and there is no official word on how many will be composed and released.

4. From *Metropolis Suite I (The Chase)* onwards, Janelle Monáe shares most of her writing credits with Nathaniel

Cindi becomes aware of the exploitation and oppression she is subjected to and she runs away. As a rebel android, she is chased by the forces of order of her dystopian society. Eventually, she inspires other androids to rebel and becomes a time-travelling messianic figure, a symbol of hope and liberation.

While an android (wholly machine) and not a cyborg (an organic-machine hybrid), the Cindi Mayweather character shares many aspects with Haraway’s boundary-testing subject; these will be explored in the first part of this article. However, there are also key differences between the two figures. While Haraway’s cyborg is theoretical, and somewhat of a blank slate, Monáe gives her android a recognizable body, voice and aesthetics, and articulates it into a fictional narrative across different media. The android’s embodiment as a black American woman and Monáe’s use of genre conventions, which further forego the cyborg’s ambiguity, will be analysed in the second part. In the third part I’ll offer an overview of Cindi Mayweather as a messianic figure in contrast with Janelle Monáe’s celebrity persona. By offering side-by-side readings of Donna Haraway’s manifesto and of Janelle Monáe’s Cindi albums, this paper will attempt to explore a way in which cyborg consciousness can be articulated in science fiction texts.

I: “A product of the man”: Cyborg consciousness

The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal militarism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential. (Haraway 1991: 151)

I’m a cybergirl without a face a heart or a mind
(A product of the man, I’m a product of the man)
I’m a Slave Girl without a Race
On the run ‘cause they hit our ways
[and chase my kind

(Robinson, Irvin III and Joseph II 2007)

Before exploring the differences between Donna Haraway’s cyborg and Janelle Monáe’s android, it

Irvin III (“Nate Rocket Wonder”) and Charles Joseph II (“Chuck Lightning”), founding members of Wondaland Productions. The resulting label Wondaland Arts Society, created and led by Monáe, was later re-named Wondaland Records.



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would be useful to clarify their origin. Whereas the Enlightenment brought a conception of personal and social identity that is built over static dichotomies such as male/female, one/other, mind/body, spirit/matter, organic/man-made—which, of course, implies the dominance of the former over the latter—the cyborg, being both ‘natural’ and artificial, includes both sides of the binary and consequently questions the frontier between them. The cyborg is born to the advanced capitalistic state as the precarious result of its investment in military research: it is therefore linked to war, to power struggles, and to oppression; according to Haraway, its eventual role is to betray its creator and participate in the end of that state. The cyborg’s story, as Kathi Weeks observes, has a “dystopian taint” (2013: 225). In the manifesto, the cyborg is described as “a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (1991: 149), and the purpose of the text is said to be “to build an ironic political myth” (149): we cannot take her words at face value, but that does not mean they are not serious.

Haraway saw the fast-growing technologies of the late 20th Century as tools to question “assumed political collectivities and their associated essentialist or metaphysical underpinnings” (Gandy 2010: 43), that is, to renounce the single, binding category of ‘Woman’—which assumes a common

Enlightenment brought a conception of personal and social identity that is built over static dichotomies [...] the cyborg, being both ‘natural’ and artificial, includes both sides of the binary and consequently questions the frontier between them.

experience to all women—as the subject of feminism. Instead, she found in the new technologies a chance to create a more fluid subject that would allow for change and multiplicity: the cyborg, who would turn against the very system that created it. Since binary categories can now be transformed or even erased, they become useless; the cyborg may allow for a post-gender (and post-race) subject. However, critics have pointed out that Haraway’s proposed new subject is too vague, too ambiguous. This was probably a deliberate choice, as the purpose of a manifesto is to make its reader feel included and called to action. In fact, some have argued that the difficulty of pinning the cyborg down is precisely what makes it interesting: “The cyborg is elusive insofar as it departs from a traditional model of the revolutionary subject (...) We should read the cyborg less as a retreat from than as a reoccupation of the traditional model of political agency” (Weeks 2013: 219). Its elusiveness is also linked to its ironic purpose and playful, metaphorical nature; instead of pinning down the cyborg, we are invited to become the cyborg.

Haraway did point out in her manifesto that women of colour could easily identify with the cyborg metaphor, as their identity can be read as “a potent subjectivity synthesized from fusions of outsider identities” (1991: 174). Taking into account that feminists of colour have interpreted their own identities as liminal, both born from and oppressed by binaries, Haraway pointed out Chela Sandoval’s development of “a model of political identity called ‘oppositional consciousness’, born of the skills for reading webs of power by those refused stable membership in the social categories of race, sex, or class” (155). When discussing cyborg feminism, Sandoval identified Haraway’s ‘cyborg consciousness’ with her own ‘oppositional consciousness’,⁵ pointing out that the former “can be understood as the technological embodiment” of the latter (2000: 375). Moreover, the cyborg’s turn against its creators can also be identified with Sandoval’s third oppositional technology of power: “meta-ideologizing”, that is, “the operation of appropriating dominant ideological forms and using them whole in order to transform their meanings into a new, imposed, and revolutionary concept” (376). By inviting women of colour in particular to identify with

5. Chela Sandoval also identifies ‘oppositional consciousness’ with the terms ‘US Third World feminism’, “mestiza consciousness”, ‘situated subjectivities’, ‘womanism’, and ‘differential consciousness’ (2000: 375), methodological tools developed by feminists of colour.



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the cyborg, Haraway worked for her own goal to go beyond essentialist and simplistic views of womanhood. Still, Abby Wilkerson reminds us that:

It is, nonetheless, worth asking whether many white feminists have enthusiastically taken up the cyborg myth precisely because of what it does not say about race. At a certain level, the cyborg can be read as an evasion of race, and of whiteness in particular, and thus (...) an evasion of power as well. (1997: 170)

Wilkerson argues that Haraway failed in her demand for “responsibility for boundaries”, whether they are racial or on account of sexual orientation, since she was too ambiguous herself in defining them.

Janelle Monáe's dystopian *Metropolis* could certainly give birth to a cyborg like Haraway's, as it is portrayed as a capitalistic, heavily militarised state. Instead, the ruling class builds sentient androids similar to the replicants of Ridley Scott's 1982 film *Blade Runner*. There are two ways to read this change: if we understand the cyborg to deconstruct the identification between Woman—in the most symbolic, static, passive, essentialist and cisgendered sense of the term—and nature (Balinteanu 2007: 400), it could be said that Monáe pushes this deconstruction further by making the hero both a woman and an android, identifying her wholly with technology.

On the other hand, machines have been also identified with Woman in negative portrayals, as in Fritz Lang's 1927 film *Metropolis*. As Huyssen argued, “Woman, nature, machine had become a mesh of signification which all had one thing in common: otherness” (in Gillis 2004: 190), to which Gillis adds that “The machine is coded as feminine because technology has been demonised as other; technology is othered because it is feminised, particularly information technology” (191). Cindi, as seen in the cover art for *The ArchAndroid*, pays direct homage to the android Maria from *Metropolis* in her design. However, she is neither a villain nor a passive machine to be operated on; she is a free-thinking, active liberator while still representing the Other, as stated by Monáe herself (DeLuca 2010: online).

While it could be said that androids lack the most important characteristic of cyborgs, their hybridity, and therefore do not share their binary-busting potential, their embodiment in living, flesh-and-blood

human actors and singers like Monáe and their human-like conscience brings them close to matching that definition. To make the connection clearer, Monáe first conceived Cindi Mayweather as a cyborg as shown in the song “Metropolis” from the early, ‘unofficial’ album *The Audition*:

View a sky without any blue.
Breakfast on incandescent, built to chew.
Dream to find another world
Where a cyborg can love and a cyber girl is still
a queen.

(Robinson 2003)

The two figures can be analysed through a similar lens; in fact, their origin story matches. Ostentatious android actions appear in the video for “Many Moons” (2008, dir. Alan Ferguson), while radio messages spread warnings and rewards for the capture of the runaway protagonist in between songs. Taking on Cindi's voice, Monáe sings:

I'm a cybergirl without a face a heart or a mind
(A product of the man, I'm a product of the
man)
I'm a Slave Girl without a Race
On the run 'cause they hit our ways and chase
my kind
They've come to destroy me
And I think to myself
Impossibly, (Wait! It's impossible)
They're gunning for me!

(Robinson, Irvin III and Joseph II 2007)

Her status as a result of industrialisation, with the sole purpose of exploitation, is therefore made explicit. It is this very status which brings about her flight, which in its turn brings to light the violence that keeps her society stable.

However, Monáe's embodiment of the android both as a singer and as an actor exposes the irony of the label “without a Race”. Unlike Haraway's elusive, abstract cyborg, Cindi Mayweather is gendered “as female (...) while nonetheless moving well beyond the normative feminine” (English and Kim 2013: 222), as well as racially labelled. The lyrics explicitly refer to the experience of living as an African-American woman, drawing from the past, and present, and dreams for the future, not only from an “I”, but also from a “we”. Cindi's story blurs the lines between metaphor and reality, projecting her lived reality onto the androids' experiences:



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We march all around 'til the sun goes down
night children
Broken dreams, no sunshine, endless crimes
We long for freedom, for freedom
You're free but in your mind, your freedom's
in a bind
(...) Civil rights, civil war
Hood rat, crack
Carefree, nightclub
Closet drunk, bathtub
Outcast, weirdo
Stepchild, freak show
Black girl, bad hair
Broad nose, cold stare.
(Robinson, Irvin III and Joseph II 2007)

Cindi's sexuality is kept slightly more ambiguous than her gender and race, with no explicit labels or references to real events used. However, she expresses attraction to men in "Sir Greendown" and to women in "Q.U.E.E.N.", while the song-interlude "Our Favorite Fugitive" includes the line "robot love is queer", though this is not uttered by Cindi herself.

If Haraway deliberately blurred the cyborg's outlines to make it a mirror in which everyone can be reflected—notwithstanding her reaching out to women of colour—Monáe chooses the android to speak both as part of and to a specific community.

The main difference between Janelle Monáe's android and Donna Haraway's cyborg, then, is the android's specific embodiment and interpellation of black American women in the first place and of those identified as 'Other' secondly.

II: "Day dreamers please wake up": Cyborg tools

Cyborgs are not reverent; they do not re-member the cosmos. They are wary of holism, but needy for connection—they seem to have a natural feel for united front politics. But without the vanguard party. (Haraway 1991: 151)

This is your land
This is my land
We belong here
Stay the night
I am so inspired
You touched my wires
My supernova shining bright
(Robinson, Irvin III, Joseph II 2010)

The main difference between Janelle Monáe's android and Donna Haraway's cyborg, then, is the android's specific embodiment and interpellation of black American women in the first place and of those identified as 'Other' secondly. It has been pointed out that "all of Haraway's subjects share a tendency towards unruliness; they enjoy playing with boundaries and with established certainties. But the cyborg (...) is 'perverse'", because it "challenges assumptions of purity and identity that so often subtend racist, sexist and ethnocentric practices" (Prins 1995: 361). To fulfil its purpose, the cyborg is bound to create conflict in order to bring about a revision of one's ideologies. The cyborg is also a "political ontological project of becoming difference" (Weeks 2013: 227), rather than a stable identity; in my view, the idea that the cyborg must 'become' and stay moveable is especially important.

Before arising as a subject, the cyborg must come to a realisation of itself, since "liberation rests on the construction of consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of possibility" (Haraway 1991: 149). This self-awareness may be brought about by recognising similarities with others; cyborg communities are not only the result of cyborg awakenings, but also their cause. Michelle Bastian argues that the manifesto "develops a kinship network that brings to light connections that have been rendered invisible by conventional Western dichotomies" (2006: 1029). The very same chain of self-realisation, creation of a community, and the fight for liberation is found in Monáe's musical saga. After coming to terms with her status as an outcast, Cindi speaks to her fellow androids:



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Are we really living or just walking dead now?
Or dreaming of a hope riding the wings of angels
The way we live
The way we die
What a tragedy, I'm so terrified
Day dreamers please wake up, we can't sleep
no more.

(Robinson, Irvin III and Joseph II 2007)

But how does that liberation take place? The search for freedom is bound to be conflictive and requires strategic thought. Haraway believed in the usefulness of the very technology which gave birth to the cyborg, but warned that it can be used for oppressive means too, as has been proved in recent years. Social media is now widely used in activism, including planning and participating in protests; the Internet carries, spreads and multiplies calls and warnings. However, social media activity can be censored or easily traced; it can also be used to reinsert a rebellious subject into the old categories it was trying to escape from. As of the late 2010s, the Internet has not brought about a post-gender, post-race world; “embodied patterns of behaviour resist any revolutionary change” (Gillis 2004: 189).

Janelle Monáe's *Metropolis* is a retro-futuristic setting, paying homage to the classic film of the same name, and there is no mention of the Internet or social media in her songs. The oppressive state forces and the rebel androids communicate mostly by radio; the fact that both factions use the same means illustrates perfectly Haraway's point. Through her aesthetic choices, Monáe frames her universe within the tradition of science fiction; by focusing on the experiences of black American women she specifically participates in Afrofuturism, a genre or movement that

‘Describes African-American culture's appropriation of technology and [science fiction] imagery’ and can be understood as an epistemology that both examines the current problems faced by blacks (and people of color more generally) and critiques interpretations of the past and the future. (Durham, Cooper and Morris 2013: 733, citing Dery)

The three scholars describe Janelle Monáe as both a hip-hop feminist and an Afrofuturist artist. Just as Haraway includes playful references to science fiction in her manifesto, Monáe participates of a wide range of musical traditions, from hip hop,

R&B and neosoul to film scores, underlined by her collaboration with other songwriters and her many featured guest artists, from slam poet Saul Williams to worldwide stars such as Big Boi, Miguel, Solange Knowles and, of course, Prince. The Cindi albums include advertisement jingles, cinematic melodies and repetitive pieces reminiscent of political propaganda, bringing her capitalist dystopia to life and making it unsettlingly similar to our own 21st century world.

Her intertextuality is not only musical, but also lyrical—including references to other hip-hop and R&B artists as well as historical figures—and visual. Her concert performances and costumes (until recently, Monáe was almost always seen in sleek black and white tuxedos) have been linked to “often-underappreciated Black artists who have shaped popular music, from Chuck Berry to Little Richard to Prince” (Royster 2017: online). Through her artistic choices, Monáe plays with gender and genre conventions while maintaining an enthusiastic, joyful feel. Just as Haraway asked that her manifesto be taken from a certain distance and sense of humour, Monáe's songs and videos are often postmodern pastiches verging on parody; for instance, the video for “Dance Apocalyptic” (dir. Wendy Morgan) shows a zombie attack in the middle of a Macarena-style dance craze while the singer “want[s] to thank you for dancing ‘til the end” (Robinson, Irvin III and Joseph II 2013). Monáe constantly opposes the violence and need for domination of the rulers of *Metropolis* to the music and dance—that is, the creative inspiration—that Cindi embodies and can offer to her fellow androids.

Through her aesthetic choices,
Monáe frames her universe
within the tradition of science
fiction; by focusing on the
experiences of black American
women she specifically
participates in Afrofuturism.



The ArchAndroid: Cyborg Consciousness in Janelle Monáe's Cindi Mayweather Saga

While it is certainly not possible to describe “A Cyborg Manifesto” as a hip-hop feminist essay, it does share the aim to offer “futurist solutions based on a transgressive ethos” (Durham, Cooper and Morris 2013: 733). Haraway asks the reader to “seiz[e] the tools to mark the world that marked them as other. The tools are often stories, retold stories, versions that reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of naturalized identities” (1991: 175); in other words, the manifesto is an invitation to turn the tables on hegemonic narratives. By choosing an android like *Metropolis*'s Maria and making her a heroine, submerging herself in the science fiction canon and making it her own, Janelle Monáe can be said to have done just that.

III: “Bolder than the truth”: Cyborg messiah

This is not just literary deconstruction, but liminal transformation. Every story that begins with original innocence and privileges the return to wholeness imagines the drama of life to be individuation, separation, the birth of the self, the tragedy of autonomy, the fall into writing, alienation; that is, war, tempered by imaginary respite in the bosom of the Other. (Haraway 1991: 177)

Bring wings to the weak and bring grace to the strong

May all evil stumble as it flies in the world
All the tribes come and the mighty will crumble
We must brave this night and have faith in love
I'm trying to find my peace

I was made to believe there's something wrong with me

And it hurts my heart

Lord have mercy, ain't it plain to see?

(Robinson, Irvin III and Joseph II 2010)

Cindi Mayweather is not only a rebellious android that articulates Donna Haraway's ‘cyborg consciousness’—or Chela Sandoval's ‘oppositional consciousness’—in a fictional text, but eventually a messianic figure in the mythology of *Metropolis*:

Myths delimit the range of possible materializations of nature in the social consciousness. The mythic fabulas, involving god and goddess figures, heroes and heroines, offer models of socialization to men and women. (...) Mythic understandings adorn or disgrace human bodies according

to the meanings born at the intersection between culture and nature. (Balinisteanu 2007: 396)

Cindi is a role model to other androids—and a model of other androids, as she appears to have been cloned at some point of the saga's complicated narrative. In the video trailer for *The ArchAndroid*, an aerial shot of Metropolis is revealed to be Cindi's headdress, as in the album cover, thus identifying her with the city-universe itself. This identification may lead to an essentialist interpretation of Cindi as a nurturing, motherly kind of messiah, but she is only ever shown on the run, inspiring others from afar. It could also be interpreted as the weight she must bear, or as a symbol of her creative potential. Balinisteanu, whose reading focuses on the Borg Queen from *Star Trek*, writes that “because they reiterate role models and action patterns, myths are a powerful force in the materialization of discursive practices and therefore of performances of the body” (415). Cindi starts and embodies a myth that is reiterated and reincarnated in other androids across time and space, allowing others to follow her. Meanwhile, Janelle Monáe as an artist materialises unconventional performances of gender by appropriating aspects of popular music and fashion codified as masculine, such as tuxedos and Chuck Berry-inspired moves, and subverting the traditional demonization of feminine-coded androids such as Maria from *Metropolis*.

Cindi Mayweather is not driven, however, by a desire to become human, but to be free; she calls the other androids to rebellion because of and through love, because she is chased and forced to live in liminal spaces because of her forbidden relationship with a human man. Community and intimacy are thus presented as the only possible alternative against the dystopian state. Janelle Monáe articulates cyborg consciousness by placing love in the foreground and making it Cindi's motivation and goal. In her lyrics and visuals, love, freedom and dance are closely linked: resistance is portrayed as dance, controlled bodies in apparent frenetic chaos. For instance, in the video for “Q.U.E.E.N.” (dir. Alan Ferguson) the rebel leaders are kept in a museum in suspended animation. Similar images of oppression as physical restraint appear in the video for “Tightrope” (dir. Wendy Morgan), which is set in an asylum. Francesca Royster points out that “Cindi's performance [in the video for “Many Moons”] is so powerful that her body literally explodes onstage—speaking both to the transformative powers



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of Black music and to the vulnerability of Black women's bodies" (2017: online). The importance of fluidity and the notion of becoming to the cyborg has already been mentioned; in fact, according to Anne Allison the force of the cyborg is in destruction, transformation and change (2001). Following that thread we find that these elements are also fundamental in what Sandoval calls "a differential postmodern form of oppositional consciousness", or "CyberConsciousness" (1995: 376). All in all, Monáe's music style and lyrical focus are a perfect vehicle to articulate a subversive cyborg myth.

It is worth noting that in the videos for "Tightrope" and "Q.U.E.E.N." Janelle Monáe appears as herself and not as Cindi Mayweather, although she is still presented through a fictionalised, 'rebel leader' narrative. Therefore, we can talk of Cindi or the rebel android as a persona comparable to David Bowie's Ziggy Stardust. Her performance of Cindi has gone beyond her albums, as she has handed out "Ten Droid Commandments" pamphlets at concerts (Andrews 2010), uses the double name "Janelle Monáe, Cindi" as her official Twitter username as of April 2017, and has been read through a science fiction lens by interviewers:

Sitting in a grey, airless record company office, this slight, stiff young woman delivers her speech in slow, deliberate tones, utterly expressionless. Dressed in her trademark starched shirt and tuxedo, hair immaculately quaffed, Monáe's face is an opaque mask of perfection: all silken smooth skin, button nose and glassy brown eyes. I begin to worry for a moment that Monáe may not just be a humourless science-fiction nerd, but actually an android herself, created in a laboratory as a super-musical cross between James Brown, Judy Garland, Andre 3000 and Steve Jobs, invented to test the desperate incredulity of music journalists. (McNulty 2010: online)

Even more explicitly, in her official Instagram profile she describes herself as "An Artist. Other. Young Jedi. Rebelutionary. ArchAndroid. CoverGurl. Afro futurist. Renaissance Woman".

Nonetheless, the identification of Janelle Monáe the artist and celebrity and the persona of Cindi Mayweather is not complete. In her more overt protest songs, like "Q.U.E.E.N." or "Cold War", the android metaphor is dropped altogether. As her career advances, there are more songs and performances outside the Metropolis concept: it was Janelle Monáe, without a persona, who performed "Hell You Talmbout" at the Women's March on Washington in January 2017 to protest the murder of black people at the hands of police officers (Royster 2017). Her acting career, which so far includes two films honoured at the Academy Awards—*Moonlight* and *Hidden Figures*—, has also made her known to film journalists.⁶ While in her red carpet appearances from 2016 onwards she seems to have moved beyond the androgynous tuxedo of the era of the Cindi albums, she still maintains a science fiction, retro-futuristic aesthetic of black and white outfits, capes and starry accessories.

How can we read Monáe's embodiment of cyborg consciousness, then? Indeed, she articulates it both as a metaphor and as a reality while moving beyond the ambiguity that has been said to weaken Haraway's proposal. Abby Wilkerson bluntly argued that it is not at all clear "how the cyborg can help in the project of taking responsibility for boundaries, whatever they may turn out to be" (1997: 168); in other words, the place of the cyborg in the discourse of power and oppression is not clear if the subjects it is supposed to represent are not made unambiguous. Monáe finds a solution by building a science-fiction narrative from her experience as a black American woman and addressing her fellow "electric ladies" and Others. However, because the individual figure of Cindi Mayweather is made into a messianic myth within the fictional narrative of Metropolis to the point that she is identified with cyborg consciousness, its nomadic, chaotic potential is lost. If Matthew Gandy differentiates between Haraway's metaphorical, playful cyborg and "the more recent and often literal inscriptions of the cyborg figure as a symbol of the 'superhuman'" of popular culture (2010: 43), Monáe's version is somewhere in between. Reading the two

6. It is more difficult to tell whether her appearance as a performer in the science fiction series *Stargate Universe* was as Janelle Monáe or as Cindi, as she sang "Many Moons".



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texts together certainly complicates their interpretation, as for better or for worse, reading Cindi as a realisation of cyborg consciousness means writing over its beckoning blank slate. Just like Cindi Mayweather's saga has not ended, Janelle Monáe's place in contemporary science fiction and gender theory cannot be pinned down yet. As she defiantly sings:

March to the streets 'cause I'm willing & I'm able
Categorize me, I defy every label
And while you're selling dope, we're gonna
keep selling hope
We rising up now, you gotta deal, you gotta cope
Will you be electric sheep?
Electric ladies, will you sleep?
Or will you preach.

(Robinson, Irvin III, Joseph II
and Parker Jr. 2013) ●

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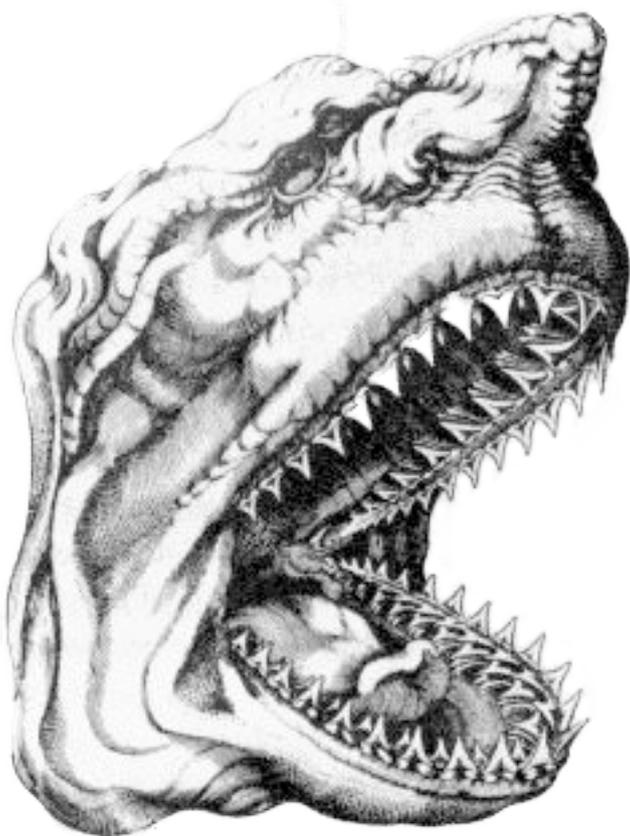
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Your Will is Not your Own: The Consequences of Being a Cyborg in *Deus Ex Human Revolution*

We were cold, so we harnessed fire. We were weak, so we invented tools. Every time we met an obstacle, we used creativity and ingenuity to overcome it. The cycle is inevitable... but will the outcome always be good?

Adam Jensen

Rubén Campos



In her much debated, much quoted and still nowadays much controversial “A Cyborg Manifesto”, Donna Haraway introduces the notion of the cyborg not only as a union of machine and flesh, but also as the symbolic crossroads in which categories, dualisms and identities are suspended, questioned and reconstructed (1991: 181). In this blurring of boundaries implied by the hybridity of the cyborg, many theorists have seen the opportunity to question and challenge the roles of gender and the body, both male and female, that dominate and define current and contemporary social contexts. Since its publication in 1991, the manifesto has become a staple to those daring to enter the cyborg debate, to the extent that, still in our times, Haraway’s optimism is still much shared.

While it is true that the figure of the cyborg may encompass such ideals, the actual realization and application of cyborgian technology, however, may also have its own unwanted drawbacks, such as the segregation of the unaugmented (humans without technological improvements), or the loss of individual freedom, total or partial, in exchange of an improved quality of life. In this article, I will analyze in what ways, be them positive or negative, the rise of cyborg technology can affect established social structures and to what extent the rebuilding of identities is as actual and effective as theorists claim it to be. To support my claim, I will focus my study on the videogame *Deus Ex: Human*



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Revolution (Eidos Montréal, 2011) a narrative that puts the player right into the debate of human augmentation and that questions the figure of the cyborg itself.

1. The Game: Narrative and Context

The year is 2027. Adam Jensen, the protagonist and the character controlled by the player, is a former police officer and SWAT specialist now working as the chief of security of Sarif Industries, one of the most prominent companies in the market of augmentations. Due to a terrorist attack by a team of BlackOps augmented terrorists in which many of Sarif's scientists are killed, Jensen is badly injured and left in a near death state that he can only overcome thanks to the augmentations and enhancements performed to his almost dead body. With these events as a starting point, Jensen embarks on a quest to find out the truth behind the attack, only to discover a conspiracy of global proportions that involves every augmented human being on the planet and, of course, the Illuminati.

After the first minutes of gameplay, it becomes clear that augmentations are not something rare or exclusive, but rather a part of the everyday life of most people. However, although cyborg technology is common and widespread, the game does not force a positive or negative view about it on the player. Instead, it shows from the very beginning that, although augmentations are useful and helpful, they are also the root of controversy and conflict: "ambivalence towards human augmentation is something of a recurring motif in *DXHR*'s plot. For example, the second you step outside the offices of Sarif Industries, you are confronted by the prejudice of non-augmented people who look upon the augmented with a distaste bordering on outright hatred" (McAlmont 2011: online).

In fact, one of the major points around which the game revolves is the moral debate on technological augmentation, a debate that not only surrounds the player in the form of riots, combats and dialectical confrontations, but also makes the player a direct part of it. Although the main character and thus the player's avatar is irrevocably augmented, the player ultimately decides whether he or she wants to further improve or enhance the character or not and how to use its newfound powers.

2. A Matter of Boundaries

Following Haraway's train of thought, many theorists have speculated about the value of the cyborg as a converging entity, the liminal point where all categories must be rebuilt and rethought. In her article "Cyberspace, Feminism and Technology: of Cyborgs and women", Stacy Gillis follows a similar path according to which "the hierarchical domination of the white, able-bodied male body which has for so long represented all bodies—and that has been the accepted norm for bodies—is disrupted by the confusion offered by the machine/human dyad that is the cyborg" (2008: 208). One would think that the scenario presented in *DXHR* is the perfect excuse to show the outcome of such disruption, but the truth is that the story does nothing in that regard. In fact, it does quite the opposite.

DXHR is a typical conspiracy narrative (it even features the Illuminati!) with a white, more-than-able-bodied male body as a protagonist and many white and also male bodies as secondary characters and antagonists. While still key to the story, female roles are usually absent in narrative terms, with the exceptions perhaps of Zhao Yun Ru, one of the main villains and CEO of the world leading augmentation company Tai Yong Medical, among a few others. Although strong in themselves, these characters and their portrayal, whether they be male or female, do not question or challenge gender roles in any significant or innovative way. Why, then, does a cyborg narrative disregard such an opportunity? First, we must not forget that this videogame, despite its deeper than usual topics and storytelling, is still a commercial product that has to reach a wide audience. Hence, it needs a protagonist with whom most players can relate¹ and a daring but not too daring story and plot.

¹ Although unique in many ways, Jensen cannot seem to escape the realm of the common looking protagonists that seem to populate modern videogames. See:

<http://www.destructoid.com/brown-hair-and-stubble-the-new-face-of-modern-videogames-178442.phtml>



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However, and this is a very important however, theorists have also taken into account the possibility that the cyborg may not be the harbinger of change that Haraway foretold, which seems to be the case in *DXHR*: “When a cyborg becomes recognizably human, it is unable to challenge the human stereotypes, classifications and expectations guiding its performance —as, in order to become recognizably human, the cyborg must behave in predictable ways and operate according to dominant social norms, thus abandoning its own potential for liminality” (Lavigne 2013: 83, original emphasis). Cyborgs in *DXHR* are recognizably human, and thus are subjected to all prejudices and stereotypes to which humans, whether augmented or non-augmented, are also vulnerable to. They operate according to the dominant social norms and expectations, for, although stronger, faster and smarter, they are still human. It could be said, then, that *DXHR* challenges Haraway’s optimistic perception of the cyborg by questioning its potential for change and turning it into just an enhanced version of a human being.

3. The Breach: Technology, Gender and Power

If anything, the technology presented in *DXHR* contributes to the creation and widening of a social and unconquerable breach between those who can and want to enhance themselves and those who do not. From the very beginning, it is made clear to the player that society’s stand on augmentation is rather fragmented and conflictive. These radically different points of view are embodied by the anti-augmentation groups of Humanity Front and Purity First. The first one, a political pro-humanist group, fights its battles in courts, conferences and hearings, whereas the second one, a pseudo terrorist group, prefers the streets as its battlefield. Although these two groups defend essentially the same ideal (that humanity should not be playing god), their radically different ways of preaching their message depict very accurately the polarization in which society is immersed.

The implications of such a moral crossroads, however, are much more practical and down-to-earth than they may initially seem, for their consequences are a real problem for everyday people. At one point in the game, Jensen is asked for help by a prostitute who is being coerced by her bosses to undergo physical augmentations so that she can better please her customers, just like many of her partners have already done. In an attempt to keep the scant control over her body she still maintains, the woman turns to Jensen for help. This single event perfectly exemplifies the extent to which cyborg technology rules the life of common people, whether they are subject to it or not. In addition, it is also the example of a patriarchal society exerting new forms of power over the disempowered.

In fact, every single interaction with cyborgian technology can be read as a form of control, for augmentation comes with consequences. In order to keep the body healthy and prevent the rejection of augmentations, the patient must regularly consume doses of a substance known as neuropozyne, which is only available by prescription. If we add this to the fact that the manufacturing and distribution of cyborg implants is concentrated in the hands of a very limited set of corporations, we get a perfect grid of control over a mostly defenceless population.

As human beings become more and more dependent on cyborg technology, due to social pressure and neuropozyne, they run the risk of becoming slaves not only to the same technology they depend



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on but also of its masters: “While technology may enframe objects by bringing them into being for human resource, people too, can be enframed by technology as objects to be used and manipulated” (Toffoleti 2007: 11). What Toffoleti may pose as a figurative way of speaking, in the game is turned into a reality for people can really *become* tools that can be used and disposed of, activated and deactivated and even forced to commit acts against their own will.

At the beginning of the game, Jensen is sent to deal with a group of Purity First activists who have broken into one of Sarif’s facilities, only to see how one of its members, previously augmented against his will, is forced by an unseen assailant to shoot himself in the head as he is controlled through a neural implant. Depending on the player’s choices, Jensen himself can also be the victim of the very same technology that keeps him alive when he is literally *shut down* by one of the villains and has to fight his way deprived of his augmentations.

The problem becomes worldwide, however, when the final conspiracy of global domination is revealed and villain Hugh Darrows, the father of augmentation and also a member of the Illuminati, activates a kill switch that turns almost the entirety of the augmented human population into raging murderers, with the only exception of Jensen. By acting this way, Darrows exposes to the world not only the reach of his own organization but also the dangers of cyborgian technology. Although in the end Jensen manages to revert the situation, the message has been sent and the vulnerabilities revealed.

Under this new light, Lavigne’s assertion that “cyborg figures (...) might create entirely new categories and thus [can] successfully be used to illustrate the arbitrary nature of current cultural dichotomies” (2013: 82) acquires a new and more disturbing meaning, for these new categories, while irrelevantly genderless, are ultimately based on the extreme exertion of power and the total and crushing inability to resist it. In these categories, there are no people but tools.

4. The Cyborg as Interpellation Process

In his essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” (1971), Louis Althusser introduces the concept of the repressive state apparatus linked with the theory of interpellation. In Althusser’s view, there are two main ways in which the state can

control and exert power over the population. The first one, which he calls ‘Repressive State Apparatus’, acts through the Government, police, army and other institutions in order to ensure the compliance of the individual and ‘functions by violence’ be it physical or nonphysical (Althusser 1971: 143). The second one, which he identifies as ideological interpellation, works its power through the press, radio, television and the media, and limits the individual as a subject by determining the ideas the individual can consciously choose as a subject (167).

As it has been discussed, in *DXHR* the cyborg is a very powerful tool of control mainly due to the utter dependence augmented individuals have on neuropozyne and, by extension, on the those who have the means to produce it. Another, perhaps less obvious way in which cyborgian technology shapes and determines the life and options of the individual is through the perpetuation of ideology, gender roles and stereotypes. While it is true that augmented individuals are capable of feats they were not before, we must not forget that the cyborg, for all its potential for liminality, is still presented as recognizably human and is, therefore, still subject to all forms of control and manipulation unaugmented humans are. As an extension of a human being, the cyborg is the perfect tool of interpellation, for it creates a situation of literal dependence between the subject and those with the means of production. In addition, being recognizably human, the figure of the cyborg carries with it all the stigmas, limitations and expectations imposed by and associated to ideology.

As part of the advertising campaign of *DXHR*, a series of clips were released in the form of very short documentaries in which augmented users narrated their own experience with cyborgian technology. In these clips, supposedly filmed and edited by Sarif Industries to promote and sell their products, augmentations are discussed in a very positive light by a group mostly comprised of male, white, able-bodied individuals who conform to the perceived stereotype of gendered beauty. The only woman in the clip is also presented along these lines. This fact is relevant for two reasons. First, augmentations are being presented as what they truly are: products that can be purchased and thus, objects that have monetary value. Second, augmentations are portrayed as being an integral part of the self. Their appearance is so smooth and organically devised that they become part of the individual, both physically and perceptively.



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In associating augmentations with a group of individuals of certain, desired characteristics, ideologies of representation of gendered beauty are furthered and enforced, and thus the room for the questioning and challenging of boundaries is greatly diminished, if not outright eliminated. Furthermore, the fact that augmentations are but another product that can be bought and sold creates a breach not only between those who can augment themselves and those who cannot or choose not to, but also between those who can augment themselves with top quality modifications and those who only have access to lesser quality ones. This way, cyborgian technology is turned into just another commodity that carries with it implied meanings of ideology and social status.

Having seen this, it could be argued that the cyborg, envisioned as presented in *DXHR*, is so seamlessly integrated into the human body that it negates most of the potential for challenge. This way, it becomes a tool through which the state apparatus can exert its power over the population, be it through augmented physical means or through the ideological interpellation of the subject.

Some conclusions

To conclude, it could be said that the cyborg debate is far from being settled. *DXHR* offers only one of the many possibly outcomes of a society on the brink of fully accepting the cyborg, not only as a way of self-improvement, but rather as the next step in evolution. True, the figure of the cyborg has an undeniable impact on the society in which it appears, and its appearance is indeed a symptom of change and turmoil. Social gaps and moral debates are bound to erupt, but that is only natural when humanity is faced with the possibility of engineering its own evolution. Although the scenarios presented in the game are far from optimistic, the fact that there are people still willing to fight against domination is reason enough to believe that a better future can be achieved through technology, even if the dangers are many. ●

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The Man at the End of the Earth: Post-Apocalyptic Masculinity and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*

Ross Church

Introduction

American film audiences are accustomed to seeing their country in some form of nuclear, ecological, or supernatural ruin, and revel in a sense of the apocalyptic sublime, in what the narrator of *The Road* calls “the ponderous counter spectacle of things ceasing to be” (McCarthy 2006: 300). The post-apocalyptic genre, and McCarthy's *The Road*'s place within it, is interesting because as the literal meaning of apocalypse—‘to uncover, to disclose’—suggests, apocalyptic texts since the *Book of Revelation* have linked destruction with the discovery of the truth. As McCarthy's protagonist, known only as ‘the man’, thinks: “perhaps in the world's destruction it would be possible to see how it was made” (300). Destruction may reveal the prior process of creation, but also the true nature of life itself. Thus, this article will examine how the post-apocalyptic genre, and wider religious apocalyptic religious discourse, has made claims about the ‘true’ nature of masculinity and femininity, which, as I will argue here, are inherently conservative. From this, this paper will explore how *The Road* partially concedes and partially resists the patriarchal ideology which governs its genre.





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A Short History of 'The End'

Religious belief in the Apocalypse has, for a long time, been a significant force in American society and culture. In fact, post-apocalyptic fiction can be seen to partially emerge from this religious discourse. In *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism*, Matthew Sutton has traced the beginning of American premillennialism's widespread popularity to the 1878 publication of William E. Blackstone's book *Jesus is Coming*. Devoted to predicting the imminent destruction of the world, this text "transformed the faith of millions in the United States" (Sutton 2014: 9) as it sold over a million copies by 1935, many more subsequently, making it, Sutton argues, one of "the most influential religious books of the twentieth century" (2014: 9). *Jesus is Coming* initiated a wider movement, for in the late 19th and early 20th century there was a "meteoric growth of churches and denominations that claimed premillennialism in their statement faith" (Sutton: 27). With the Second World War and the dropping of two nuclear bombs in 1945, world events seemed to provide both credibility and shape to the coming end-times. This led to apocalyptic beliefs infiltrating popular culture: "music, literature, and the arts all testified to the fact that in the post-holocaust, post-Hiroshima world (...) citizens had embraced apocalypticism" (Sutton: 296). Premillennialists were effectively using the medium of popular culture to spread its message, and consequently, their beliefs were becoming part of popular culture itself. This evident with *Left Behind*, a series of incredibly popular books which "explain American eschatology from beginning to end" through exciting fiction (Sutton 2014: 365). These books sold over sixty-three million copies and were only to be outsold by J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (Sutton: 365).

Religion and *The Road*

The Apocalyptic Christian movement provided some of the founding texts in the post-apocalyptic genre and were to influence, or at least inflect, the wider secular culture. This religious context is apparent in *The Road*, although the text is deeply agnostic. One critic has argued that the novel's unspecified disaster is religious in nature, noting parallels in the imagery in *The Road* with the prophecies of the *Book of Revelation* (Grindley 2008: 11-13). Another critic has noted that as the disaster happened

at 1:17, it echoes Chapter 1, Verse 17 in the Bible which describes God's creation of light, thus making the unspecified disaster an inversion of biblical creation (Hage 2010: 143). The man directly references past prophets when he is dying, saying to his son, 'the boy': "look around you (...) There is no prophet in the earth's long chronicle who's not honoured here today. Whatever form you spoke of you were right" (303). The man has explicitly described the events in *The Road* as the culmination of a religious apocalyptic tradition. This religious context is particularly important for exploring issues of masculinity in *The Road* as the religious discourse of the Apocalypse intersects with patriarchal ideology, which we will see continues, in certain ways, in secular post-apocalyptic fiction, and which must inform our reading of *The Road*.

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Apocalyptic Discourse and Patriarchal Ideology

It is of course a truism that religious apocalyptic belief is socially conservative and inseparable from patriarchal ideology. Billy Sunday, an influential premillennialist, claimed that “woman is the battleground of the universe” (in Sutton 2014: 141). Female liberation was seen a major cause and manifestation of the coming apocalypse, thereby justifying the enforcement of the subordinate role of women within a patriarchal society. It was, as many believed, a “defiance of the Almighty’s supposed gender hierarchy”, which “had triggered” God’s “rage in the Old Testament and fundamentalists felt confident that the changes happening around them would soon incite God’s last-days wrath” (Sutton, 2014: 138).

The conservative gender politics of apocalyptic religious discourse has its roots, of course, in its origins, in the already mentioned *Book of Revelation*. Take this (in)famous passage:

I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH (*Revelation*: 17.4, cited in *Biblehub*; original capitalized text)

The woman dressed in purple represents Babylon and the decadent and pagan Roman Empire (*Biblehub*: online). In this extraordinary passage, evil is equated with, and expressed as, feminine sexuality. This allows us to see how profoundly patriarchal apocalyptic discourse is. This has been explored in a brief essay by Lee Quinby, in which he claims

that “patriarchal masculinity” was partly “canonized” (1999: 1) by the *Book of Revelation*. The text justified female subordination through “the denunciations of Jezebel, the figuration of Babylon as a female whore, and the idealizations of the submissive Woman Clothed with the Sun” (1999: 2), so that the “the deployment of the *Book of Revelation* over time produces an apocalyptic masculinity and masculinist millennialism as mutually reinforcing embodiments of patriarchy” (2). The *Book of Revelation* is, thus, an essential text to the creation and maintenance of patriarchal ideology within Christianity and, subsequently, within Christian society and culture. This is the inescapable context of post-apocalyptic fiction. What is particularly interesting is that secular post-apocalyptic texts often show a similar connection between imagining the Apocalypse and patriarchal ideas. Many post-apocalyptic texts are, partly, patriarchal fantasies, and therefore these works can be said to constitute an inherently conservative genre.

Post-Apocalyptic Fictions as Patriarchal Fantasy

The post-apocalyptic space is masculine. Male and female roles return to a supposedly ‘primitive’ state in which women are often powerless sexual objects. Men embody patriarchal ideas of maleness, surviving through technical ingenuity, power and violence. The genre present a “Hobbesian (...) state of nature” characterized by a “relentless competition and a war of all against all” (Sugg 2015: 793) in which the female is either absent or the victim. *The Road* is no exception, for it shows how the world has reverted to a form of primitive militaristic patriarchy, in which the dominant social group is now a horde or tribe. A description of one such group highlights their savage masculinity, which is exaggerated by their phallic weapons: “An army in tennis shoes, tramping. Carrying three-foot lengths



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If gender is, as Judith Butler argues, a performance, then post-apocalyptic fiction presents humanity without any artifice.

Post-apocalyptic fiction as patriarchal fantasy has been considered elsewhere by Katherine Sugg, who describes how many post-apocalyptic texts (like *The Walking Dead*) are responses to a crisis in masculinity in late capitalism.

of pipe with leather wrappings (...) Bearded their breath smoking through their masks (...) The phalanx following carried spears or lances (...) Behind them came (...) women, perhaps a dozen in number, some of them pregnant" (101). Women are reduced to chattel, objects of sexual pleasure which, grotesquely, will become a means of providing nutrition. We see this in another scene as babies are now food: "what the boy had seen was a charred human infant headless and gutted" (223). The sexual violation of women has become a literal form of consumption. The woman's physical integrity is, in the profoundest sense, violated.

What makes this aspect of this genre particularly conservative is that in the absence of civilization, we are presented with an *imagined* but supposedly natural state of life. If gender is, as Judith Butler argues (1990), a performance, then post-apocalyptic fiction presents humanity without any artifice. We are supposed to see the human as they really are, including the real nature of the different sexes. These texts reinforce the idea of patriarchal man's natural violence and the passive weakness of the female. They invoke familiar (patriarchal) versions of masculinity and femininity. This is not to say that in a post-apocalyptic world a violent and hyper-patriarchal system of life would not emerge, but the genre naturalizes patriarchal concepts of gender, very much in the way the *Book of Revelation* 'canonizes' patriarchy.

Patrick B. Sharp, whose book focuses upon race in texts about the nuclear apocalypse, has shown how the post-apocalyptic world has allowed writers to re-imagine the American frontier (2007: 6). In doing so, writers reinvigorated forms of masculinity which were suppressed in modern society. Many of these nuclear frontier stories "relished the prospect of civilization being destroyed" (Sharp: 171) as they allowed man to exist in his 'natural' state. Post-apocalyptic fiction as patriarchal fantasy has been considered elsewhere by Katherine Sugg, who describes how many post-apocalyptic texts (like *The Walking Dead*) are responses to a crisis in masculinity in late capitalism. This crisis of white masculinity brought about by "recent social and economic transformations" meant that survival narratives provide a "nostalgic return" to "masculine agency and authority" (Sugg 2015: 793). Not only, then, do post-apocalyptic fictions naturalize patriarchal concepts but they also actively create patriarchal fantasies, compensating for man's sense of disempowerment.



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The Hero(ine)?

The man's wife, the boy's mother in *The Road*, is usually remembered by the father through her sexualized (or eroticized) body, for he recalls how "he could feel the tops of her stockings through the thin stuff of her summer dress" (18), or "her crossing the lawn (...) in a thin rose gown that clung to her breasts" (30). However, despite this focus on her feminine physicality, the man's only recollection of her voice, during their discussion of her decision to commit suicide, we hear a provocative and powerful character. She challenges the man's masculinity by suggesting that he does not have the ability to fulfil the typical male role of protector: "You can't protect us (...) maybe you'll be good at this, but I doubt it" (63), but she also challenges the patriarchal ideology at the heart of the post-apocalyptic genre.

The Road is part of an inherently conservative genre, because this genre generally can only imagine a world in which women are either absent or doomed to male subjection. The woman plays on her existence within a post-apocalyptic text, within this particular genre, by saying; "we're not survivors. We're the walking dead in a horror film" (62). They are only provisionally alive, they can only "wait" for their end, and especially for a woman in such horror films she is particularly vulnerable (as is the boy): "sooner or later (...) they will rape me. They'll rape him. They are going to (...) kill us and eat us" (63). She fully understands the untenable place of the female within the post-apocalyptic patriarchal environment. At the prospect of brutal victimhood, the wife chooses death by her own hand. In explaining this choice she questions the whole idea of the man's project of survival; "you talk about taking a stand, but there is no stand to take" (63).

She recognizes that his desire to live is part of the wider patriarchal conception of life as a battle, as a "stand" against unfavourable odds. His desire to live, regardless of everything, is the product of futile masculine heroics, potentially derived from the "old stories of courage and justice" (44) he was

once told and now tells his son. However, in choosing death, the mother challenges more than this vision of life, she challenges, by comparison, the Christian morality which the man and boy incongruously attempt to maintain, a system in which suicide and (non-defensive) murder is wrong, and so is stealing, so that the boy often asks if it "okay" for them to "take" (154) the food they find. When they come across a harrowing scene of a man struck by lightning, with "one of his eyes burnt shut" (54), the inadequacy of the father's old moral system becomes apparent. According to the mother's own thinking, death can be a blessing, a mercy. To kill this man would certainly be the humane thing to do rather than leaving him to die an agonizing death. However, the father can't articulate or conceive this: "Can't we help him? Papa?" his son asks, "No, we can't help him. There is nothing to be done for him" (54). The father's insistence on life, as he always insists to his faltering son "you can't give up. I won't let you" (211), can become a form cruelty, a perpetuation of absurdity.

The mother presents her suicide within the Madonna/whore dichotomy. She could choose to stay with her child, that is to say, to be a mother (a Madonna), or, as she actually does, she can commit suicide and 'abandon' her child and family. Any female behaviour which is contrary to motherhood, which breaks from the supposed female role, is often understood as sexual deviancy. Her 'abandonment' is, thus, equated to the actions of a 'whore': "You can think of me as faithless slut if you like. I've taken a new lover" (63), the lover being death (to die, significantly, has always been linked to the female orgasm). The woman, I would argue, is subverting this idea of the woman who rejects motherhood as a whore, for she has not internalized this language, she offers this idea "if" he would "like". Her speech, in fact, reminds us of (and parodies) earlier examples of the patriarchal discourse which is hostile to female agency; ironically, she places herself in a tradition of "sluts" who originate in the figure of Babylon.



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The mother imagines death as male, a lover, a man walking “out in the road” (185), which accurately reflects how danger is primarily masculine in the post-apocalyptic world. The father, however, feminizes death, almost equating death with his wife, an unsettling sexualized creature: “In his dreams his pale bride came to him out of a green and leafy canopy. Her nipples pipeclayed and her rib bones painted white” (18). Once again, we see a connection to the whore of Babylon, the fatal temptress, death gendered as female. The man, compared to the woman, sees death as a defeat, emasculation if you will, whereas as the mother’s speech argues, death can be a form of self-affirmation. Her decision to commit suicide is the logical conclusion to the new world. The reader must have sympathy for her “hope (...) for eternal nothingness” (63). Her suicide is the only form of female resistance (other than through complicity in savagery which is available to some females in the novel). The mother accepts death, and in doing so, maintains the integrity of her own physical self. What is so radical in this act is that in this determination to preserve the self, she challenges the patriarchal idea that the mother’s existence is intrinsically bound to the life of the child. Like Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* (1899), she has chosen death (which is a form of self-preservation) over motherhood (which is a form of death). Unlike the old survivor Ely, she is the only one to actually choose to die, making her an example of bravery, for it is the fear of death which keep many of these characters alive, as Ely and the father’s conversation show:

Do you wish you would die?
No. But I might wish I had died. (...)
Or you might wish you’d never been born.
Well. Beggars cant be choosers. (184)

Fathers and Sons

The mother not only challenges the patriarchal thinking and behaviour in this book, she is also the most insightful character, providing an incisive reading of the father’s relationship to his son. One critic has described how their relationship seems to be untroubled by oedipal conflict, as their relationship shows how “the oedipal paradigm passes with the patriarchal culture that generated it” (Cant 2009: 197). Indeed, there are many occasions where their relationship imitates a familial domesticity:

“They ate slowly out of bone china bowls, sitting at opposite sides of the table with a single candle burning between them” (234). However, the critic Arielle Zibrak has provided one of the best readings of their relationship, and consequently the novel as a whole, showing how problematic their relationship is. Zibrak’s argument is deeply indebted to the mother’s own reading of the man’s relationship to his son. Showing how the mother is a truly a subversive presence in the text, for she says:

I can tell you (...) you wont survive for yourself. I know because I would never have come this far. A person who had no one would be well advised to cobble together some passable ghost. Breathe it into being and coax it along with words of love. Offer it each phantom crumb and shield it from harm with your body. (65)

She understands that in the world where there is no reason to live, only the fear of death, the father must use his son to create meaning. He has to use his son like “a passable ghost” to justify his existence. The father does talk of his son in these terms, for the son is his “warrant” (4), his purpose, his “world entire” (7). As Zibrak has argued, this means that the “the child is, to use his term, a ‘prop’ onto which heteronormative culture projects the belief in futurity in order to avoid the spectre of meaninglessness” (2012: 109). By being the meaning of life for the father, the boy is preventing his own reason to live. The son can only be a passive object for the father, something the mother predicts in her speech and counters in her suicide.

The First Bullet

In post-apocalyptic fiction the (mostly male) protagonists are frequently in a liminal state between past civilization and present primitivism; they often resist their new conditions although these are the source of their heroism. This resistance is shown, however, to be difficult. The wife mentions briefly that there were once three bullets, saying she should have killed herself “when there were three bullets in the gun instead of two” (63). Presumably, therefore, the man has already killed by the time the story begins. Murder is, of course, inevitable in the world in which there “were fires on the ridges and deranged chanting. The screams of the murdered. By the day the dead impaled on



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The man has succumbed to the primitive conditions in which he finds himself; he has made a fatal concession.

spikes along the road" (34). Pacifism, like women, cannot exist in this post-apocalyptic environment, thus the father must resolve and explain (especially to his son) the inherent contradiction of being a 'good guy' who kills. What is particularly tragic about this story is the how the father becomes the violent male he resists.

This process of transformation of the man into the very people he opposes is seen in comparing his encounter with the "lean, wiry, rachitic" (70) member of the marauders, who comes across the man and boy whilst going to "take a crap" (71), and with the thief who takes their belongings later on in the novel. In the first encounter the father does not threaten real violence, just that he "would rather take" him "up this road a mile or so and then turn you loose" (71). The father does, however, at one stage use his gun as a threat, saying: "the bullet travels faster than sound. It will be in your brain before you can hear. To hear it you need a frontal lobe and things with names like colliculus and temporal gyrus and you won't have them anymore" (71) Apart from suggesting that the man was once a doctor, the scientific vocabulary (in a world in which language is disintegrating) turns the threat into a display of education (and civilization) rather than of masculine force. In killing the man, however, he realizes that he gains some kinship with the 'bad guy', for the "wiry" man becomes "my brother

at last" (84). Compare this with his encounter with the thief of their possessions from the beach at the end of their journey. On this occasion the father resembles that figure which haunts post-apocalyptic fiction, an emblem of American masculinity: the cowboy. During the confrontation "the pistol was double action but the man cocked it anyway" (280). This classic cocking of the gun is followed by the warning that, if he didn't step away, "I'm going to blow your brains out" (280). What a difference an apocalypse can make! From using the precise language of neuroscience, the man regresses to macho, cowboy language. He is enacting, for a moment at least, the patriarchal fantasy of the male. This continues in his actions, making the man strip to both humiliate and punish him: "take them off. Every goddamned stitch" (281). As the boy's horrified reaction testifies, the man effectively kills the thief: "he was just hungry, Papa. He's going to die" (281). Indeed, like the past atrocities by the blood cults, the father has contributed to the truth of his own statement that "the history of the world" contained "more punishment than crime" (34). He is complicit in the injustice of the post-apocalyptic world. The man has succumbed to the primitive conditions in which he finds himself; he has made a fatal concession.

Which Conclusion?: Defending the Happy Ending

The father shows the immanence of violence in human nature. His faith in his son, however, is intact: "you're the best guy. You always were" (303). The ambiguous fate of the boy is essential to our final conclusions from this text, in whether, in the end, the mother or father is the better guide for our understanding the novel.

As I read it, the novel ends happily with the boy rescued by a kind family as the father dies, for the frequency adverb "sometimes"—in "she would sometimes talk to him about God" (314)—suggests that the narrative is describing a longer period of time and thus shows the boy's continued survival. Additionally, if food is finite, it does not add up nutritionally to waste precious resources feeding the boy, specially when there are other children to care for. The apparent decency of the man and the woman also contributes to a reading that the boy has finally found the 'good guys'. However, if this is the case, this betrays the rightfully pessimistic vision of the universe in the book, in which



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“the absolute truth of the world” is the “darkness implacable (...) The crushing black vacuum of the universe” (14). This conclusion nullifies the powerful critique that we have seen in the speech and act of the boy's mother. The mother is then literally replaced by this new maternal figure who “speaks of God” (314). By proving the mother wrong, McCarthy's text succumbs to the patriarchal conservatism within the post-apocalyptic genre. As Zibrak states, the new woman at the end of the novel “reestablishes the proper heteronormative order ruptured when the boy's mother died. The boy's new family is deemed to be good because their relations to one another are legible within the terms the man has set” (2012: 123). On the other hand, some readers suggest that the story leads to the boy's death, which is certainly hinted at. For example, the images of trout in the final page suggest danger: one of the father's earlier memories in the book was of trout which “flash like knives” (46). Also, the new man's willingness to lie—to state that he “is carrying the fire” despite not knowing the significance of this—contributes to a sense that the boy will shortly be another victim. If this is the case, the mother's radical reading of the post-apocalyptic world still stands, becomes justified: she is proven to be the voice of reason within the madness of patriarchy.

Nevertheless, I still support the happy ending. Through the short scene of the boy's mother, *The Road* makes a significant challenge to the patriarchal ideology which is intrinsically part of the post-apocalyptic genre. Yet, in the end, although the novel's conclusion re-establishes a conservative vision of life, the boy's new family represents a resistance to the brutal patriarchy of the marauders. As the father did in his own way. ●

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Lies so True: A Glimpse of the Imagination of Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic

Julie Novakova

“Why should the stories so painstakingly fabricated by myself be less true than history, so indifferently described by others based on the reality?”

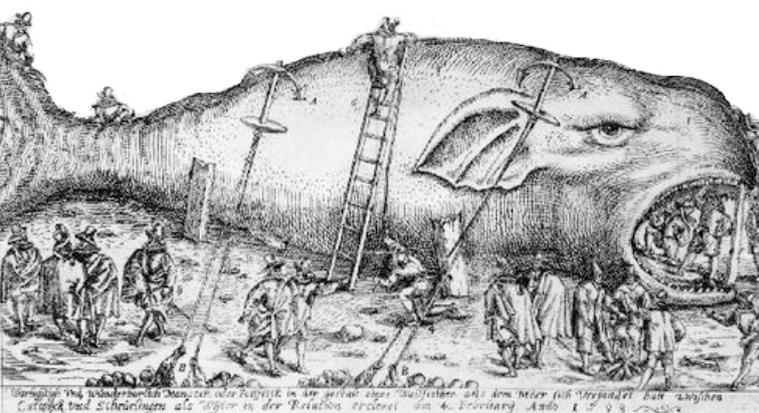
The story I'm about to tell is true. But so is the quote above, taken from the introduction of the *Novel of Manfred Macmillen* by Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic [1, p. 15]. The prolific Czech author of poetry and prose, editor, critic, translator and bibliophile, left a permanent trace in the history of Czech speculative fiction as well as the queer movement, while his name remains largely forgotten now but for the few lines in Czech literature textbooks. Taking a leap of faith here, I dare to say that he would have liked the contradiction.

The introductory passage continues: “In art, lying is a necessity, however with one limitation: that what is being fabricated has a deeper meaning than mere reality.”

Meet the master of lies so true. Much like his fiction and the characters he created, he stylized his own life as well...

Quiet rebellion, inconspicuous bravery

Born in 1871 in an impoverished family in Prague as Josef Karásek, but called Jiří at home, he was the only one of four siblings to reach adolescence.





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His father died when Jiří was nineteen. The deaths in the family, their grim financial situation, his distance from other people caused not only by his sexual orientation but also his sensitive, melancholic and shy character, and his appreciation for beauty led him to Catholic aesthetics, even though religious faith itself was not of a big importance to him. The young man did not finish his theology studies, briefly considered becoming a teacher, but lacked the money for further studies, and thus became a post office clerk instead. While tiring and frustrating due to the lack of time to devote to literature, the job has brought forth at least one benefit: starting in 1896, it required regular trips to Vienna, where Karásek met a man who became his intimate friend and later a model for the characters of “mages” in Karásek’s *Novels of Three Mages* [2, p. 147-148, 207-210].

At the dawn of the 20th century, he adopted the aristocratic title “ze Lvovic” (“from Lvovice”), claiming kinship with the 16th century astronomer and astrologer Cyprian Karásek ze Lvovic. There is sparse evidence of that, and most likely it has been a fabrication, an aristocratic stylization for distancing himself from the “low” society and making his life seem more special. But don’t mistake aristocratic self-stylization for contempt for the poor or less educated. Much like other fellow authors from the circle of *Moderní revue*, he rather despised “bourgeois”, pretentious middle-class manners and pseudointellectualism. He regularly gave lectures for workers in many Bohemian cities [2, p. 159-160], and liked to talk with them, especially the anarchists among the workers, who tended to seek out modern literature and philosophy. At one point, he mentions in his memoirs that “we in the *Moderní revue* were not only aristocrats, but also anarchists” [2, p. 129]. By then, he’d already been a prolific author and editor. In 1892, he started his career as a critic, and in 1894, he helped establish the aforementioned literary journal *Moderní revue* (*Modern revue*) together with his friend and colleague Arnošt Procházka. The same year, his debut book of poetry *Zazděná okna* (*Bricked windows*) was published.

First connected to symbolism and then decadence, he published prose, poetry and articles as well. In 1895, he published a special issue of *Moderní revue* including his letter fiercely condemning the infamous trial of Oscar Wilde and advocating the freedom of same-sex desires, and several other themed articles including the first translation

of Wilde’s prose into the Czech language (“The Decay of Lying”, translated as “Úpadek lhaní” by Hugo Kosterka, [2, p. 130-131]). Perhaps encouraged by the fact that the issue, albeit scandalous, was spared censorship, Karásek soon published his poetry collection *Sodoma* (*Sodom*), which included explicit language and sexual imagery. However, his collection was quickly confiscated and Karásek was investigated for suspicion of sodomy, misdemeanor against public morals and against public peace. A general amnesty from press offenses, issued by the Emperor the same year, saved him from a trial [2, p. 135-136].

His prose can be characterized by flowery, rich language—perhaps too elaborate and strained at some times compared to some of his contemporaries—, its gaze inward in the soul, the topic of love between two men, and frequent use of medieval, especially gothic imagery. Karásek had been the sole Czech author writing openly about homosexual love in his fiction at the time, while others only hinted at it extremely covertly (if it is not merely a figment of contemporary readers’ imagination), like Julius Zeyer in his *O věrném přátelství Amise a Amila* (*Of The Faithful Friendship of Amis and Amil*), set in a legendary rendition of 12th century knighthood. Medieval elements were by far not rare in the *fin de siècle* literature, but their use was especially pronounced Karásek’s prose, sometimes resembling the so-called gothic novels or their German counterpart, the “Schauerroman”.

Many of his novels, most importantly the *Novels of Three Mages*, also contained many fantastic, occult elements. While there apparently lies a lot of research behind his occult themes, Karásek didn’t quite reach the complexity and perspective of another writer whose fiction featured occult elements strongly and was very much tied to the environment of Prague: Gustav Meyrink. Meyrink himself likely would have had a big impact on Czech speculative literature, had he not been a German-speaking author, living physically next to the Czech-speaking authors but culturally elsewhere. It is unclear whether Meyrink and Karásek ever met (besides, Meyrink left Prague in 1904, after an earlier scandal tied to his banker’s career, and wrote most of his works of fiction only later in Austria), but at least Karásek certainly knew of Meyrink. He also became friends with Paul Leppin, another Prague-based German-speaking author who used occult themes in his fiction.



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Novels of Three Mages

Karásek had written three novels that are generally considered as speculative fiction, although fantastic elements sometimes appear in his other works as well. The novels are *Román Manfreda Macmillena* (*The Novel of Manfred Macmillen*, 1907), *Scarabeus* (1908), and *Ganymedes* (*Ganymede*, 1925), together referred to as the *Novels of Three Mages*. All are interconnected by a common pattern of themes, as the following paragraphs will illustrate.

In the *Novel of Manfred Macmillen*, the narrator, Francis Galston, meets an intriguing man when visiting Vienna: count Manfred Macmillen, a perfect dandy as well as a dreamer, a detached man with a somewhat demonic appearance. Francis longs for his proximity, but that occurs only after they see a play by Walter Mora about the 18th century occultist Cagliostro. Manfred is extremely shaken by the piece. He pleads Francis to run with him outside before the curtain falls, and when back at his palace, he starts telling him the story of the legendary Cagliostro and his connection to the Macmillens. Cagliostro once stayed at this very palace, and Manfred has a few years ago found himself drawn to his portrait in an antique shop seemingly by accident, finding that he has an uncanny likeness of the long-dead mage. He's had visions and insights, and began to stylize his life into Cagliostro's—a true “artist of life”. Here, Karásek once again points out the appeal of fiction and style as opposed to cold reality.

The theatre play has terrified Manfred because its words resembled those he'd written into his diary about Cagliostro himself. Can there be another man who could be an incarnation of the dead occultist? Is he the source of a frightful sighting Manfred had in Prague recently? If so, they couldn't possibly coexist! One of them must perish. Francis, captivated by Manfred's strength of spirit and beauty, promises to stand by him. Later, they travel to Prague, depicted here in a very mysterious, gothic fashion, and Manfred sets to destroy his “doppelganger”. His magical experiments sometimes work but Walter Mora always survives, and they drain him very much. Francis is torn, watching his beloved fade so much. In the end, he loses him altogether, when Manfred succeeds in drawing Mora to their villa against his will, but when the desperate Francis runs out to witness their clash, both have disappeared.

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Scarabeus contains fewer speculative elements and they are concentrated in the end of the novel. The protagonist is a 20-year-old man Gaston, tired by life and contemplating suicide until he encounters an unlikely duo of friends: a young, feminine, rose-cheeked, aristocratic-looking boy, and a serious, rough, dark-haired man with an air of grim detachment. Intrigued, he follows them all the way to Venice, witnesses their argument and parting, and makes acquaintance of the younger one, the beautiful Oreste. They become close, but eventually Oreste is drawn back to the mysterious Marcel. Gaston, devastated, finds Marcel's palace and goes inside to find Oreste. Instead, he encounters Marcel and is immediately magnetized by his strange beauty and strength of personality. Marcel begins to explain the story of his ancestry—that he has descended from a feared poisoner Marie Madeleine, eventually beheaded for her murders. In his view, she had been an artist in her crimes: ruthless, without conscience, without any plain motives such as greed or vengeance. He longs to become a force of pure evil, committing crime as an art and a way of living a true life. Gaston is scared, shocked, but captivated by this man. The morning comes, and Marcel admits to making the history up as a style he wants others to see him in.

Gaston is set to leave, convinced that Oreste simply left the city by being rejected by Marcel again, but eventually he decides to stay with Marcel, even though he rejects the proximity of all people. Later, he finds Marie Madeleine's tomb in the palace. There, under the tomb, is a hidden cellar containing terrible secrets... Marcel serves the cult of the Egyptian goddess Isis, portrayed here as the "Eternal Evil, Murderer, Seducer," Marie Madeleine being one of her incarnations. And there lie the bodies of the young men, perfectly preserved by Marie Madeleine's poison contained in her scarab ring, Oreste among them. And Gaston is going to be the next one. Dying, he finally sees the spark of love in Marcel's eyes... At the very end of the novel, Karásek casts doubt on the events of the story, ascribing them possibly only to Gaston's imagination from the moment he first saw the two men, and if so, leaving him to a fate supposedly worse than a beautiful death in the cellar, which finally earns him Marcel's love.

The demonic poisoner theme was loosely inspired by the story of a French poisoner, Madame de Brinvilliers. During his trip to Italy, where he wanted to gain inspiration for *Scarabeus*, Karásek had witnessed the arrest of a young Russian man who had shot the husband of his mistress, a "demonic" countess Tarnowska, in a Venetian hotel. The countess reminded Karásek of Madame de Brinvilliers, and the outline of the novel became clear [2, p. 208-209].

Ganymede: Golems and androids

Perhaps the most important of the novels from the viewpoint of speculative fiction is the final one, *Ganymede*, published in one piece as late as 1925 (slightly earlier published in a serialized form in *Moderní revue*) and set in Prague. Again, we encounter a familiar central pair of characters: young, fair Radovan and more mature, dark-looking, experienced Adrian Morris. However, in this case the roles of a mage and a companion discovering his secrets are disrupted; there is yet another pivotal character much closer to the archetype of a mage than Adrian. Jörn Moller is a Danish sculptor drawn to Prague by the legends of Rabbi Löw's Golem. He's obsessed with the idea of creating his own artificial man—however, not just as a mute servant, but as an artificial human being that would love him and be his companion forever. Radovan becomes a model for his "Ganymede," and finally



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Moller succeeds in animating the figure, but dies soon after, his already feeble life force drained by the ritual. While Adrian was bound to destroy the master's creation, he does not comply and attempts to revive the figure, put to sleep by Moller before his death, himself. His disobedience results in a tragedy when Radovan sneaks in the room and sees the Ganymede, his likeness in every aspect. Ganymede wakes and strangles Radovan, who in the moment of his death by the hands of his doppelgänger perceives an ecstatic vision of becoming a Ganymede carried away by the mythical eagle, embraced by a god.

In *Ganymede*, Karásek in a way anticipates the issue of love/sex androids (he even uses the term android several times in the novel) and creating one to the likeness of an existing person. As Moller models his Ganymede, he's gradually losing interest in the real young man before him, which hurts Radovan. The story, dealing with the topic of longing for an "ideal" partner instead of committing to a real relationship, has relevance even today and remains perhaps the most significant of the *Novels of Three Mages*. But unlike in most future works exploring this theme, Ganymede is not supposed to be a mere obedient servant to Moller; according to Moller's words, his creation was supposed to become his equal or even his master. He tells Morris: "I will now revive the golem and surpass my great teacher: my golem will not be mute, but he will talk. He will not be my magical servant, but my friend for all eternity..." [1, p. 406] He plans to say the following words when reviving the clay statue: "I raise you to life from dead clay, not to serve me, but for me to serve you. You will be my friend and I will gaze into your bright eyes to read your wishes off them, and I will fulfill them for your joy. I will do anything you ask for your love, even if you wished me to walk through fire, surpass water or throw myself from a tower..." [1, p. 408-409] This also sets it far apart from an earlier French novel *L'Ève future* (*The Future Eve*; 1886) by Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, where the unequal setting of the relationship of the gynoid Hadaly and Lord Ewald is very pronounced.

The novel builds on the myth of golem, which became increasingly popular in Prague in mid-19th century and was also used in other contexts by writers such as Meyrink or Leppin, and the motif of doppelgänger, also present in *The Novel of Manfred Macmillen* as the clash of the titular character with the playwright Walter Mora, or in several Meyrink's proses. The structure of the three main characters is also reminiscent of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Wotton/Morris as the wiser, cynical "guide" of younger men; Hallward/Moller as the "creator"; Dorian/Radovan as the beautiful object of portrayal—but in the last case, their personalities couldn't be further apart) [3, p. 61].

At approximately the same time when *Ganymede* was published, the creation of new life in a robot, respectively gynoid, is explored in the Central European environment in Karel Čapek's play *R.U.R.* (1920), which coined the word "robot", and Thea von Harbou's novel *Metropolis* (1925) and its film adaptation. But where Karásek uses mythology and occultism, they use scientific imagination, and where he focuses on the individual characters and their relationships, they offer more of a broad social critique. In Eric G. Wilson's typology of the android, Ganymede falls into the category of "golem" and his maker more on the "hermetic" end of the spectrum, while von Harbou's gynoid and Čapek's robots would be best categorized as "automatons" and their creators on the "neurotic" part of the spectrum [4, p. 28-29]. While Karásek's perhaps envisioned a "love android" earlier than most writers and remains fairly unique in conceiving him more as an equal companion than a servant and portraying a gay relationship, *Ganymede* does not seem closely tied to other works in terms of inspiration in either way. The novel unjustly received little attention at the time when it was published; but it was a time when decadence and new romanticism were widely viewed as a literary anachronism. Its fate was paradoxical: while it enjoyed little attention in its own time, it withstood the test of time unlike some other contemporary works, and while it never reached fame, it remains read and studied, and would merit a translation into other languages.



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The mage and his servant

Taken as a whole, the three novels possess simple plots but complicated inner lives of the characters, emotional as well as intellectual; complex imagery; a dark, “gothic” portrayal of magic and the occult, and in overall strong elements of the decadence—adoration of dark magic and the beauty of evil, ostentatious dandyism, preference of medieval faith to modern rationalism, contempt of ordinary morals and tempers...

The character of the mage is portrayed as strong-willed, mysterious, dark, grim and also misogynous, often fiercely. The latter along with some of Karásek’s poems in *Sodoma* and elsewhere may raise the question of the author’s misogyny. Considering that he had had several close female friends whom he respected in life as well as work, this conclusion seems unlikely. The other prominent character of the three novels is always a younger, submissive man, often described as having a “woman’s soul.” Karásek himself used the terms “sexually inverted” or “third gender” when referring to same-sex sexual preference. Perhaps the most equal of those three relationships is the one between Manfred and Francis in the first novel, given that Manfred himself sought Francis’ help and proximity and the age difference is only vague, unlike in the following novels.

The story composition also ties the novels together very much. In the narrator’s introduction at the beginning of the first novel, casting doubt on the events of the second one at its end, and finally addressing the reader directly at the beginning of the third, Karásek plays a game with the reader and stresses the perceived importance of imagination as opposed to the bare reality. Although each novel features different characters, the common themes and the author-reader relationship justify calling the novels a loose trilogy; together, they create something more than the mere sum of their parts.

The epilogue

After the end of WWI and the advent of Czechoslovakia, Karásek continued all his previous activities: he still worked at the post office, his other jobs not being able to support him financially, kept writing, editing, translating... He briefly edited one occultist journal and one bibliophile journal and contributed to many others. At the beginning of the 1930s, he

was one of the most prominent personalities of the sexual freedom advocate movement and worked at the magazines *Hlas* (*The Voice*) and *Nový hlas* (*The New Voice*), published by and for sexual minorities and people supporting them.

In 1925, *Moderní revue* was discontinued after the death of Arnošt Procházka. In 1933, Karásek retired from his work of a director of the museum and archive of the Postal and Communications Ministry, a position he deservedly held since 1921. Throughout the 1930s, he was gradually publishing less. After a long pause, he published a loosely autobiographical novel *Ztracený ráj* (*Lost Paradise*), and sometimes published newspaper articles reminiscent of earlier times. He lived an increasingly quiet life, and just as quietly died in 1951 of pneumonia. He is buried at the Malvazinky cemetery in Prague. His collected memoirs were only published several decades after his death [2]. They show both sides of Karásek: the aristocratically-stylized aesthete, and the diligent, practical, hard-working man behind so much more than his own prose and poetry. Thanks to his, Procházka’s and their associates’ efforts, Czech poets such as Otokar Březina or Karel Hlaváček were given recognition, and translations in *Moderní revue* brought forth (sometimes for the first time for a given author) works by Oscar Wilde, August Strindberg, Friedrich Nietzsche, Stanislaw Przybyszewski, or introduced art by Edvard Munch and Gustav Vigeland.

Nowadays, people mostly consider writers such as Jakub Arbes or Svatopluk Čech as the beginnings of Czech speculative fiction. Karásek remains more valued as a poet, a critic and a bibliophile. However, the areas of his work were not mutually exclusive. He has influenced the course of Czech literature a lot (not speaking of the queer movement, where his impact may have been even greater), perhaps subtly at any given time, but his imprint in early Czech speculative fiction is unquestionable. His life may have been largely quiet and inconspicuous—barring the occasional, if sometimes fierce, literary battles on the pages of journals—and so was his death, but his legacy still lives on: quiet but persistent, thoroughly mixed truth and lies speaking a deeper truth in unisono. ●

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How We Talk about Feminism: Approaches to Feminist Rhetoric and the Implied Reader in Naomi Mitchison's *Memoirs of a Spacewoman*



Anna Whealing

Science fiction has long been viewed as a particularly apt genre for writers to challenge ideas fundamental to the nature of our existence. As Ursula K. Le Guin writes in her essay “Is Gender Necessary? Redux”, “one of the essential functions of science fiction, I think, is precisely this kind of question-asking; reversals of a habitual way of thinking, metaphors for what our language has no words for as of yet, experiments in imagination” (159). Feminist writers such as Scottish author Naomi Mitchison (1897-1999) have taken to science fiction as a medium for questioning notions of gender and sexuality and for postulating gynocentric rather than androcentric conventions. Mitchison is an example of

how ‘reversals of a habitual way of thinking’, and ‘experiments in imagination’, can be employed by feminist writers to challenge their readers’ everyday perceptions and attempt to persuade their readers to a feminist way of thinking.

In 1978, Wolfgang Iser first proposed the concept of the ‘implied reader’, a critical theory concept which explains how a writer will shape their rhetoric with a particular type of reader in mind, and which is crucial in the production of successful rhetoric. Mitchison differs from other feminist science-fiction writers of her time by creating a particularly female-orientated text with, I argue, a female or female-orientated ‘implied reader’ at its heart. By considering how feminist writers use an implied



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reader to craft their texts, I further question the success and intentions of feminist science fiction, focusing primarily on Naomi Mitchison's 1962 novel *Memoirs of a Spacewoman*. I will first show how Mitchison uses her implied reader to explore the problem of feminine identity as a central concept of Second Wave Feminism. I will then compare Mitchison's writing to the perceptions of feminist rhetoric in science fiction with regard to the opinions of William Marcellino and Patricia Monk, and finally prove that, in utilising notions of the implied reader, feminist rhetoric can be persuasive on many levels and to many different readers.

Iser coined the term 'implied reader' to describe a figure who possesses the appropriate factual, cultural and literary understanding of a text's 'repertoire'—the particular real-world conventions used in the text which are shared by reader and author, for example the social role of 1960s Western women. Iser writes that the implied reader embodies the "predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect" (1978: 34). Sean Connors neatly sums it up as "a theoretical construct not to be confused with actual readers. It is perhaps better understood as a role actual readers are invited to adopt" (2012: 34). For instance, when Dickens writes about the place of Victorian women, or when Mark Twain uses a (now) derogatory term for a black person, we, as current readers, adjust our understanding to approximate the mind-set of the implied reader of these books at their time of publication.

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Controversial to her time, Mitchison gives her readers a female protagonist; completely autonomous, with a successful career, Mary retells her adventures through space, her communications with other species and her experiences of motherhood and a variety of unconventional pregnancies. There is no doubt that this novel is gynocentric in characterisation and plot. We may be able to presume that when Mitchison was writing her novel, the implied reader for whom she wrote was in fact the growing group of women and feminist readers of science fiction. Considering this, I will analyse the success of Mitchison's rhetoric with regard to how she persuades female readers and those real readers ready and willing to assimilate with this implied reader's viewpoint.

After establishing *who* Mitchison was writing for, we must now ask of what was she attempting to persuade her female implied reader. To answer this, we must consider the type of utopian society which is presented in *Memoirs*, and particularly the type of female protagonist which Mitchison creates. Mary is introduced first and foremost as an extremely brave and experienced woman, she muses for instance: "I begin to wonder how many more voyages I should undertake, supposing, of course, that I don't get killed" (Mitchison 2011: 5), a statement which proves her occupation as spacewoman to be dangerous, compelling and one that takes her far away from home. It also proves that she has complete autonomy, not only to choose who she wants to be, i.e. a spacewoman, but also to choose how many voyages to undertake and indeed what level and type of role to accept. For, as she says, "they have asked me to be leader several times, but I do not care for that sort of responsibility" (5).

In sexual matters too Mary has complete command over her own choices; she mentions casually in the opening sentence that her children have many fathers (which we later learn is absolutely normal). In her desire for the attractive T'o she articulates graphically how "I had wanted to touch T'o all over. I had wanted to get my fingers long and tinglingly into his hair, and to run them down his neck and arms" (23), demonstrating that for women, sex as well as procreation is an open subject. Despite all this freedom Mary never lets her attraction to men "stand in [her] way" (12), her passion and ambition for work always wins her over.

Autonomous in occupation and sexual desire, Mary is also free to act upon her own feelings. When she decides that she wants to take an alien



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'graft' attached to her body the decision is hardly thought through, let alone discussed with any man, thus demonstrating her control over her own body. The society in *Memoirs* places huge importance on feelings, empathy and discussion; women are encouraged to listen to their feelings which, as in the case of Mrs Hayes finding the dying butterfly, often lead them to enlightening outcomes. The gynocentric thinking which Mitchison is advocating is a society where women are completely free to make their own choices, free from family, husband and home, free to make decisions based on true feelings and free to undertake work in any field they so desire. It would seem that this 1962 novel is seeking to persuade its female or feminine orientated implied reader to challenge the confined ideas of female identity in the 1960s.

By expanding the perceptions of female identity Mitchison is challenging a feeling similar to what Betty Friedan recognised a year later (1963) in writing *The Feminine Mystique*. Since Mitchison was Scottish upper-class rather than American middle-class like Friedan, it would probably be inaccurate to say that this novel was written precisely with the suburban housewife (embodied in Friedan's text) in mind as the implied reader. However, it is clear that the feelings which moved Friedan to write her feminist text must have been similar to the thoughts Mitchison had in mind when writing *Memoirs*; that is to say, both writers were invoking early Second Wave Feminism. Mitchison does this primarily by questioning what it means to be female, and wondering what is the intrinsic identity of a woman free from patriarchy? Almost at the same time Friedan noted that American housewives had no identity outside that of wife-and-mother and so, she wrote, "the feminine mystique permits, even encourages, women to ignore the question of their own identity" (126). The protagonist of *Memoirs* is the exact opposite of wife-and-mother; Mary has no concept of a husband and does not even appear to have a permanent house. Mitchison's 'experiment in imagination' appears to have completely eliminated the concept of the feminine mystique in an attempt to find out what was left.

What is more, the novel actively questions female identity in terms of female biology. *The Feminine Mystique* states that "the theorists of femininity" in the 1950s and 1960s alleged "the identity of woman is determined by her biology" (136). The speciality of the female body in its ability to bear children was a factor used to 'prove' to women that their

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place was in the home bringing up the children. In *Memoirs* Mitchison presents an alternative product of female biology: that women's natural empathy, understanding and communication skills are invaluable to the progression of the human race in expanding our horizons and achieving peaceful and beneficial relationships with other civilisations. In an early comment Mary mentions that "I may be out of date, but I always feel that biology and, of course, communication are essentially a woman's work, and glory" (9), an opinion which some might consider a suggestion of female essentialism and therefore problematic in the creation of a truly feminist text, which should emphasise equality. Yet, Mary is referring to areas of science and scientific research as being "essentially a woman's work"; she is thus inverting the traditional patriarchal idea of 'women's work' to mean more than simply having babies. In a sense, Mitchison is reclaiming the idea of womanhood and giving femininity a scientific and progressive importance. For, although being a mother is an important part of Mary's identity, it is equal with her identity as a spacewoman and communication expert. Indeed the thought of being permanently responsible for her children and over-mothering them is decidedly unnerving to Mary, part of her feels "marvellous (...) to be back in a ship with all [her] instruments and tables" (70). With the idea that natural feminine compassion makes women



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good at scientific research, Mitchison persuades her implied reader that the female identity has the potential to be incredibly multifaceted and need not be confined to a form of biological essentialism. At the same time, she does not undermine the fact that maternity is a very special part of a woman's identity; and thus does not lose sympathy or credibility in the eyes of her implied reader.

With this uncommon and very complete appeal to the female implied reader *Memoirs* is a rare jewel for female science-fiction fans. Especially if one considers what Patricia Monk stipulates about the huge and daunting backlog of masculine science fiction; that as far as the 1940s and 50s there existed: "A sexist bias on the part of male writers, together with a minority of women writers in the field, and in addition to this strongly bonding element in science fiction among writers and fans (...) all combine to produce a literary mystique characterised by gadgetry, adventure and androcentric thinking" (4). She goes on to say that women writers, instead of breaking away and creating overtly gynocentric works have "shown a tendency to succumb and to incorporate the mystique into their own writing" (4). By the choice of a male protagonist and a masculine centred plot, that of a battle or quest for instance, Monk believes that women writers are furthering the androcentric mystique rather than abating the stereotypical roles and negative image of women in science fiction. One of the biggest criticisms of Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* for instance is that, by the invention of androgynous beings and the use of the masculine pronoun, the novel does not feature a single female character, and so has been questioned as a true feminist utopian novel (Marcellino 2009: 208).

It is clear that Mitchison does not 'succumb' to the "literary mystique characterised by gadgetry, adventure and androcentric thinking". *Memoirs* includes adventure as an occupation, with spacewomen and spacemen literally living for adventurous space travel, yet it is a form of adventure which is expected, planned in detail and carried out with immense practicality and awareness. Any gadgetry which Mary or another character uses is given minimal consideration and is hardly central to the plot. Indeed, a major critique of *Memoirs* is that the novel includes no engaging plot at all (Murray 2011: vii), as it appears to contain no dramatic tension or climactic point; it is simply a collection of ideas and memories concerning the life of a spacewoman. This is perhaps the novel's ultimate gynocentric prize:

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its ability to focus purely and simply on the personality, feelings and experiences of a protagonist who is not only free from a patriarchal society but free from an androcentric literary mystique. Just as the novel does not require a male voice, it does not require an adventure-fuelled plot, nor diverting gadgetry, primarily because it is focused on appealing to a female implied reader rather than a male one. This is not to say, of course, that women do not find these androcentric tropes entertaining, only that Mitchison seems to be experimenting with an alternative form of science fiction and rejecting the androcentric mystique for a more gynocentric text.

Not all implied readers of feminist science fiction rhetoric are the same however, and when implied readers vary so will the nature of the rhetoric. By briefly comparing Mitchison to another feminist writer, Ursula K. Le Guin, the variety and importance of the implied reader to feminist rhetoric can be reaffirmed; for whereas Mitchison speaks a notably gynocentric language, Le Guin's approach is far more androcentric. Monk sees this as extremely problematic but William Marcellino argues that Le Guin's novel is a good example of successful feminist rhetoric. He praises the way Le Guin uses a style of rhetoric most likely to influence the implied reader on 'his' own level and so convince such reader to an alternative perspective. According to Marcellino, the use of a male protagonist and typical

masculine quest plot in *The Left Hand of Darkness* is the most persuasive rhetorical style to engage the "young, male science fiction reader with patriarchal beliefs" (2009: 207), which is the implied reader of the novel. This implied reader "is a close match to the narrator of most of the story" (207), which Le Guin herself calls a "conventional, indeed rather stuffy, young man from earth" (1989: 160). As over the course of Genly's travels "his assumptions about gender are 're-mapped', the real reader may also be persuaded, and move closer to a feminist position" (Marcellino: 207). This novel therefore is an example of how by equating a different style of rhetoric—the perspective of the protagonist, the nature of the plot—with a different implied reader, a feminist text can succeed in persuading patriarchal young males to a feminist understanding. This alternative feminist rhetoric employed by Le Guin demonstrates how fundamentally different feminist texts can be equally persuasive.

How we talk about feminism therefore depends on who we are talking to: Le Guin chooses to address young patriarchal males whereas Mitchison wishes to influence female readers. This leads me to wonder, therefore, whether patriarchal male readers and female readers are so fundamentally different that they cannot be united by one style of rhetoric. Although I have identified the implied reader of *Memoirs* to assimilate with Second Wave Feminism and the frustrated housewives of the 1960s, Mitchison's novel, I believe, can also influence patriarchal readers, although by a significantly different means of rhetoric. The problem with discussing a little-known novel written fifty-five years ago is that we simply lack the wealth of critical reviews and essays which accompany popular canonical authors. It can easily be assumed however that *Memoirs* was, and still is, as Jenni Scott put it "forthright and shocking" (2014: online). Reconsidering the opening sentence of the novel, "I think about my friends and the fathers of my children" (5), we can see that even to readers of today, the casual statement about having multiple partners is unusual, to 1962 patriarchal readers it would have been almost social transgression. Having a woman protagonist at the top of her field, and with as much sexual freedom and social liberty as a man is bound to have shocked a patriarchal reader of the 1960s. What was perhaps even more unsettling and uncomfortable was the use of a reminiscent female voice telling stories of adventure in a perfectly gynocentric style. In short, a 1960s science-fiction

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text written for a female implied reader would be unsettling for the young patriarchal reader precisely because it underlines the inequality present in science-fiction literature and in society in general. *Memoirs* is an overtly non-patriarchal text and so it succeeds in making patriarchal readers aware of their own adherence to patriarchy. The use of the female implied reader pointedly dissociates a patriarchal reader from the text, in the hope of leading them to question why they cannot easily assimilate with the female implied reader.

Other science-fiction works follow a similar approach, for example the short stories by Joanna Russ, “When It Changed” (1972), and James Tiptree Jr.’s (Alice Bradley Sheldon), “The Women Men Don’t See” (1973) are both feminist texts which present overtly feminist arguments, with the intention of shocking patriarchal readers into a realisation of their own patriarchy. These texts rather than simply dissociating patriarchal readers from a female implied reader end up estranging them from the rhetoric. In the case of Russ’s story for instance, men become insensitive “apes with human faces” (Russ: online), interested only in self-gain; in Tiptree’s tale Ruth and Althea prefer to go to space with unknown alien life than remain in a man’s world. These texts suggest that men are blind to the need for equality and that separatism is the only answer for female happiness; in this respect their rhetoric is less persuasive as a feminist viewpoint, for patriarchal and non-patriarchal readers alike. Less successfully than Le Guin, they also use a patriarchal implied reader; Tiptree writes from the male character perspective of Don Fenton (a perspective made more credible by her pseudonym James Tiptree Jr.), and even though Russ writes about an all-female society she makes her women strangely masculine, fighting duels and described as distinctly tom-boyish. These texts therefore become problematic for female readers who cannot assimilate with an improbable masculine implied reader and equally for patriarchal readers who see themselves alienated and estranged.

Mitchison’s feminist utopia on the other hand, advocates for interdependence rather than separatism, she does not turn men into aliens nor into blind hindrances of female happiness and she presents them as equally free and valued. Indeed, the relationships Mary has with Peder and Pete, for example, show that men are an important part of Mary’s life and more than simply fathers of her children; they support her and comfort her when

she needs them. Even though *Memoirs* is undeniably a female-orientated text, written with a female implied reader in mind, the equality which it shows between men and women is a more persuasive rhetoric for patriarchal readers. Instead of feeling completely rejected by an aggressive feminist writer they are invited into Mitchison’s gynocentric world, and will hopefully awaken to a sense of their own patriarchy or will find themselves understanding the feminist viewpoint.

The success of a feminist text can be measured by how persuasively it guides readers towards a feminist perspective. The method of persuasion is the style of rhetoric employed, and that will depend on the type of reader it is attempting to influence. Effectiveness will, of course, depend on whether the real reader is willing to be persuaded. Mitchison chooses to address a female implied reader and therefore uses a more feminine-orientated rhetoric to discuss the creation of a female identity outside patriarchy and outside the notion of the feminine mystique. This is not to say however that other approaches, such as that of Le Guin in employing a style of masculine rhetoric cannot be just as influential. Equally, a well-crafted rhetoric can potentially influence a completely opposite reader from the intended implied reader. Both Mitchison and Le Guin are even more persuasive in their feminism, for they create an interdependent rather than a separatist utopia, and so they succeed in uniting each gender in a shared vision of the future, rather than simply portraying an alternative superior matriarchal society (as Russ does). These authors clearly do not wish to appeal only to men or women; they use the implied reader to invite the real reader, whether male or female, to think in a particular mentality. If you are reading *Memoirs* you are asked to assimilate the female perspective and think in terms of female problems and triumphs. By creating an interdependence utopia Mitchison theoretically makes this assimilation to the implied reader easier for male readers, for they are not alienated, victimised or presented as monsters—in fact they are placed equally beside females and asked to question how they like it. ●

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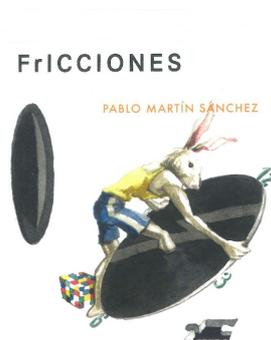
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Fricciones de ambos hemisferios

Mariano Martín Rodríguez

Puede parecer frívolo comparar, por tener ambas el mismo título, dos colecciones de cuentos publicadas en la misma década por un autor español y otro chileno, cada uno en su país de origen. Sin embargo, las similitudes entre los dos volúmenes no se limitan a la coincidencia de títulos. En ambos, el juego de palabras entre *fricciones* y *ficciones* sugiere un homenaje matizado, entre la asimilación y el rechazo, a las *Ficciones* de Jorge Luis Borges. El modelo del autor argentino es un referente ineludible del neofantástico o, más bien, de la imaginación o la fantasía razonadas, según los términos utilizados por el propio Borges. Así se puede designar un tipo de ficción que, lejos de ser un escándalo para la razón como lo era la irrupción de lo sobrenatural en la literatura fantástica de raigambre decimonónica, potencia el asombro y el sentido de lo sublime ante nuevas realidades que se realizan virtualmente en la mente del lector atento gracias, precisamente, a la aplicación a una materia fabulosa, *irrealista*, de métodos de creación y exposición que le confieren una apariencia de artificio pergeñado por la razón en ayuntamiento íntimo con la fantasía. El rigor «razonado» de la composición se extiende a la propia escritura de las ficciones, cuya retórica adopta a menudo la de discursos denotados como racionales en la tradición de las denominadas ciencias humanas, sobre todo

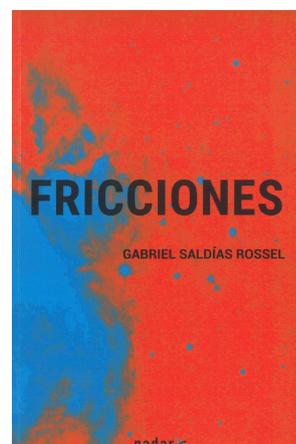


Fricciones
Pablo Martín Sánchez

Benalmádena (España),
E.D.A., 2011.

978-84-3-7507316

185 páginas



Fricciones
Gabriel Saldías Rossel

Santiago (Chile),
Nadar, 2016.

978-84-3-7507316

102 páginas



Fricciones de ambos hemisferios

A diferencia de otros autores modernos ensalzados por la crítica oficial, la escritura [de Borges] no tiene la función de envolver engañosamente, con pirotecnias verbales, la indigencia de ideas, de contenidos. Su claridad pone de relieve la riqueza de conceptos, haciéndolos parecer nuevos, lo sean o no.

de aquellas con mayor tradición de obras científicas y literarias a la vez, como la Historia y la Geografía. De hecho, Borges escribió varias de sus ficciones especulativas con el estilo con que lo habría hecho un científico de las disciplinas humanas. ¿Qué es su «Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote» sino un buen estudio de Filología imaginaria? ¿Qué es «El informe de Brodie» sino un informe etnográfico inventado, pero textualmente verosímil? Incluso cuando abraza un modo narrativo más convencional, rara vez encontraremos en Borges una técnica estilística o estructuralmente disonante respecto a la gran tradición narrativa heredada, prevanguardista. Casi nada hay en las obras maduras de Borges de la arbitrariedad antirracional(ista) de la escritura de las Vanguardias, prolongada por la rama principal del Postmodernismo, desde Severo Sarduy hasta la efímera generación Nocilla española de hace pocos años. A diferencia de demasiados otros autores modernos ensalzados por la crítica oficial, la escritura no tiene la función de envolver engañosamente, con pirotecnias verbales, la indigencia de ideas, de contenidos. Al contrario, su claridad pone de relieve la riqueza de conceptos, haciéndolos parecer nuevos, lo sean o no.

Esta técnica literaria ha sido utilizada por otros narradores contemporáneos de Borges, sobre todo en las literaturas latinoamericanas (Marcel Schwob, Giovanni Papini, etc.), pero fue la perfección con que el maestro argentino la empleó lo que suscitó

numerosos émulos hasta la actualidad. Por ejemplo, el número y la calidad de las colecciones de relatos de «fantasía razonada», escritos con rigor en el uso ortodoxo de los discursos retóricos preexistentes, han sido tan abundantes en España en las dos décadas en torno al cambio de milenio que cabría hablar de toda una generación de «nietos de Borges» (autores nacidos a partir de 1960), al menos desde la publicación de la colección de ficciones *Los furores inútiles* (1990), de Santiago Beruete y Fernando Luis Chivite. A esta siguieron otras de Carlos Almira Picazo, Felipe Benítez Reyes, Juan Bonilla, Armando Boix, Ginés S. Cutillas, Antonio Dafos, Santiago Eximeno, Javier Fernández, Luis García Jambrina, Juan Gómez Bárcena, Fernando León de Aranoa, Alberto López Aroca, Pablo Martín Sánchez, Gloria Méndez, Vicente Luis Mora, Manuel Moyano, Miguel Ángel Muñoz, Ángel Olgoso, Braulio Ortiz Poole, Félix J. Palma, Sofía Rhei, David Roas, Javier Sáez Ibarra, Eloy Tizón, Pedro Ugarte, Eduardo Vaquerizo e Iban Zaldúa, entre otros valientes que se opusieron así al concepto puramente comercial de la narrativa promovido con éxito indudable por la gran industria editorial y las instancias de legitimación oficiales y, en consecuencia, sus colecciones de ficciones no han sido apenas deshonradas por premios. Además, como los compradores de hoy parecen elegir las narraciones por su extensión y los libros por su peso, los cuentos no son *comerciales* y, en consecuencia, los de estos autores tampoco han recibido, en general, el apoyo de las grandes corporaciones editoriales capaces de embarcarse en operaciones de comercialización nacional e internacional. Esto puede explicar quizás por qué una pléyade de ficcionistas como pocas veces antes había surgido en España no parezca haberse impuesto en la conciencia del gran público, ni tampoco haya cruzado la frontera del idioma. Una excepción notable es el libro *Fricciones* (2011), de Pablo Martín Sánchez, que se publicó en francés en 2016, traducido por Jean-Marie Saint-Lu.

Esta traducción es indicio de la importancia del libro dentro de la producción de los «nietos de Borges» (y de Arreola, Cortázar, Monterroso, etc.). Desconocemos las razones por las que un traductor y una pequeña editorial (La Contre Allée) se han atrevido a romper la barrera de silencio que los envuelve, fuera de comentarios en internet, ocasionales reseñas y un muy limitado interés del mundo académico (por ejemplo, la revista *Brumal*). Esto no impide congratularse de la elección hecha por los animosos intermediarios franceses. No es solo que



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los veintisiete cuentos del volumen indiquen la deferencia del autor hacia sus lectores, a quienes no toma, como es la mala costumbre actual, por discapacitados literarios; muy al contrario, los cree capaces de entender y apreciar la amplia cultura que despliega en ellos, aunque sin pedantismos y con la necesaria ironía para no caer en solemnidades enfadosas. El acierto de la elección radica también en la representatividad del libro, ya que este propone variadas muestras de los temas y técnicas que se pueden espigar de otras colecciones de su mismo grupo de ficcionistas borgianos españoles, salvo la ciencia ficción, pese a haber sido muy cultivada por estos escritores. Martín Sánchez parece preferir un tipo de fantástico contemporáneo, no tecnológico y con abundantes rasgos metaficticios.

Un ejemplo de ello puede ser el cuento «Rodolfo dedos de lápiz», cuya premisa argumental recuerda la de la película de Tim Burton *Edward Scissorhands* (1990). En el texto español, los dedos-lapiceros no se deben a una intervención tecnológica, sino que se ofrecen como una realidad inverosímil, pero que no produce sino una leve extrañeza. Desde este punto de vista, se podrían considerar un indicio de realismo mágico. Sin embargo, no se trata de una magia onírica o arbitraria. El fenómeno desempeña una función alegórica que convierte el relato en imaginación razonada: los lápices son un símbolo sostenido de la creatividad literaria, hasta su agotamiento final liberador. En efecto, la literatura aparece en el libro como una actividad apasionante, pero algo excéntrica y que, por ello, coloca a sus fieles practicantes en situaciones de marginalidad incómoda en una comunidad que ha dejado de respetarlos y casi de entenderlos. Los lápices de Rodolfo le impiden llevar una vida normal.

En otros ejemplos, el niño que escribe compulsivamente una «Redacción» procaz y malhablada (dividida en tres partes intercaladas entre otros relatos del volumen, lo que multiplica su efecto) sufre la estrecha vigilancia de una maestra que parece apreciar muy poco el atrevimiento de dicha redacción. Un actor cómico actúa obsesivamente en un teatro para arrancar la sonrisa a un espectador fiel y permanentemente serio, sin saber que este tiene un rictus que lo hace incapaz de sonreír. Estos escritores y artistas imaginados por Martín Sánchez suscitan la admiración por la pasión de su entrega a su oficio, pero también la sonrisa por los extremos ridículos a que puede llevarlos. Estos sentimientos encontrados, que aparecen fundidos hábilmente a lo largo del libro, reaparecen una y otra vez en estas

Fricciones. Como el lector cautivado por «La biblioteca de Babel» borgiana en «El subrayado es tuyo», no se sabe si la pasión literaria es tal que «no sabes si has estado en el cielo o en el infierno» (p. 28). Tampoco se sabe si son dignas de asombro o de risa las labores de escritores que intentan, sin conseguirlo, ajustarse a las querencias del mercado, como el entrevistado en «Por qué nunca he escrito un cuento erótico», cuya tentativa a este respecto acaba sustituyendo el placer erótico por el tormento (¿placerentero?) de la obsesión lingüística. Una ironía similar se aplica al escritor de «Etc.», cuya búsqueda de la palabra justa y de una literatura concisa le impide pasar de esa abreviatura, o al inventor de la «Poesía métrica», esto es, de la escrita entre estaciones del metropolitano bonaerense. Y, ¿qué decir de los fundadores de la revista catalana «*Verbigracia*», cuyos juegos se inspiran en la literatura aleatoria y matemática del grupo OuLiPo, cuyos resultados no se sabe si son meros juegos o «la muestra fehaciente de la locura a la que puede conducir un exceso de pasión literaria» (p. 126)?

Pero el ejemplo quizá más sugerente de la gustosa ambigüedad de la literatura, tal como la presenta Martín Sánchez, es la imitación irónica de la escritura de Roberto Bolaño en «Un oficio peligroso», cuyo joven admirador del célebre y celebrado chileno se lo hace en los pantalones cuando se da cuenta de que Bolaño ha modificado una cita propia que su admirador había escrito en las paredes de los servicios de un café, tras no atreverse a abordarlo de viva voz. Más allá de la sátira evidente de

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la bardolatría, Martín Sánchez sugiere la estupidez tanto del lector entusiasta como del mismo escritor admirado, pues la cita elegida, «la literatura es un oficio peligroso», es la quintaesencia de la vanidad monstruosamente necia del escritor que se quiere dar tono, pues ¿qué diría un minero del carbón, un albañil constructor de rascacielos, un bombero, un policía o un militar en acción y otros trabajadores que se juegan la vida en el trabajo ante tal afirmación de un autor tan famoso y adulado? En el mundo de la ficción, Bolaño corrige su afirmación mediante otra perla de sabiduría, no mucho más profunda, pero quizá cierta al menos: «La vida es un oficio peligroso». No obstante, si se interpreta la cita de Bolaño, que ha inspirado hasta una tesis de doctorado, como que la literatura es un oficio peligroso porque la línea entre lo sublime y lo ridículo es muy delgada, el cuento de Martín Sánchez ilustra esta posibilidad magistralmente. Su pastiche de Bolaño, cuya forma de escribir imita, no parece indigno de este escritor, y hasta podría calificarse de superior, en la medida en que la ironía es la reina de los tropos... Tal vez sería osado afirmar lo mismo de pastiches de Borges como «De sueños y de versos», cuyo uso de la nota como complemento y modificación de la ficción principal exagera, o «La soledad de los espejos», que reescribe «El Aleph». En ambos casos, la ironía también está presente, dirigida sobre todo a los procedimientos estilísticos en el primero y más orientada hacia las obsesiones metafísicas del argentino en el segundo, lo que es compatible con el temblor del yo narrador ante la imagen que devuelve el «fiscal polifemo de ti mismo» (p. 39). En ambos casos también, el pastiche es fiel a la letra, pero también al espíritu del modelo ambiguamente homenajeado, un modelo que se ha asimilado bien (recuérdese «El subrayado es tuyo») antes de ir más allá.

Una de las enseñanzas borgianas es que se puede hacer ficción literaria más que estimable sin limitarse al *novelismo* hegemónico. Martín Sánchez emula al Pierre Menard borgiano en textos como «*Verbigracia*» y «*Poesía métrica*». Como otros «nietos de Borges» (David Roas mediante su factura imaginaria «*Mecánica y psicoanálisis (un futuro cercano)*») o Santiago Eximeno mediante sus instrucciones para «*La hora de la verdad*»), el autor anexiona así al reino de la ficción no solo los discursos de las ciencias humanas, sino otros cuyo carácter práctico parecía privarles de literariedad. En «*Ósculos*[®] (vía oral)», la escritura del prospecto farmacéutico se sigue a rajatabla pero, al aplicarse a los besos, produce extrañeza y, en consecuencia,

hace que miremos con nuevos ojos a los besos mismos, los *objetivemos* por así decir, desligándolos de la mera sentimentalidad. Esto multiplica paradójicamente la impresión de su efecto y, asimismo, el efecto del texto mismo como artefacto tanto más original por cuanto ha adoptado un discurso que rechaza teóricamente cualquier novedad en cuanto a la forma. De este modo, se genera un placer en la lectura que radica en el reconocimiento combinado con el de la sorpresa.

En otras ficciones del libro, esta combinación no se confía tanto a la forma retórica elegida como a la estructuración de la materia tratada. Un «*Accidente*» se narra sucesivamente desde la perspectiva de varios de sus testigos y el lector ha de reconstruir el rompecabezas, encontrando así sentidos insospechados a lo que parecía una desgracia vial común. En el último cuento del libro, «*Entropía*», unos sucesos cotidianos y banales se presentan en forma de diario, cuyas fechas se suceden cronológicamente, pero ocultan un sutil e inquietante desorden de los acontecimientos, que cabe interpretar como una manifestación catastrófica, por lo súbita, del destino final del universo o como una alteración misteriosa de las leyes físicas, en cuyo caso podríamos leer esta ficción como un texto fantástico, al igual que otros cuentos del libro en torno a alteraciones heterocrónicas, como «*Faustine*», una historia de amor entre dos personas que viven en décadas diferentes, conmovedora pero nunca sensible. Otro desajuste temporal resulta trágico: en «*El cubo de Rubik*», Sócrates, Descartes y Einstein intercambian frases célebres, diciendo unos lo que dijeron realmente los otros. Se trata de una curiosa y muy original variante del género ucrónico o historia alternativa. Una vez más, se reconocen tiempos y personajes (reales), lo que intensifica la sorpresa de ver atribuida a Descartes la fórmula « $E = mc^2$ », por ejemplo. Las reflexiones que inspira este cuento especulativo sobre el don de la oportunidad y sus consecuencias en cómo se escribe la Historia se dejan a la discreción de los lectores. Martín Sánchez se limita a exponer los hechos con una objetividad que los hace aún más extraordinarios.

En otros casos, una narración lineal genera la sorpresa por medio de un giro final que rompe expectativas. En «*Luego están los dentistas*», las alucinaciones del paciente en la consulta odontológica parecen estar haciéndose realidad, mientras que el uso de la segunda persona universal nos hace identificarnos imaginariamente con el personaje y sus temores, por lo demás muy extendidos en la vida



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real. Cuando ya creemos que todo ha sido fruto de un miedo infundado, el descubrimiento del efecto de la intervención en el paciente, aunque no es mortal, parece dar razón a los temerosos. Una vez más, se combinan íntimamente el reconocimiento y la sorpresa, igual que lo hacen lo sublime y lo ridículo, porque esa prevención frente a los dentistas es risible por lo exagerada, sin dejar por ello de estar sobrecogedoramente justificada en la ficción y, quizás, en el propio universo. A este respecto, el primer texto del libro, «Sopor», es un microrrelato que puede sintetizar este planteamiento que explota la coincidencia, la *fricción*, entre cosas opuestas. El narrador sale a la calle y observa cómo una epidemia de sueño duerme a la ciudad entera; al preguntarse por la causa, recibe desde lo alto «un atronador ronquido que suena *urbi et orbe*» (p. 16). ¿Dios roncando? ¿Habrá un espectáculo que aúne mejor y más íntimamente lo grandioso y lo cómico, lo fabuloso y lo mundano? Y, además, *urbi et orbe*, esto es, en la urbe y en el orbe.

Como en la mayoría de las ficciones del volumen, Martín Sánchez acierta ahí a conferir un aire de verosimilitud realista a lo que narra, pero sin caer en el costumbrismo, ni en el localismo, y mucho menos en la mera circunstancialidad dependiente de las modas del día, ideológicas o no. Se trata de un universalismo enraizado paradójicamente en la esfera de lo real cotidiano, en el contexto de la ciudad contemporánea, y la lengua del libro así lo refleja. Aunque su registro es predominantemente culto, admite los coloquialismos como signos de que nos encontramos en un tiempo concreto, el actual, aunque se observe *sub specie aeternitatis*. No otra cosa hacía Borges, su principal referente, pese a las diferencias entre ambos autores. El español ha acogido también otras influencias y las ha asimilado igualmente de forma original y, lo que es más importante, de manera intelectualmente rigurosa y literariamente impecable por su escritura. El reconocimiento francés no parece ser entonces un accidente editorial. Es de lamentar que el autor no haya perseverado por esa vía y, desoyendo los consejos del propio Borges, haya perpetrado después varias novelas extensas. Y es de esperar que Saldías Rossel no lo siga por ese camino demasiado transitado, porque su libro señala la aparición de otro interesante f(r)iccionalista.

Ambos volúmenes de *Fricciones* coinciden en explotar el espacio de roce, de *fricción*, entre dos emociones antitéticas. En el español, la ironía es el lubricante que facilita la fricción entre la placa tectónica de lo sublime y la de lo burlesco. En el chileno, el sarcasmo sustituye a la ironía en unos cuentos, todos ellos obedientes a los moldes novelescos tradicionales, en los que el humor intenta oponer resistencia a la presión de una concepción trágica y desesperanzada de la vida, que se observa desde una perspectiva social, política e histórica, en vez de metafísica o estética. Aunque varios de los relatos se pueden considerar manifestaciones de «fantasía razonada», sus referentes literarios se alejan del modelo borgiano preferido en España, país cuya literatura Saldías Rossel conoce muy bien, pues se doctoró en Barcelona con una importante tesis sobre la distopía en la fase tecnocrática del régimen franquista. Con todo, su libro resiste al paralelismo con la producción de los «nietos de Borges» españoles, abrazando en su lugar la dolorosa tradición de la literatura comprometida hispanoamericana de las décadas de 1960 y 1970, que el autor intenta poner al día, aunque manteniendo la mayoría de sus planteamientos y carga ideológica. El relato «Lindo como un sol» puede considerarse una expresión autoficticia de ese rechazo implícito de Europa y de sus circunstancias culturales. En el avión que lo lleva de regreso a Chile, el narrador repasa sarcásticamente las glorias de este su país, esto es, las costumbres que impiden a sus habitantes medrar por razones de mérito, disfrutar de la justicia social y gozar de los frutos del desarrollo, entre otras cosas. El nacionalismo masoquista aparece como un sentimiento atroz, pero inevitable, hasta englobar y anular el mundo entero, porque «más allá de los Andes solo se encuentra Chile» (p. 71). Contrariamente al volumen de Martín Sánchez, no es lo cotidiano lo que se transmuta en universal, sino que esto último solo se manifiesta en el libro de Saldías Rossel a través de su plasmación concreta en Chile. Este localismo asumido encuentra su expresión más nítida en los cuentos que recuperan las técnicas literarias del socialrealismo crítico del siglo pasado, en su vertiente regionalista o criollista tanto como en la magicorrealista. La primera se manifiesta en «Desde el pozo» mediante la exposición de la tragedia del obrero industrial que se



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resigna a sus injustas condiciones de vida y hasta salva heroicamente una explotación petrolífera en los años cincuenta; la segunda inspira el «Cuadro costumbrista» rural del patriarca latifundista que ha de ser destruido, puesto que su categoría y clase se han encarnado simbólicamente en un cuerpo asesino y monstruoso, que puede recordar algunas deformaciones físicas y sociales explotadas ficcionalmente por José Donoso en *El obsceno pájaro de la noche* (1970), por ejemplo.

Junto a estos *revivals*, el revolucionarismo antiyanqui imperante entre los escritores hispanoamericanos hace décadas se vierte en los odres nuevos de la ciencia ficción, que es el principal vector de la imaginación razonada en las *Fricciones* de Saldías Rossel, quizá de forma paralela a los jóvenes autores españoles de distopías y ficción prospectiva populistas tras la acampada revolucionaria del 15-M madrileño. Por ejemplo, «Malo de fábrica» muestra a un robot que se ofrece a un grupo de *punkies* genuinos para que hagan realidad sus sueños de destrucción de «este mundo corrupto» (p. 24), pero la cobardía de los partidarios del *no future* aborta tan loable proyecto: el robot rebelde descubre, a la vez que los lectores, que la revolución de los jóvenes inconformistas es únicamente estética e individual. En cambio, «Residencia en la tierra» sugiere una solución más violenta, el magnicidio. La posible apología del terrorismo, que nos puede parecer incómoda en la actualidad, se justifica en el mundo ficcional del relato por la opresión ejercida por un poder imperial que, en el cuento de Saldías Rossel, coincide con unos Estados Unidos del futuro que han absorbido y aculturado Sudamérica por completo, además de haber expoliado a sus habitantes, a quienes trata y reprime de la forma más rapazmente colonialista. En este contexto, el atentado contra el presidente norteamericano se presenta como una medida liberadora, en la tradición de la resistencia antimperialista tan de moda en la época cuya literatura revive el autor, pese al manifiesto desinterés actual de la gran potencia americana por lo que pase o deje de pasar en los países que se imaginan invadidos en esta ficción prospectiva. Sin embargo, no se trata de anticipar el futuro, sino de ensalzar la valentía del hombre común convertido a la revolución y, quizá, de ironizar en torno al imperialismo cultural, en la medida en que el atentado del latino anexionado «honra la única verdadera tradición de su nueva patria» (p. 84), la de Lee Harvey Oswald. Esta frase final reorienta la lectura del cuento hacia un sarcasmo con ribetes de alegoría,

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La ciencia ficción también le sirve al autor para abordar el tema de la justicia retrospectiva frente a los crímenes impunes de las dictaduras militares de Sudamérica.

La dictadura de Augusto Pinochet parece ser la herida que, al parecer, no se consigue cerrar en Chile, aunque vaya camino de disolverse en el «formol de los eones»

en la línea de otro relato antiyanqui (además de anticapitalista) del libro, titulado «Champion latinoamericano». Aquí se presenta el tragicómico destino de tal campeón en el deporte de la ruleta rusa, popular en el siglo XXI. Tras haber sobrevivido a un número imposible de disparos, acaba muerto por la avalancha de hombres de negocios, legales o no, que se abalanzan para explotar sus derechos. Latinoamérica ha sobrevivido a conquistas, catástrofes naturales y otras crisis graves, pero acabará muerta por el capitalismo (neo)liberal, parece decir el cuento, con la libertad y las licencias intelectuales que se suele tomar un apólogo político fictocientífico hispanico de hoy.

La ciencia ficción también le sirve al autor para abordar el tema de la justicia retrospectiva frente a los crímenes impunes de las dictaduras militares de Sudamérica, sobre todo el peor de ellos, el de las desapariciones forzadas. Mientras que otras dictaduras hispanas (la franquista, la castrista, etc.) fusilaban a sus disidentes con todas las de la ley, las desapariciones en el Cono Sur de aquel continente impidieron incluso llorar a los propios muertos, imponiendo a sus familiares el tormento de la esperanza. Esta herida es casi imposible de cicatrizar, tal como Saldías Rossel muestra en «Memento Mori». El militar chileno asesino cuyo cerebro se conserva vivo para someterlo una y otra vez a torturas, a fin de que confiese el lugar donde había hecho desaparecer a sus víctimas, nunca puede brindar esa información, con lo que la torturadora se ve incapaz de superar su pasado, salir de ese infierno de la justicia, necesario pero también imposible. Una herida que no se cierra, no puede cicatrizar.

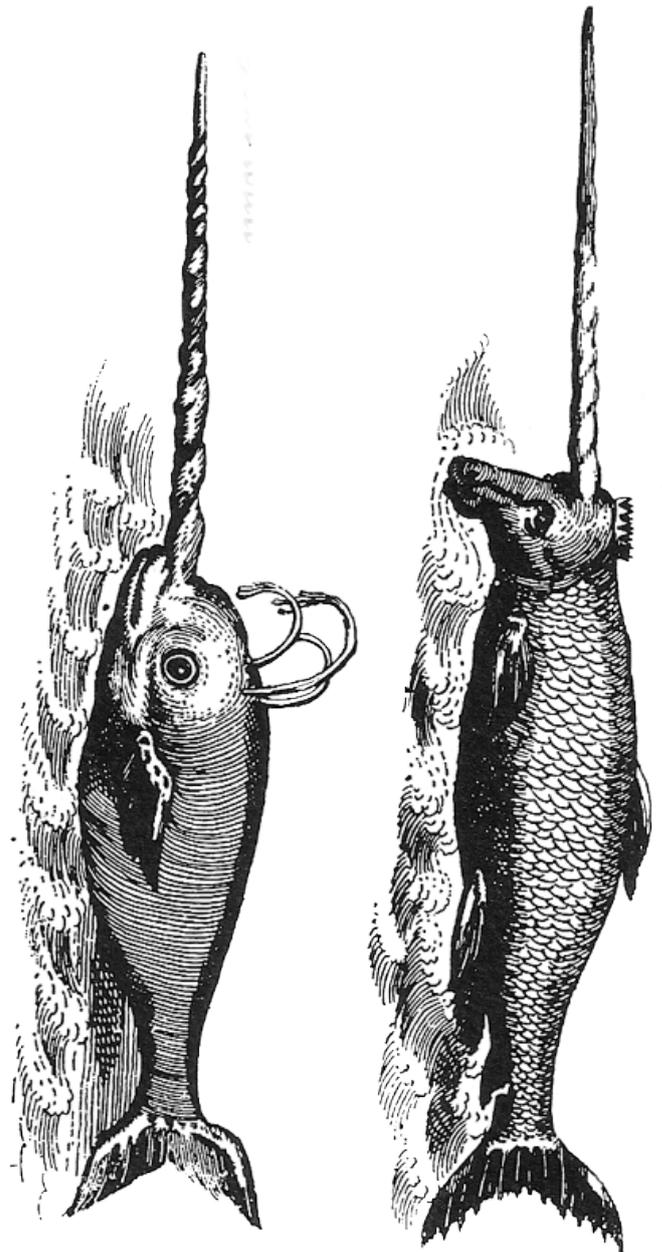
La dictadura de Augusto Pinochet parece ser la herida que, al parecer, no se consigue cerrar en Chile, aunque vaya camino de disolverse en el «formol de los eones» (p. 62). Además del tratamiento trágico de esta memoria histórica, Saldías Rossel opta por un eficaz humor negro en «Santiago del Correcto Extremo», que es una variante original del motivo de la resurrección de los muertos. Víctor Jara y las otras víctimas de aquel dictador retornan a la vida y se adaptan bien a su nueva existencia, pero pronto se sabe que son los únicos difuntos que volverán. Los redivivos acaban canonizando a Pinochet por haber conseguido «eternizar al pueblo chileno sobre la faz de la tierra» (p. 11) y amenazan con aplicar a quienes se opongan a su santo patrono las mismas medidas represivas que ellos habían sufrido. A diferencia de la mayoría de las fábulas razonadas del libro, esta no tiene una lectura política inequívoca.



Fricciones de ambos hemisferios

Lo mismo puede interpretarse como una condena del extremismo (ambos serían igualmente represivos, además de tornarse uno en otro con facilidad) y como una denuncia humorísticamente cruel del sello impuesto por Pinochet en la historia de Chile, entre otras cosas por su ejemplo del uso de la violencia para alcanzar objetivos políticos. En cualquier caso, este relato destaca por su originalidad, además de por su buena escritura, lírica y socarrona a la vez.

En el volumen, solo parece poder rivalizar con él en buen oficio e interés el último cuento, «Mañana hablamos», que es también el más apolítico y universal. En un ambiente cotidiano representado mediante las técnicas de la narrativa realista moderna, un adolescente se ve confrontado a la vez al amor y a su imposibilidad debido a una catástrofe no explicada que acabará con el mundo al día siguiente. El final truncado deja en suspenso la crisis, cuyo desenlace queda al arbitrio de la imaginación de los lectores. Así se abre la puerta al misterio y se resuelve, mediante la apertura a un espacio incógnito que abarca y anula las oposiciones, la fricción entre la fantasía y la Historia, entre la política y la conciencia irónica de su violencia infernal, entre la ciencia ficción y la obsesión del pasado, que Saldías Rossel combina en diferentes dosis en sus cuentos. En ellos alcanza normalmente el equilibrio justo, de manera que acaba saliendo airoso del riesgo de abrazar el compromiso sin el distanciamiento necesario para que la literatura pueda imponer su ley a la ideología, sea esta política o estética. En efecto, no era menor el peligro que supo sortear Martín Sánchez al escuchar, pero no entregarse, a las sirenas del formalismo vanguardista, cuyos estragos en las letras (post)modernas no han sido apenas menores que los infringidos en ellas por la subordinación a la política de partido. Salvando sus diferencias, el *friccionista* del hemisferio norte y el del hemisferio sur ilustran hasta qué punto el cuento es propicio no solo a una escritura cuidada, sino también a la experimentación variada de técnicas y estilos, lo que genera una tensión enriquecedora hacia el equilibrio de la unidad en la diversidad de los buenos libros de ficciones breves, de libros como estos. ●



La difícil construcción de una ciencia ficción nacional: el caso de Irlanda

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Quiero aprovechar la oportunidad que me brinda *Hélice* de reseñar el magnífico volumen de Jack Fennell, *Irish Science Fiction* (2014), para hacer algo más que describir este libro y proponer una reflexión sobre cómo se construye una tradición nacional dentro de un género. En las fechas en que escribo acabo la edición de un volumen monográfico en inglés sobre ciencia ficción española que la prestigiosa revista académica *Science Fiction Studies* publicará en breve (verano de 2017)¹. Tanto el volumen de Fennell como este monográfico son parte de un nuevo proceso global por el cual se está intentando complementar el habitual enfoque angloamericano con una serie de variados enfoques nacionales. *SFS* ya ha publicado monográficos sobre ciencia ficción china (2013), italiana (2015) e india (2016), que se suman a otros volúmenes monográficos nacionales tales como, entre otros, *Ukrainian Science Fiction: Historical and Thematic Perspectives* de Walter Smyrniw (2013).

La idea del monográfico sobre CF irlandesa parte del propio Jack Fennell, profesor en la University of Limerick, quien se la propuso a Liverpool University

1. El volumen, que he editado junto a Fernando Ángel Moreno, tendrá traducción al castellano, que publicará Spórtula en 2018.



Irish Science Fiction
Jack Fennell

Liverpool University Press (Liverpool
Science Fiction Texts and Studies 48),
Liverpool, 2014

978-17-8-1381199

224 páginas



Un diagnóstico acertado

Press. Es importante señalar que se trata de una prensa británica (con una excelente colección sobre ciencia ficción) y no irlandesa, dato que indica otro hecho relevante: la diseminación de estas nuevas tradiciones nacionales se está haciendo desde el entorno angloamericano dominante en el género y no desde el propio entorno nacional². Parece que una vez acotado el territorio angloamericano, se está por fin respondiendo a la pregunta de cómo funciona la ciencia ficción en otros países e idiomas. El caso irlandés, por supuesto, constituye una compleja encrucijada, ya que se trata de unir dos lenguas (el inglés, el gaélico) además de sumar territorios repartidos entre dos estados: la República de Irlanda, y el Reino Unido, al que pertenece Irlanda del Norte. Mientras Irlanda se considera territorio postcolonial, Irlanda del Norte, que ha luchado hasta extremos inconcebibles por mantenerse británica, pondera ahora unirse a su vecino del sur para poder permanecer en la Unión Europea tras el Brexit (previsto para 2019).

El libro de Fennell se articula en nueve capítulos, que cubren desde el siglo XIX al presente, e incluso el futuro, en tanto que el autor se aventura a pronosticar hacia dónde avanzará la ciencia ficción irlandesa. La mezcla de hechos históricos, subgéneros y nombres propios en los capítulos, anuncia el método que sigue Fennell, y que parece elemental para cualquier retrato de un género narrativo en una variante nacional: es preciso contar al mismo tiempo la historia de la nación y la del género, ofreciendo simultáneamente introducciones a los autores más destacados y a sus obras. Fennell se enfrenta a esta tarea como pionero y es por ello digno de alabanza, ya que le toca trazar un mapa antes inexistente (y mucho más poblado de lo que él mismo había inicialmente imaginado). El método empleado es impecable. El resultado, aunque muy ameno, requiere, no obstante, un notable esfuerzo por parte del lector.

Fennell se dirige tanto al público irlandés como al foráneo, por lo cual debe ofrecer datos históricos que posiblemente al primero le parezcan someros y al segundo copiosos. El lector que tenga un buen conocimiento previo de la historia de Irlanda podrá, en suma, disfrutar más de la historia de la ciencia ficción en este país, mientras que quien nada sepa deberá esforzarse en ambos sentidos para seguir la

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narración. Pese a la brevedad del volumen, la cantidad de información que ofrece es alta y ante el aluvión de nombres y títulos, muchos de los cuales son inaccesibles (por estar en gaélico, por ser poco conocidos incluso en inglés), la pregunta es cómo hay que leer *Irish Science Fiction*. O cualquier otra historia nacional de la ciencia ficción. Diría que lápiz en mano tanto para subrayar como para anotar en libreta, y con humilde espíritu de estudiante. Se trata de un volumen que está pidiendo a gritos un curso como complemento, sea presencial o virtual.

Fennell combina perfectamente el descenso al detalle del comentario de texto con el ascenso a la teorización de las raíces nacionales de la ciencia ficción irlandesa. En este sentido, resulta especialmente gratificante la introducción. El autor se remonta a la década de 1850 para datar la aparición de la ciencia ficción en Irlanda, incursionando hasta *Los viajes de Gulliver* (1726) en busca de unas raíces propias, y cuestionando de paso que la ciencia ficción sea un género importado. Fennell, no obstante, ejecuta un acto de prestidigitación algo temerario al defender su decisión de tratar la heterogénea isla de Irlanda como una unidad en relación a la ciencia ficción, y pese a ello advertir que no va a intentar «construir una definición única y general» (2)³ de la 'Irishness', o personalidad nacional irlandesa.

2. En España hay en marcha finalmente una historia de la ciencia ficción española, editada por Teresa López-Pellisa. En todo caso, esta se publicará tras el monográfico pionero de *SFS*.

3. La traducción de todas las citas originales es de la autora.



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Podría parecer que sin esta base, su tarea se complica. Es por ello que, invocando un oscuro trabajo de la académica rusa Tatiana Chernyshova, de 1972, Fennell se lanza a proponer una base alternativa, que es su tesis central: según él, la ciencia ficción, la fantasía (en el sentido de la «fantasy» anglófono) y el terror, tienen «en común su arraigo en el mito, la lógica cultural dominante en las sociedades tradicionales o “premodernas”» (3). Fennell coloca la ciencia ficción irlandesa en un territorio postcolonial, compartido con otras excolonias británicas, tal como la India, donde la fusión del mito con este género es también muy potente. Como observa, «las colonias fueron lugares donde la tradición y la modernidad existieron al mismo tiempo: el mito era más fuerte en estos territorios que en el imperio central, y, como consecuencia, las tendencias que tomó cada género no son tan sencillas de definir» (4).

El problema, como el propio Fennell indica, es que, se use el discurso que se use, al estudiar la ciencia ficción en relación a una tradición nacional, «se corre el riesgo de asumir sin más la existencia de

una identidad nacional estable e inalterable, o la de una única tradición» (7). Sucede también que la respuesta que se da a la pregunta de qué condiciona un caso nacional particular puede complicarse al trazar una comparación con otros casos. Fennell, como he indicado, acepta (con algunas dudas) la pertenencia de Irlanda al entorno postcolonial británico. Irlanda, sin embargo, comparte rasgos con otras naciones: es evidente que por su fuerte Catolicismo se relaciona de cerca con España. Cuando Fennell describe la pobreza científica de Irlanda, la fuga de cerebros, la baja autoestima tecnológica, lo ridícula que la idea de una ciencia ficción irlandesa es para muchos irlandeses, el lector español no puede sino sentirse identificado. Quizás Fennell magnifica la colonización británica de Irlanda y no le da suficiente entidad a la colonización interna, también sufrida por España, por parte de una Iglesia retrógrada. De hecho, siguiendo esta reflexión, la vinculación del mito con la ciencia ficción irlandesa parece más bien una negación (pagana) del poder Católico que (irlandesa) del poder imperial británico.

No hay que negar el impulso mitificador de toda la ciencia ficción ya que, como señala Fennell, este género narrativo no rinde culto a la ciencia sino que inventa toda una pseudociencia en su búsqueda de una explicación a la existencia del universo y de lo humano. En naciones como Irlanda y España, en las que la modernidad llega tarde y mal, la tensión entre racionalismo científico y mitificación genera una gran inseguridad. Fennell ensalza al autor de *Los viajes de Gulliver*, Jonathan Swift, como prueba de que se puede ser «paradójicamente anticiencia y tener una mentalidad científica» (26), afirmación que necesita de muchos más matices para ser coherente. Igual (o más) pertinente es la pregunta de cómo se pueden combinar los temas de interés local con los globales en una literatura nacional. Aquí radica la mayor diferencia: mientras británicos y americanos jamás han dudado de que sus temas locales sean de interés global, en el resto de tradiciones nacionales la duda persiste, de ahí la incertidumbre ante la necesidad (y la realidad) de una ciencia ficción propia.

Pese a la insistencia en el mito como solución al problema específico de Irlanda, Fennell subraya que la ciencia ficción de su país sigue necesariamente el ritmo del tortuoso proceso de independencia, que incluye no sólo el levantamiento de 1916 (con la proclamación del *Free State*), sino también una cruda Guerra Civil (1922–23), la llegada de la República en 1948, y la eclosión de los *Troubles*

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Un diagnóstico acertado

en Irlanda del Norte, recrudescidos por la actividad terrorista del IRA (1969–1997, aún por desarmar). Así pues, se sienten asediados quienes se sienten profundamente británicos (como el norirlandés Robert Cromie) y también quienes se identifican con el nacionalismo irlandés más extremo. Irónicamente, nos dice Fennell, «es más probable que un autor irlandés de ciencia ficción describa la invasión alienígena de Irlanda en particular que la de la Tierra en general» (221).

Parte de las contradicciones paradójicas que Fennell describe es el singular caso del autor irlandés de ciencia ficción más conocido a nivel mundial, Ian McDonald. Nacido en Manchester en 1960, hijo de madre irlandesa y padre escocés, y establecido en Belfast desde 1965, McDonald es autor de una serie de potentes novelas, cuya acción mayormente ocurre en territorios muy alejados de Irlanda: Kenia en *Chaga* (1995), India en *River of Gods* (2004), Turquía en *The Dervish House* (2010); el título *Brasyl* (2007) es transparente. Otras novelas, como *Sacrifice of Fools* (1996), suceden en Irlanda y Fennell se acoge a esta circunstancia para argumentar que, lejos de ser culpable de explotar al otro exótico —incluso de orientalismo— McDonald narra en sus novelas como «el mundo marginal no occidental adopta los ornamentos del futuro occidental —temas, clichés y tramas gastados— con su estilo idiosincrático, redecorando una casa prefabricada» (173). Es bien cierto que McDonald ha conseguido ‘normalizar’ la presencia de países poco habituales en la ciencia ficción pero, no nos engañemos, se trata de un acto de apropiación cultural. Identificar a McDonald como irlandés en lugar de británico (que también lo es), no cambia el sentido de la maniobra. Fennell, como irlandés, conoce de sobra la larga lista de obras sobre Irlanda escritas por americanos y británicos, y sabrá reconocer por ello la importancia capital de dar prioridad al nativo en la representación de su propia nación, sea en la ciencia ficción o en cualquier otro género.

En cuanto al futuro, Fennell espera que se mantenga una cierta estabilidad histórica, pese al problema pendiente de la unificación de la isla. Sobre todo, confía en que se supere la «aparente incongruencia del concepto ‘ciencia ficción irlandesa’» (214), y en que los irlandeses aprendan a mirar al futuro más que al pasado. Se diría que Fennell es algo más optimista en relación a la ciencia ficción en gaélico, de la que espera no tanto cambios radicales, sino «la deconstrucción y reinterpretación de los clichés de la ciencia ficción» (223), expectativa

que debería ser compartida por cualquier tradición nacional. La nota más pesimista la pone su aseveración de que, dada «la internalización de los discursos tanto del colonialismo como del capitalismo burgués Católico» y su insistencia en que los irlandeses son «más místicos que científicos», habrá que «importar el futuro de otras tierras» (219). Sentimientos todos ellos compartibles desde España pese a nuestra posición postimperial.

Como Fennell concluye, «los géneros y las naciones tienen historias plurales, y hay numerosas maneras de alcanzar el sueño de hacerlas visibles» (234). Con ello, Fennell avisa de que la suya es una versión, a lo cual cabe añadir que, como la versión primera y pionera sobre qué es la ciencia ficción irlandesa tiene un altísimo valor. Esperemos que avance el estudio de este género en dirección parecida para muchas otras naciones y lenguas. Y, sobre todo, esperemos que una vez sepamos mejor cómo funciona la ciencia ficción en cada tradición seamos capaces de comparar y, sobre todo, de compartir lo mejor de cada tierra. ●

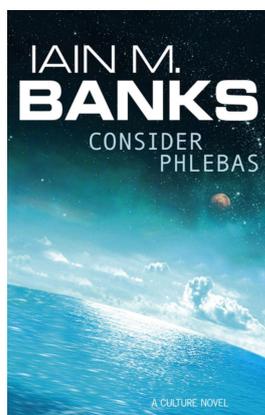


Pulso entre dos novelas

Mario Amadas

Vicente Luis Mora los llama pasadizos. A los vínculos más o menos visibles, a las afinidades más o menos evidentes entre una obra y otra, los llama pasadizos. Hay algunas similitudes significativas entre *Lágrimas de luz*, de Rafael Marín, y *Consider Phlebas*, de Iain M. Banks, y algunas intenciones parecidas cuyos logros, cada uno a su manera, son consecuentes con el propio canon en el que están inscritas, y por eso digo, retomando la voz de Mora, que hay pasadizos subterráneos entre *Lágrimas de luz* y *Consider Phlebas*.

La primera es la ópera prima de su autor, publicada en 1984 pero escrita en 1981, a los 21 años, lo cual ya es un mérito. La segunda, de 1987, es la primera novela ambientada en el marco de la Cultura, y también la ópera prima de su autor. Las dos tienen un inicio absorbente, cautivador, y se enmarcan en la space opera pura y dura. A. Thorkent, escritor gaditano (su nombre real es Ángel Torres Quesada), ya había popularizado en España la ciencia ficción sideral, la *space opera*, en su *Saga del Orden Estelar*. Con novelas *pulp* poco sofisticadas pero dinámicas, sus incursiones en el género son refrescantes por lo que tienen de atrevidas: escribía en castellano una literatura de consumo rápido que no tenía mucho público entre nosotros. Marín, aunque escribiera su novela siendo aún muy joven

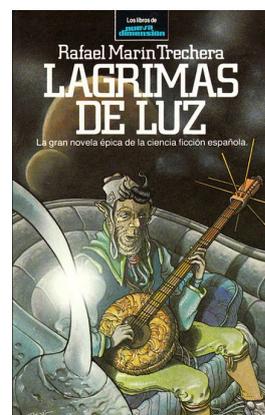


Consider Phlebas
Iain M. Banks

Reino Unido,
Orbit, 2005.

978-18-5-7231380

471 páginas



Lágrimas de luz
Rafael Marín

España,
Fénix, 1984.

978-84-9-4046049

372 páginas



Un diagnóstico acertado

y ello se note en el uso de algunas fórmulas expresivas algo graves, algo sentenciosas, que suenan a forzado, consiguió con *Lágrimas de luz* la maduración de la *space opera* en nuestro idioma. Una obra definida, una *Bildungsroman* bien estructurada. Un paso adelante con respecto a lo que había hecho su predecesor con el género en España.

La novela de Marín, como la de Banks, es episódica. Cada capítulo o par de capítulos constituyen una microhistoria particular que funciona como parte del todo en la vida del narrador. Las dos avanzan con la narración de esos hechos aislados, que les sirven a los respectivos autores para tejer el marco en el que se desarrolla la historia, el cuadro en el que van brotando las aventuras de los protagonistas y los personajes secundarios, siempre relevantes, que les rodean. En el caso de Marín, un universo regido con mano imperialista por la Corporación; en el de Banks, un universo en guerra dividido entre la Cultura y los Idiranos. Sin querer ahondar en el cuadro puntillista que es el mundo de la Cultura, vemos en *Consider Phlebas* que el protagonista no forma parte de los buenos, precisamente; Hamlet Evans, protagonista de *Lágrimas de luz*, tampoco. Evans quiere ser poeta en la Corporación, cosa que consigue, sí, pero al precio de escribir largos poemas épicos de glorificación al ejército. Paulatinamente, se desencanta. El alegato antibelicista y antimilitar va creciendo poco a poco a lo largo del libro. De esta manera, al encuadrarse en el bando irracional, la recepción de los personajes se problematiza en las dos novelas.

Algunos episodios de *Lágrimas de luz* son extraordinarios, como la descripción de los soldados muertos en el espacio, cuyos cuerpos flotan alrededor de una estrella con un último mensaje grabado (de fidelidad a la Corporación), que se repite eternamente como una letanía macabra. En cambio, a la descripción que hace del planeta Castigo, justo cuando llega Evans, le falta colorido, le falta consistencia para alcanzar las cotas de sentido de la maravilla que sí tenían esos cuerpos muertos flotando en el espacio. Banks, ahí, le saca ventaja: sus detalladas descripciones son, aun cuando son cortas, un torrente de alucinación; por ejemplo, uno de los personajes se quita la cara para sustituirla por una placa de acero inoxidable. Abigail Nussbaum, en su dura crítica de la novela, llamó al estilo de Banks «*space opera* hiperimaginativa». Pese a lo feo del término, da en el clavo. Los episodios de que se compone la novela son miniaturas de ciencia ficción extrema, de imaginación fuera de lo común (hasta

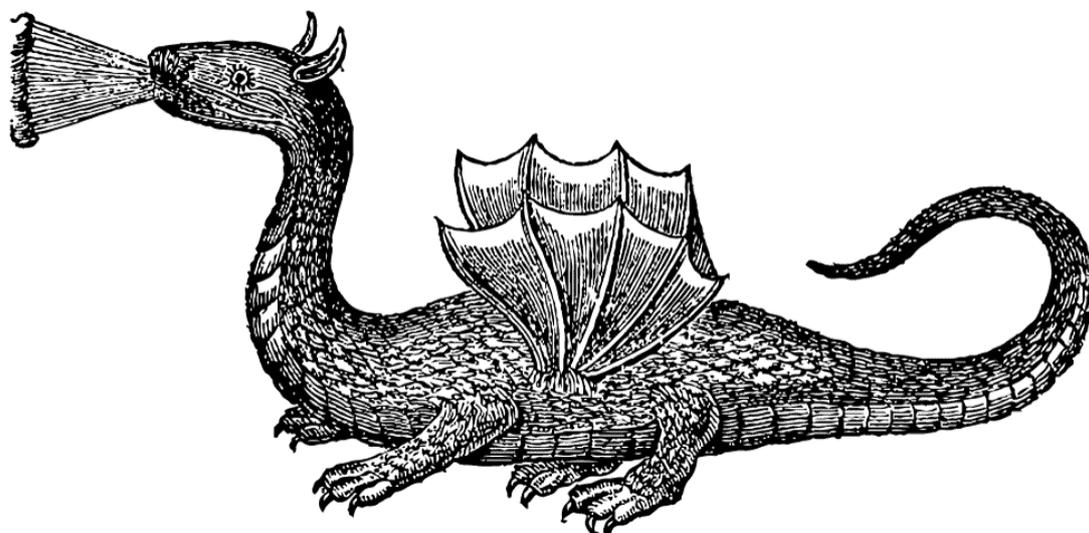
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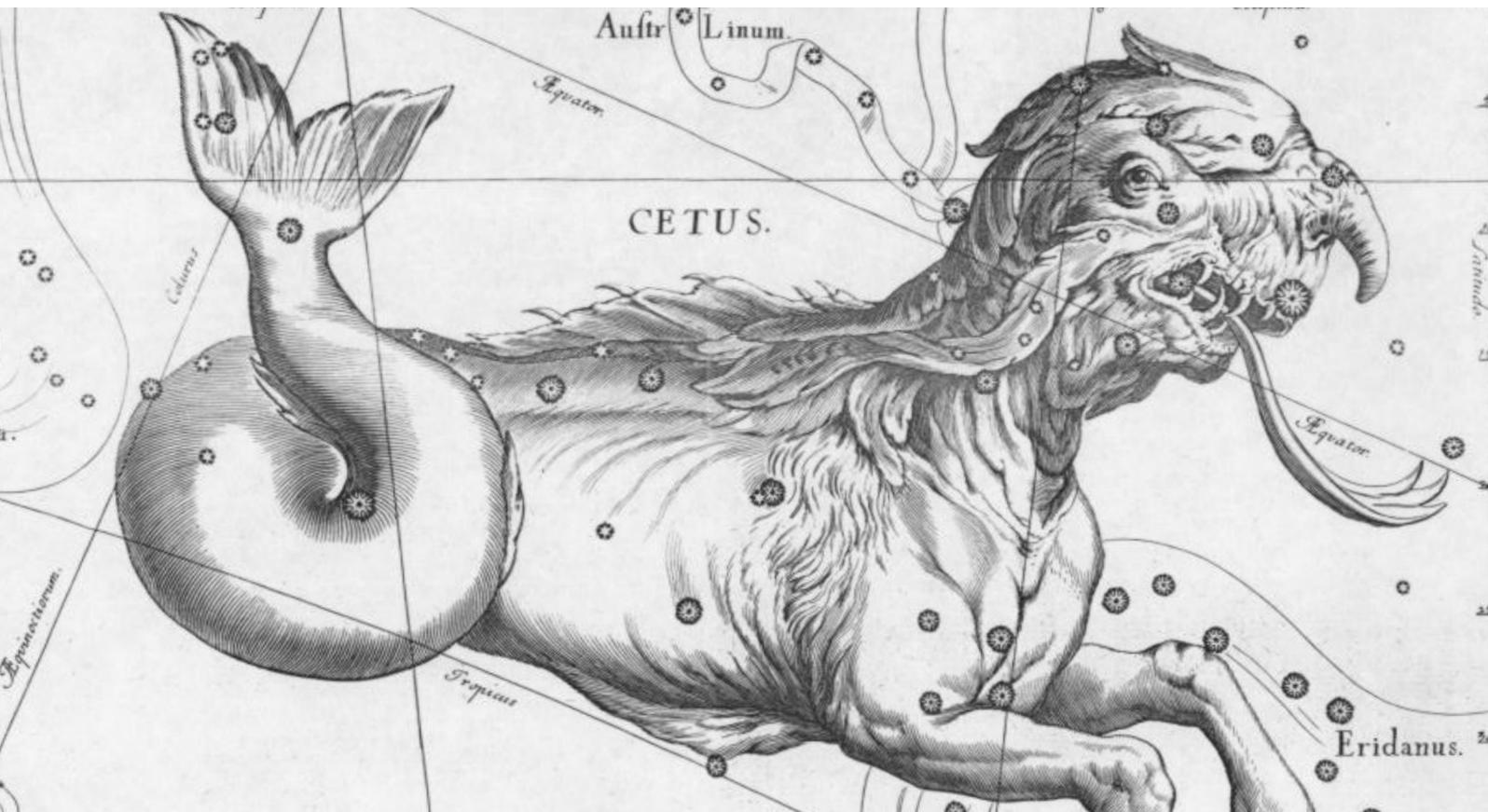
para los que cultivan el imaginario más extraño). Donde Marín sí parece que se avanza un par de décadas con respecto a la novela de Banks es en el retrato de la sexualidad abierta y de las muy democráticas relaciones de pareja que vemos al principio de la novela.

Hay más color en Banks y todo está agigantado en la novela. Pero los dos, a su manera, han contribuido a la *space opera*: Banks, sofisticando el imaginario; Marín, dignificando su presencia en la ciencia ficción en castellano. Son méritos diferentes. Cada novela tiene los pies metidos en su tradición, pese a pertenecer no sólo al mismo género, sino al mismo subgénero. Cada una tiene su repercusión particular en el idioma en que han sido escritas. Y la importancia de una en la tradición fictocientífica de su propio idioma no es comparable con la de la otra, porque en inglés se puede hablar de tal cosa mientras que, en castellano, no. Qué aporta una al sub-género y qué aporta la otra no se puede medir con el mismo rasero. O sí, seguramente. La de Marín aporta menos, porque no ensancha el imaginario ni la puesta en escena de la *space opera* y la de Banks sí. Pero eso no le resta mérito ni valor literario a la novela de Marín. Un poco como si *Los mares del sur* (1979) de Manuel Vázquez Montalbán

se hubiera escrito en Estados Unidos en inglés. Lo que tuvo mérito y fue influyente en castellano no lo hubiera sido, imagino, en Estados Unidos. Porque ahí ya había una tradición asentada de novela negra, un imaginario aceptado por el público lector. Pero aquí fue poco menos que una revelación o piedra fundacional del género. Así, como novela no tiene excusas: tiene que ser buena con independencia del idioma, de la tradición en que se inscriba, de todo. Pero como novela de género, lo que no es elogiado en un lugar sí puede serlo en otro. Caso de la novela de Vázquez Montalbán. Y caso, también, de *Lágrimas de luz*, de Rafael Marín. Dignifica un imaginario que en castellano casi no había tenido practicantes ni seguidores. La novela nos regala un redondo y digno ejemplo de *space opera* americana escrita en castellano. Es la asimilación correcta de un modelo muy concreto y con una consistencia literaria superior a la de Torres Quesada. Desgajadas de su tradición y ya insertas en el campo de la ciencia ficción, de la literatura, la novela de Banks es, seguramente, mejor, más ambiciosa y compleja, pero el personaje que uno recuerda después de leer estos libros es Hamlet Evans, de *Lágrimas de luz*. Con sus ilusiones y sus desencantos, con su vocación y su entereza. ●



Hablando de literatura con Rosa Montero



Por Mariano Martín Rodríguez

Es un bonito día de mayo en Madrid. Pese a estar cansada tras un viaje transatlántico, Rosa Montero, con quien había hablado un par de veces con ocasión de visitas suyas a sendas ferias del libro en Bruselas, ha aceptado casi de inmediato brindar a Hélice el honor de una charla sobre literatura, especialmente sobre la suya, que tanto ha hecho y sigue haciendo para promover la ciencia ficción en España, y sin esconderse por ello ni disimularlo. Ahora estamos en su casa, con el balcón abierto, con vistas al bello paisaje del parque del Retiro.

MM. Tras haber entrevistado a Ursula K. Le Guin e Ian Watson, pensé que convenía también entrevistas a autores españoles de un prestigio y nivel comparable a los anteriores en el ámbito de la ciencia ficción y géneros afines (o ficción especulativa, para no pillarme los dedos con las definiciones). Aunque conozco a varios escritores españoles de ciencia ficción, he preferido empezar por alguien que ya tiene

reputación de clásico. Aprovechando que ya nos conocimos en Bruselas (donde me dedicaste *Temblor*) y que Ursula es amiga común, pensé naturalmente en ti para abrir esta serie en español.

RM. Todo lo que sea abrir un poco la sociedad ante la ciencia ficción, que ha estado muy encerrada...

MM. Por eso, mi primera pregunta es: ¿cómo reaccionaron tus amigos escritores cuando te pusiste a publicar ciencia ficción, sobre todo con *Temblor*, cerca del principio de tu carrera?

RM. Reaccionaron como siempre, están acostumbrados; el camino de mi obra es muy libre. Siempre he escrito lo que me ha dado la gana... Recuerdo que, por ejemplo, mi editor, Mario Lacruz, que era muy famoso, se quedó un poco desconcertado. A los tres meses, después de que el libro fuera bien (tal vez porque se vendió como fantasía en vez de ciencia ficción), me dijo: «Es muy raro, aunque es un libro que habla de cosas que son todas inventadas, emociona» (*nos reímos*).



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MM. Se conoce que él no había leído mucha ciencia ficción...

RM. ¡Nada! Por lo demás, *Lolita* también es cosa inventada. Todas las novelas son inventadas. También *El Quijote*... ¿A qué se refería? En efecto, aquello le debía de parecer una cosa delirante, pero había momentos en que le emocionaba. Era eso lo que le extrañaba.

MM. Y, ¿entre tus amigos y compañeros escritores?

RM. No me acuerdo, pero creo que ha sido más chocante ahora cuando he publicado ciencia ficción pura, ante la cual hay más resistencia.

MM. Con *Lágrimas en la lluvia*, que ha ido muy bien, ¿notaste esa resistencia entre los editores o colegas?

RM. Al principio no sabía muy bien cómo reaccionarían las dos editoriales con las que siempre he trabajado, Seix Barral y Alfaguara. Hace unos diez años, cuando estaba pensando en escribir esa novela, lo comenté con una persona de Alfaguara y esta me dijo: «Mira, está bien, pero acaba de hacer el gremio de libreros una encuesta sobre hábitos de lectura y ha salido que el género que más odian los lectores españoles (y las lectoras españolas; en eso coinciden) es la ciencia ficción. Me parece estúpido, pero, ¿no podríamos decir que es un libro de fantasía?» Y yo contesté que no, porque no lo es. Pero el comentario era real. De hecho, tanto *Lágrimas en la lluvia* como *El peso del corazón* se han vendido menos que la media de mis libros, aunque el segundo libro ha ido mejor. Voy notando que está aumentando el afecto por Bruna. Me he encontrado con muchísimas personas (por ejemplo, en ferias del libro) que han leído esas novelas y dicen: «Me han gustado mucho, lo que es extraordinario, porque yo detesto la ciencia ficción». A lo que respondo: «Muchísimas gracias por darme ese voto de confianza pero, ¿qué habías leído de ciencia ficción?». «Pues nada», contestan.

MM. También me pasa eso como lector de ciencia ficción. Cuando me miran raro después de decirlo, respondo: «No todo va a ser el *Hola*...»

RM. (*Se ríe*). Y siempre que te dicen eso, luego no han leído nada, aunque sí van a ver películas de ciencia ficción. Pero al libro, no. Esto abunda más en mi idea: por un lado, piensan que es una cosa esotérica, que no tiene que ver con su realidad, cosa que es un error gigantesco, porque la ciencia ficción es una herramienta metafórica poderosísima para hablar de la condición humana, del aquí y ahora, de lo que somos. Por otra, está el hecho de la repulsión que tiene esta sociedad española respecto a la

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ciencia. Tenemos científicos estupendos, pero están todos fuera, porque no hay dinero, básicamente. Además, esto es producto de una historia, que hasta el siglo XVII las universidades las dominaba la Iglesia. Mientras que, en Europa, estaba en auge el cientifismo (por ejemplo, Newton), en España no había ni cátedras de matemáticas... Luego llegó esa tendencia anticientífica española: recuérdese ese dicho infame de Unamuno: «que inventen ellos». Nosotros teníamos la Metafísica, que le parecía mucho más importante...

MM. Y la mística.

RM. De hecho, se refería a la mística en concreto.

MM. Bueno, eso es lo que cree mucha gente, pero, como investigador de la ciencia ficción española temprana, he descubierto que no solo se hizo ciencia de calidad en algunos períodos, como en el del Positivismo de la Restauración, sino que incluso hubo ciencia ficción pionera incluso a escala mundial; después, no tanto. En esa época, la mayoría de los intelectuales españoles deseaba que el país estuviera al mismo nivel que la Europa avanzada y eran conscientes de que eso se podía conseguir a través de la ciencia (positiva).

RM. Pero estamos hablando de una minoría pequeña.

MM. Pero influyente. Eso cambió a partir de 1898: como no íbamos a alcanzar nunca a esos países...

RM. ... Mejor cultivar la diferencia. Es muy interesante lo que dices, pero estoy segura de que ese fenómeno no tenía un eco popular en la sociedad.

MM. No, era una cuestión entre intelectuales. Pero estos eran bastante numerosos. Y, luego, una vez más, los novecentistas pretendían europeizar España, ciencia incluida. La mayoría de ellos escribió también ciencia ficción. En mi opinión, la ciencia ficción no es algo que no haya interesado a los escritores españoles, sino que no lo he hecho a la institución cultural oficial.

RM. Además, duró tan poco que no pudo calar, esa breve primavera de la ciencia ficción en España.

MM. Sí, el primer lustro de la década de 1920, fue muy buen período. Más adelante, con la llegada de la Segunda República, hubo una politización extrema, una presión para que se trataran temas políticos y sociales del presente, tanto en un lado como en otro de las dos Españas. Eso de pensar en términos universales, ya no se llevaba en España en los años treinta del siglo pasado. Esto se prolongó durante las décadas posteriores. Sin embargo, creo que hoy en día la ciencia ficción se acepta mejor.

RM. Efectivamente. Hay escritores generalistas que escriben ciencia ficción. José Carlos Somoza, por ejemplo, y que la vende.

MM. Aunque no la vende como ciencia ficción... O no le dejan venderla. En tu caso, con tu renombre, no creo que un editor se atreva a negarse a que vendas una novela como ciencia ficción. Es impresionante que una escritora del canon contemporáneo como tú declare que escribe ciencia ficción y la defienda públicamente, sobre teniendo en cuenta la resistencia de varios críticos reputados y oficiales ante este género.

RM: En efecto, hay críticos, de los que no quiero decir el nombre, que escribieron reseñas de *Lágrimas en la lluvia* y se notó que no habían entendido nada de nada.

Hay críticos, de los que no quiero decir el nombre, que escribieron reseñas de *Lágrimas en la lluvia* y se notó que no habían entendido nada de nada.

MM. No sabrían leerla.

RM. Uno, por ejemplo, no sabía qué decir; estaba desconcertado.

MM. Cuando te preguntan (en encuentros literarios, ferias del libro, etc.) por qué escribes ciencia ficción, ¿qué sueles decir?

RM. Que es algo que siempre me ha encantado como lectora y que, como escritora, es un género que proporciona una herramienta metafórica poderosísima como pocas para hablar de lo humano y de la realidad. Tiene esa vertiente social importante, lo mismo que la novela negra.

MM. Pero la novela negra tiene muchos más puntos en común con el costumbrismo...

RM. De hecho, creo que en España se ha hecho tradicionalmente mucha novela negra, porque es heredera de la picaresca.

MM. En mi opinión, la ciencia ficción en España no tiene mucho apoyo oficial de las instituciones



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culturales (los manuales de literatura, la gran prensa, etc.) por una razón muy simple: España está en una península y la mentalidad es muy insular y localista, mientras que la ciencia ficción es, por definición, cosmopolita. Quizá lo que suscita tanta resistencia en España es el hecho de que la ciencia ficción sea un género universal. Incluso cuando se desarrolla en España en un futuro, eso supone un distanciamiento del medio local.

RM. Te compro ese argumento (*rié*).

MM. Como, en España, lo oficial ha sido el realismo, todo lo propio, cuando se ve una historia que se desarrolla en otros planetas y no se puede calificar de izquierdas o derechas según la división política de la circunstancia nacional o local, no gusta. Dado el peso de la política militante local en la literatura española, por ejemplo, la obsesión literaria por la Guerra Civil, una perspectiva como la de la ciencia ficción no se entiende ni se aprecia. En cambio, tú no has escrito sobre la mencionada Guerra Civil.

RM. No, qué hartura. Una excepción es *La hija del caníbal*, en la que uno de los personajes principales tiene un pasado anarquista, pero no gira en torno a esa guerra. La literatura sobre esta no hace sino abundar en el tópico de lo que somos, una y otra vez. Es como si se obligara a los franceses, ingleses y alemanes a escribir continuamente novelas sobre la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Nosotros nos hemos quedado enquistados ahí.

MM. Tus referencias literarias son más extranjeras que españolas, ¿no?

Pertenezco a una generación en la que no leíamos a autores españoles. Mi contacto con la lengua literaria contemporánea, aparte de Juan Marsé, ha sido con el boom hispanoamericano.

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RM. De hecho, pertenezco a una generación en la que no leíamos a autores españoles. Mi contacto con la lengua literaria contemporánea, aparte de Juan Marsé, ha sido con el *boom* hispanoamericano. Así descubrí qué cosas tan maravillosamente rompedoras se podía hacer con la lengua española.

MM. Luego vino vuestra generación, que devolvió los galeones, por así decir.

RM. No, sigue siendo menos conocida, a pesar de que ha producido una literatura postmoderna muy variada y plural, pero tiene menos influencia de la que merece en el extranjero.

MM. A pesar de lo mucho que te traducen, y con razón.

RM. Te aseguro que la literatura española sigue siendo una segundona, pese al nivel que tiene.

MM. Quizá el problema es que no somos exóticos.

RM. Además, durante mucho tiempo solo se solía traducir la literatura española que insistía en el tópico.

MM. Bernarda Alba y sus hijas...

RM. No te estoy hablando de aquella época, sino de ahora, del posfranquismo. Por ejemplo, en los años ochenta, si publicabas un libro sobre el maaquis, te traducían en Francia.

MM. ¿Cómo conseguiste derribar esa barrera?

RM. Tuve la suerte de que una editora se interesara por mí, le gustara mi obra y ahora tengo unos once libros traducidos en Francia. Escribir es una



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carrera de larga distancia. Llevo treinta y siete años publicando. En tanto tiempo, o mueres o avanzas.

MM. En el cuento español, ha habido un grupo de autores nacidos después de 1960 que ha producido grandes colecciones de relatos en las que conviven distintos géneros, entre ellos la ciencia ficción.

RM. Juan Bonilla, por ejemplo.

MM. Pero este fenómeno parece haberse dado menos en la novela. Desde este punto de vista, tu labor ha sido imprescindible.

RM. (*Riéndose*) Muchas gracias, pero yo lo hago por amor a la ciencia ficción. Y porque uno tiene que escribir lo que le apetece, lo que necesita escribir. Mi próxima novela será otra Bruna.

MM. Qué bien. Y, además, no son secuelas.

RM. Por supuesto. Estoy muy entusiasmada con este nuevo proyecto. Es algo que me late dentro, que quiero y necesito hacer.

Todo el rato tienes que luchar contra una especie de sentimiento entre los colegas escritores, periodistas y otra gente de la cultura, por el que se considera que tú haces esto como un divertimento. Sin embargo, tengo con ellas la misma ambición literaria, expresiva y emocional, estilística y narrativa que en todas mis novelas. No hay ninguna diferencia en absoluto.

MM. ¿No te parece más difícil escribirlas que las que se desarrollan en la España contemporánea?

RM. Siempre tienen una dificultad añadida. Son más complejas. Pero cada novela tiene su dificultad. Comparadas con la *Historia del rey transparente*, una novela muy extensa que está escrita en presente continuo y requirió un gran trabajo histórico, las dos novelas de Bruna fueron más fáciles. Lo que me gusta es crear un mundo que se va completando, partes que voy descubriendo y me hacen preguntarme por qué no las había visto antes. Es fascinante la creación de los diferentes detalles. Me fascina la ciencia ficción como vehículo de expresión y de vida.

MM. La ciencia ficción obliga a crear mundos, pero también supone que el lector esté dispuesto a trasladarse con la imaginación a uno que, teóricamente, nada tiene que ver con su propia circunstancia.

RM. Lo que está ocurriendo ahora en la narrativa española, es que cada vez se fabula menos. Hay una enorme cantidad de autoficción. Eso es un síntoma de fatiga, de la menor capacidad de hacer grandes ficciones. A esta fatiga seguirá seguramente una fatiga del lector, una fatiga social y cultural. Todo el mundo parece pegado a lo cotidiano, y así nos va.

Se necesita un acuerdo con el lector, con un lector

que quiera verdaderamente imaginar.

MM. Y salir de su mundo, para poder juzgarlo.

RM. Exacto.

MM: Esa era la gran función de la ciencia ficción, no tanto proponer soluciones.

RM. Por supuesto.

MM. A este respecto, me gustaría preguntarte por la politización reciente de la literatura, sobre todo a raíz del 11-M.

RM. Creo que es una traición del sentido de la escritura, de esa búsqueda del sentido de la existencia. La literatura es un viaje de conocimiento y no se puede empezar ese viaje con las respuestas ya listas. Hay géneros que sí permiten la politización, como el periodismo o el ensayo, que permiten la lucha por tus ideas. Para la ficción, que busca poner un poco de luz en las tinieblas y en lo que somos, es una catástrofe.

MM. Es la premisa de la literatura comprometida, en nombre de la cual se condenó a la ciencia ficción durante muchos años.

RM. Y también cualquier tipo de literatura fantástica. Mira el ejemplo de Álvaro Cunqueiro cuando estaba de moda la berza.

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MM. Además, cuando los propios autores realistas hacen una incursión en la ciencia ficción, como Francisco García Pavón en *La guerra de los dos mil años*, se reciben en silencio o como si hubieran sido un error. Cuando publicaste *Temblor*, y antes de *Lágrimas en la lluvia*, se debió de pensar que fue una rareza y que luego volviste al buen camino.

RM. Ya *La función delta* era una novela futurista, porque sucedía en parte treinta años más tarde de su fecha de publicación, 1981. Ahora ha pasado esa fecha y algunas predicciones se han cumplido, como la prohibición de fumar, cuando en esos años se podía hacer hasta en los aviones. Además, en muchas de mis novelas hay elementos fantásticos, sobre todo después de *Temblor*.

MM. Cuando salió esta, fue bastante criticada en los medios de aficionados, por no ser ciencia ficción ortodoxa. De hecho, al principio parece fantástica, debido a la presencia de la magia. ¿Cómo la veías entonces y cómo la ves ahora?

RM. No la he vuelto a leer, pero yo no creo en el género como jaula. Lo digo tanto para los de fuera, que lo odian, como para los de dentro, que se hacen su propia jaula y, desde ella, dictaminan qué es lo bueno y lo malo. En el siglo XXI, me parece ridículo encerrarse en una jaula genérica. En el siglo XIX, las convenciones eran tan fuertes que, incluso para hacer una novela en primera persona, se sentía la necesidad de explicar de dónde procedía el manuscrito, que se había encontrado en el baúl del abuelo, etc. Ahora tenemos una gran libertad. *El peso del corazón* es una novela de ciencia ficción, pero también es una novela psicológica, política, de meta ficción, negra... Esa es la gracia. Lo mismo ocurre con *Temblor*. Es un cuento que salió solo. No me dije que esto era ciencia ficción hasta aquí y esto de más allá, otra cosa.

MM. Cuando la leí, me pareció extraordinaria la pericia con que habías fundido géneros antitéticos como lo son la ciencia ficción, que se basa en la racionalidad, y la fantasía, que se basa en la magia y lo emotivo. Lo que no entiendo es por qué no se ha traducido al inglés.

RM. Yo tampoco lo entiendo. Quizá porque son muy cerrados. Sin embargo, me han traducido en los Estados Unidos las dos Brunas.

MM. Es curioso también, porque *Temblor* es una de tus novelas que más atención académica ha suscitado. De hecho, de las novelas especulativas españolas de las últimas décadas, es aquella a la que se han dedicado más artículos de ese tipo, incluso en

los Estados Unidos, país donde se entendería quizás mejor que en Europa.

RM. Sí, porque hay allí más lectores acostumbrados a leer ciencia ficción y más respeto por ella. Pero el mundo de la traducción es muy arbitrario. Voy a decir a mi agente que ofrezca *Temblor* para su traducción al inglés.

A continuación hablamos un rato de nuestra amiga común Ursula K. Le Guin. Ambos coincidimos en que se trata de una de las grandes escritoras vivas en cualquier género, pero que su defensa de la ciencia ficción, ha impedido seguramente que tenga ese reconocimiento también por parte de la institución cultural aún hegemónica, a diferencia de la actitud de Margaret Atwood, pese a haber escrito esta varias novelas universalmente consideradas de ciencia ficción, incluida la última.

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RM. Algunos escritores niegan escribir ciencia ficción, pese a hacerlo, porque deben de estar hartos de que los ninguneen por ello.

MM. Cuéntame cómo conociste a Le Guin y su obra.

RM. Lo primero que leí de ella fue *The Left Hand of Darkness* y me acuerdo de su impacto en mí, cuando yo tenía veintitantos años. Una profesora, Mary Harges, que estaba haciendo una tesis sobre mi obra, me preguntó por mis autores más admirados y contesté que Le Guin era una de ellos. Bastantes años después, Mary le hizo una entrevista a Ursula para otro trabajo y le dijo que yo la consideraba uno de mis maestros. Además, le dio un libro mío. Luego me lo contó y para mí fue muy emocionante; le pregunté a Mary si podía escribir a Ursula. Me dio su dirección y así lo hice. Desde entonces mantenemos correspondencia. Le mandé un libro más. Saber que había leído mis libros, incluido *Temblor*, y saber de ella que le habían gustado, porque ella es muy generosa, me supuso una alegría inmensa. Conocí a sus hijas, una de las cuales, Elizabeth, incluso llegó a vivir en Madrid, pero no me atrevía a visitar a Ursula, porque siempre me ha dado reparo conocer en persona a quienes admiro mucho. Pero Elizabeth me dijo que ya llevábamos siendo amigas de correo quince años y que tenía que ir a ver a su madre. Entonces fui a Portland y se portaron conmigo maravillosamente.

MM. Cuando leí *Temblor*, me recordó bastante la obra de Le Guin, porque habías conseguido algo que muy pocos escritores, Ursula entre ellos, consiguen: aunar el sentido de la maravilla que produce la visión de un mundo original, con las características atrayentes de la fantasía, con la emoción, una emoción que se desprende de las descripciones, del uso de la lengua, etc. ¿Qué te parece a ti?

RM. Para mí es exactamente igual que el resto de mis libros. Lo que me lleva a escribir una novela

Lo que me lleva a escribir una novela es una emoción. Son unas imágenes o sueños con los ojos abiertos que aparecen en mi cabeza, que yo no busco sino que me buscan a mí, y que me emocionan y turban tanto que me digo que tengo que contarlos.

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Desde hacía bastantes años, tenía el deseo imperioso de crear un mundo entero, que tuviera esa cosa que tiene la ciencia ficción, cuando te planteas efectivamente crear una realidad aparte, que te obliga a crear como un rompecabezas, con su propia lógica.

MM. Y, en *Lágrimas en la lluvia*, ¿cuál fue ese huevecillo?

RM. Fue el deseo de crear un mundo propio que yo pudiera visitar. También el deseo de jugar con algo tan grande como es un mundo. Aparte de eso, quería hablar de mis obsesiones de siempre, el amor, la muerte, el paso del tiempo, lo que el tiempo nos hace o más bien nos deshace, y también la memoria como algo artificial, como un cuento que nos contamos a nosotros mismos, y por lo tanto nuestra identidad también es artificial. Desde hacía bastantes años, tenía el deseo imperioso de crear un mundo entero, que tuviera esa cosa que tiene la ciencia ficción, cuando te planteas efectivamente crear una realidad aparte, que te obliga a crear como un rompecabezas, con su propia lógica. Eso me encanta. Todo tenía que tener su sentido. Desde el principio, quería crear un mundo que yo pudiera visitar de cuando en cuando al escribir y que me permitiera pasar por encima de los límites de la realidad convencional que vemos hoy, creando posibilidades más fantásticas que me facilitaran una capacidad de expresión metafórica de lo que somos. La primera decisión fue que se desarrollara cien años más adelante, en 2109. Empecé la historia en 2007 y la escribí durante tres años, para que su publicación fuera justo un siglo antes de 2109.

MM. ¿Y *El peso del corazón*?

RM. Lo mismo. Es Bruna Husky la que me cuenta sus historias. Es el personaje que más me gusta de todos los que he escrito; es el que siento más vivo y más cerca de mí. A diferencia de lo que ocurre en otras de mis novelas, el personaje es absolutamente esencial.

MM: ¿Me puedes decir algo de lo que Bruna te ha contado para tu próxima novela?

RM. Hay un problema que tengo que solucionar científicamente. Intento que mis novelas no sean científicamente estúpidas, sino que sean razonadas. Hay un acto terrorista que acaba con la energía en todo el mundo durante un tiempo determinado. Por esta razón ella va a las fábricas de replicantes, y esta imagen es el huevecillo de la novela. ¿Cómo no habían aparecido antes? Porque tienen instalado un microprocesador para que no vuelvan a esas fábricas. Bruna tiene que hacerlo, a pesar de que ello le produce grandes molestias físicas (vómitos, etc.). Consigue entrar y ve a los replicantes en los tanques, muriéndose porque se ha cortado la energía. Es así como me lo ha contado.

MM. ¿Ya tiene título?

RM. Todavía no lo tengo pensado.



Hablando de literatura con Rosa Montero

MM. Cuando nos conocimos en Bruselas, donde estabas firmando ejemplares de *Lágrimas en la lluvia*, me mencionaste *Blade Runner*.

RM. Fue una fuente de inspiración y así lo reconozco en el título y se menciona en la novela. Aunque, más que una fuente de inspiración, tengo la sensación de que hice una versión de un mito contemporáneo, como si hubiera escrito una novela sobre el mito de Edipo.

MM. De hecho, tu novela es muy distinta a *Blade Runner*.

RM. No tiene nada que ver, salvo el mito. Es el concepto del replicante que, al vivir menos, no puede olvidar que es mortal y que tiene memorias artificiales, lo que coincidía con dos obsesiones mías, la muerte y la memoria como construcción artificial, como relato que nos contamos y que va variando con el tiempo.

MM. A mí me recordó también la moda del *cyberpunk*. ¿Eras consciente de ello?

RM. No, para nada, aunque he leído *Monna Lisa Overdrive* y otras novelas, en inglés. Me han interesado mucho, pero no las tenía presentes conscientemente al escribir *Lágrimas en la lluvia*.

En España, se venden muy poco los libros de cuentos y, por ello, resulta más difícil publicarlos, reciben muchas menos críticas, etc. Entiendo que, desalentados por esa presión del mercado, se pasen a la novela.

RM. La ciencia ficción es muy amplia. ¿Con qué autores te iniciaste en el género? ¿Cómo empezó a gustarte?

RM. Tengo la idea de que mi primer contacto con el género fue siendo muy pequeña y no con un libro, sino con una historieta. Un hermano de mi madre, pintor, tenía una buena colección de ellas y me trajo, cuando estuve enferma de los cinco a los nueve años, *Flash Gordon*. Adoraba tanto este como *El príncipe valiente*. Son dos cosas que me encantan: las leyendas artúricas, que se reflejan en *Historia del rey transparente*, y la ciencia ficción. En esos años primordiales, me abrí a esas dos visiones del mundo. Luego, he leído de todo a lo largo del tiempo: Arthur C. Clarke, Ray Bradbury, Stanislaw Lem, Philip K. Dick, Le Guin, William Gibson, Ian Banks...

Hablamos un rato de Ted Chiang, que Rosa no ha leído aún, como otro escritor que aborda magistralmente el tema de la memoria y el lenguaje.

MM. Entre mis escritores favoritos están Jorge Luis Borges y Ted Chiang, ninguno de los cuales ha escrito novela alguna. En cambio, no has escrito apenas relatos, sino sobre todo novelas. Hay muchos grandes cuentistas, pero que no han perseverado por esa vía y han acabado escribiendo novelas. Es como si un escritor que ha demostrado con el cuento ser bueno se sintiera disminuido si no publicara ninguna novela y, a menudo, no de una extensión razonable como las tuyas, sino novelones. ¿Qué opinas de la manía actual de hacer novelas muy largas, venga o no a cuento?

RM. Eso pasa sobre todo en España. En Latinoamérica parece haber más respeto por los cuentistas. En España, se venden muy poco los libros de cuentos y, por ello, resulta más difícil publicarlos, reciben muchas menos críticas, etc. Entiendo que, desalentados por esa presión del mercado, se pasen a la novela.

MM. Lo propio de un artista es escribir lo que cree que debe, como has demostrado a lo largo de tu carrera.

RM. Hago eso, pero es porque he tenido la fortuna de que me han ido leyendo. Pero, ¿qué pasa si escribes un par de libros de cuentos espléndidos y no encuentras editor para el tercero? Por mi parte, empecé escribiendo novelas y los cuentos, de los que he escrito pocos en treinta y siete años, son rarezas. Escribir un cuento es como asomarse por una ventana y ver un paisaje maravilloso, mientras que la novela es salir de la casa y caminar por ese paisaje.



Hablando de literatura con Rosa Montero

Leo muchísimos cuentos, pero, como escritora, me gusta más el viaje de la novela y, como hecho vital, hacer ese viaje durante tres años.

MM. Pero no lo haces porque sea «comercial».

RM. No. He sido siempre novelista en primer lugar.

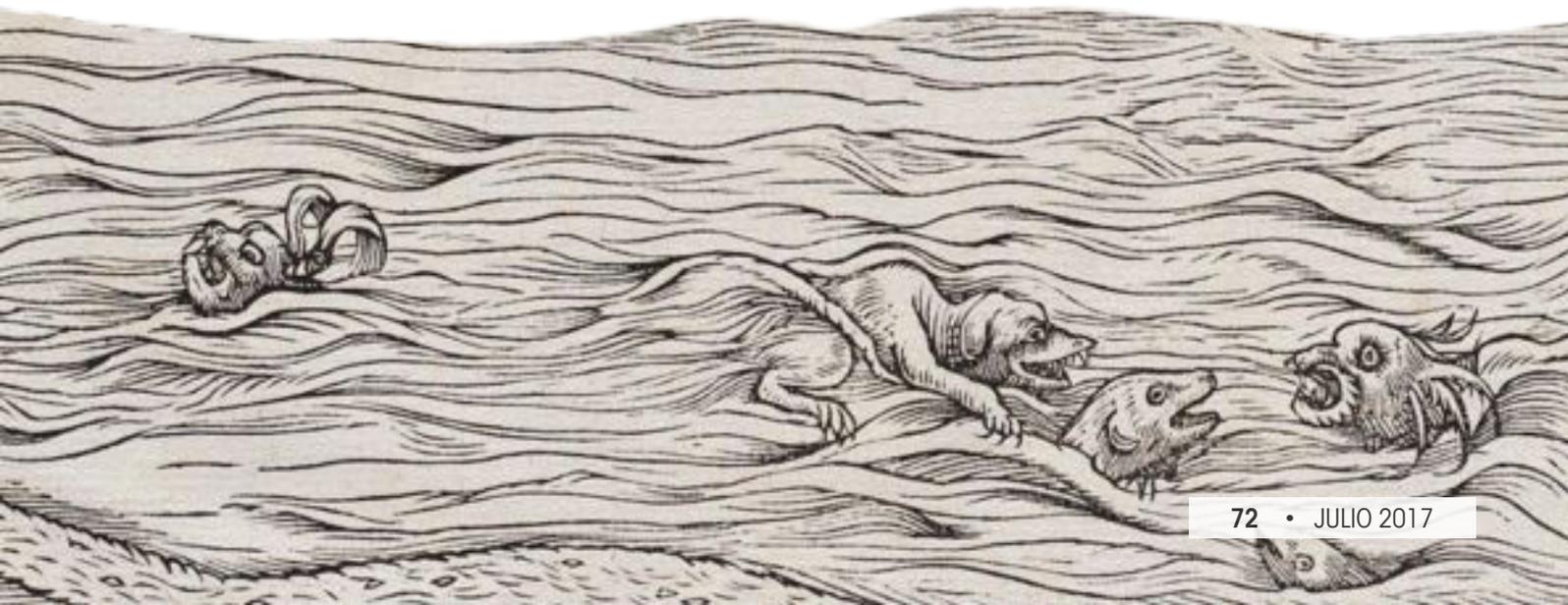
MM. Y muy buena novelista, en mi opinión. A este respecto, uno se pregunta por qué una novela como *Temblo* no tiene la misma consideración que *Corazón tan blanco*, por ejemplo.

RM. Hombre, gracias. *Corazón tan blanco* es una novela preciosa. Pero es cierto que hay una literatura digamos oficial.

MM. Como has «cometido» ciencia ficción y sigues cometiéndola, no te tenemos ni en la Real Academia Española...

RM. Existe una gran cerrazón mental. Los mandarines españoles de la cultura valoran una literatura mucho más convencional que la ciencia ficción. La literatura debería ser justamente todo lo contrario; debería dar patadas a las paredes del mundo, para tirarlas y hacer el mundo más grande.

Nos congratulamos de que Rosa Montero vaya a seguir, efectivamente, haciendo el mundo más grande mediante sus novelas de ciencia ficción, que nos brindan realidades planetarias enteras, con detalle y coherencia, haciendo que miremos la realidad con ojos nuevos no solo a nosotros, los amantes del género, sino a muchos otros lectores que han empezado a descubrirlo y apreciarlo gracias a ella en España y en otros países, a pesar de los pesares. ●

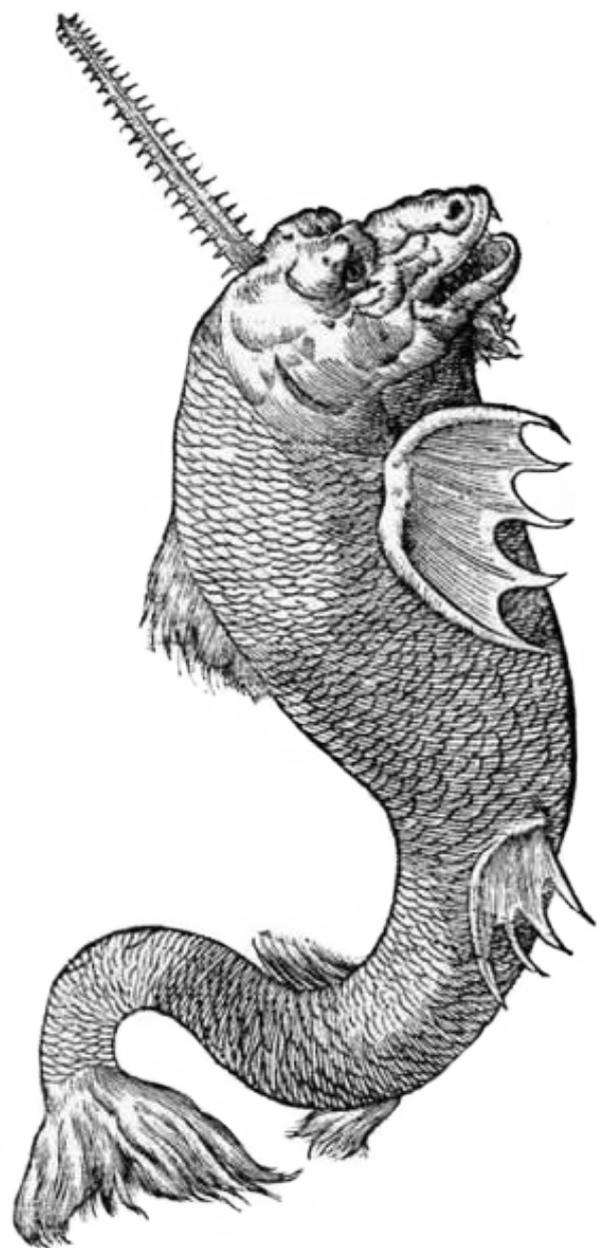


Four Centuries of Good Government

Introductory Note and Translation with Notes
by Valerie Hegstrom

Nilo María Fabra y Deas (1843-1903) was a Spanish journalist and politician during the latter half of the nineteenth century. In 1865, he founded an organization that grew into the first news agency in Spain, the Agencia de Noticias Fabra, and he himself worked as a correspondent during the Seven Weeks' War (1866) and the Franco-German War (1870-71). A member of the Liberal Party, he was elected to the Spanish Senate in 1891 during the regency of María Cristina of Austria. In 1860, a collection of his poems appeared, and he later published Spanish-language stories and novels of interest to fans of speculative fiction. His serial novel, *El problema social* (The Social Problem, 1890), and his collections of short stories and novellas, *Por los espacios imaginarios* (Through Imaginary Spaces, 1885), *Cuentos ilustrados* (Illustrated Stories, 1895), and *Presente y futuro* (Present and Future, 1897) include science fiction, political dystopia, and alternate history. "Cuatro siglos de buen gobierno" ("Four Centuries of Good Government") stands out as the first *ucronía* (alternate history) penned in Spanish.

Fabra included "Four Centuries" in his collection *Cuentos ilustrados* in 1895, just three years before the Spanish-American War, popularly known in Spain as the "Disaster of 98." This conflict dealt the final blow





Four Centuries of Good Government

to Spain's empire, resulting in the loss of Spain's remaining colonies in the Caribbean and the Pacific and causing a sense of apathy and the search for a redefinition of Spanish identity by the group of literati known as the Generation of 98. Fabra's story looks back on an earlier time period, following the initial explorations by Columbus and Vasco da Gama at the turn of the sixteenth-century and the beginning of Spain's "Golden Age," and imagines a different aftermath. All alternate histories ask the question "what if...?" "Four Centuries" goes beyond the question by including a tone of Portuguese *saudade* or longing, "if only..." If only Prince Miguel, the infant son of King Manuel I of Portugal and his consort Isabel (daughter of Isabel of Castile and Fernando of Aragon), had lived to adulthood, then the kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula would have united under one homegrown monarch. His survival beyond the age of two becomes the Jonbar hinge of the story. Because the fictional King Miguel I sets the pattern of implementing wise and forward-looking policies, four centuries later, the Afro-Iberian empire develops into one of the most prosperous and powerful on earth.

Historical reality played out quite differently. After Prince Miguel died as a young child, his maternal aunt Juana, called "la Loca" (the Mad), became heir to the thrones of Castile and Aragon, but her husband, father, and eventually her son, Carlos I, ruled in her stead. Carlos, a Habsburg, had been raised by his aunt in Flanders, spoke little Spanish, and became Carlos V of the Holy Roman Empire. His son, Felipe II, ruled Spain and Portugal as two separate kingdoms. The tenuous "union" lasted from 1580 to 1640, and the Habsburg

monarchy led to few, if any, of the advances that Fabra imagines in his utopian alternate history. "Four Centuries" projects quite modern political, scientific, and social values and sensibilities, except concerning religious tolerance, particularly in regard to the *Moriscos*, a term which the narrator uses to refer all Muslims; the story characterizes them as uncivilized and in need of careful conversion and catechization.

I have used the 1895 edition of "Cuatro siglos" as the source text for my translation. The story reads like a historical account or chronicle, and sometimes like a political document. I have attempted to approximate the words, long sentence structure, and tone of the source text in my translation, because I believe that meaning is carried in all three. I have chosen to reorder the syntax of many sentences for the sake of comprehensibility. The source text included three footnotes, which I have labeled and translated; all other explanatory footnotes are my own. *Cuentos ilustrados*, true to its name, included black and white sketches by several artists scattered throughout its pages. Fourteen drawings, including a portrait of King Miguel I as an adult, graphically suggest the alternate vision of Iberia that Fabra describes in "Cuatro siglos"; my translation does not reproduce those illustrations. ●



Nilo María Fabra
Four centuries of good government
 A story about the modern age

I

Prince Don Juan, the only male child of the Catholic Monarchs, was laid to rest on the fourth of October in 1497, and his elder sister, Doña Isabel, queen of Portugal, succeeded him in the right to inherit the throne of Castile, according to the laws of the latter kingdom; none of which impeded Philip *the Fair*, married to Doña Juana, the second daughter of those monarchs, from claiming for himself and for his wife the titles of Prince and Princess of Asturias.¹

The Spanish sovereigns hastened to protest such an unjustified pretension and, resolved to destroy it completely, they summoned their children, those from Portugal, and on the 29th of April of 1498, they made the Courts,² gathered in Toledo, recognize and avow Doña Isabel, wife of King Don Manuel, as the legitimate successor to the crown of Castile; while Don Fernando convoked, on the second of June of the same year, the Aragonese Courts, with the aim that these, on behalf of that kingdom, would make the same agreement.

The Courts of Zaragoza provoked grave difficulties for the desires of the Royal family (who had gone on purpose to that city), because the greater part of the representatives, invoking the laws of Aragon, in spite of examples to the contrary, professed the principle that females should be excluded from succession to the throne. After a prolonged controversy, it was decided to defer the resolution until the delivery of the Monarchs' eldest daughter, who was with child; with the object of proclaiming, in the case that a boy were born, the child as heir to the crown, by virtue of the testamentary disposition of Don Juan II, according to

which, if there were no male children, the right to succession of the male descendants of the daughters of the monarch would be recognized.

The opposing opinions being reconciled on this point, no opposition arose to the recognition of Prince Don Miguel, to whom the virtuous Princess Doña Isabel gave birth, at the cost of her life, on the 23rd of August, 1498, in the city of Zaragoza. The four arms of the kingdom of Aragon, gathered on the 22nd of September, confirmed their agreement with the solemn oath regarding the tender grandchild of the Catholic Monarchs and firstborn son of those of Portugal.

During the first days of the following year, the Courts of Castile, assembled in Ocaña, and on the 17th of March, those of Portugal in Lisbon declared Don Miguel the legitimate heir of the respective kingdoms.

* * *

Don Miguel I³ was proclaimed king of Castile in 1504 when Doña Isabel *the Catholic* died, king of Aragon in 1516 when Don Fernando expired, and king of Portugal in 1521 when Don Manuel *the Great* passed.

The illustrious grandson of the Catholic Monarchs was about twenty-four years old when he united the crowns of Castile, Aragon, Portugal, and Navarre within the Peninsula, and beyond it, those of Naples and Sicily; along with the colonies of the East and West Indies, which in the period, the Spanish and Portuguese navigators were expanding with astonishing speed.

Don Miguel was a monarch of energetic spirit, of untiring activity, and of thoughtful and cultivated understanding. From his grandfather Don Fernando, he inherited that sagacity and diplomacy that made of him one of the most able politicians of his time; from his grandmother, the Catholic Queen, the generous impulses and tenacious perseverance that gave a world

1. Prince or Princess of Asturias is the title of the crown prince or princess, next heir to the throne of Spain. Asturias, led by Don Pelayo, was the only Christian stronghold to withstand the Islamic invasion begun in 711 and the first Medieval Spanish Christian kingdom, established in 718.

2. The *Cortes* were parliamentary bodies instituted in Medieval Spanish kingdoms and later in regional governments. Several autonomous regions of Spain continue to have legislative bodies known as *Cortes*.

3. Prince Don Miguel, whom the author of this pseudohistory names a king, died in Granada on the 20th day of July in 1500, at the tender age of two, unfortunately for Spain, which had fastened its fondest hopes on that child. (*Footnote from the source text*).

Four Centuries of Good Government



to Spain and completed the work of the Reconquest; from his mother, the pious Doña Isabel, the most pure religious sentiments, although far removed from superstition and fanaticism; and finally, from his father, king Don Manuel, that unceasing desire and noble fervor with which he protected and stimulated the daring undertakings directed toward the work begun in the West by the extraordinary genius of Christopher Columbus, and in the East by the indomitable constancy of Vasco de Gama.

But above such relevant qualities, others superior to them stood out in the young sovereign (in an age in which the tendencies of a sentimental order suffocated the voice of reason and of convenience), and they were common sense, clear and correct judgment, and the eminently utilitarian spirit that presided in all of his political actions.

The turbulent nobility diminished in the previous reign; those haughty magnates, who insulted the majesty of the throne, reduced to impotence; the Royal power respected everywhere; the religious orders reformed, thanks to the Christian zeal of Isabel, seconded by the austere energy of Cisneros, who during the minority of the King intervened in the governing of Castile; the Holy Brotherhood organized, a militia created for the defense of social order, which became a vigorous champion of the throne against the excesses of the nobility; the great king Don Miguel understood that the peace, prosperity, and fortune of his extensive domain lay in the respect of the venerated popular institutions and in the gradual development of these, united in a strict and indissoluble bond with the Crown.

At the same time, it was necessary to give a certain unity to those peninsular States, which differed among themselves in their laws, practices, customs, and even in their language, and to that end, with prudent measures, without wounding local concerns, he went about preparing the way for the system that reaches such a high degree of perfection in our days, thanks to the unanimous cooperation of the electoral body, to the impartiality of the representatives of the country, and to the sincerity and uprightness of the governments:

the logical consequence of the progression of the political customs, after so many centuries, without the dissolution of continuity, of a regime embodied in the spirit of the Iberian nation.

In the middle of the chaos into which the economic sciences were then plunged, Don Miguel displayed a rare example of foresight, facilitating free trade between the European kingdoms subject to his scepter, extending to their ports the privilege, which Seville and Lisbon enjoyed, of contracting with the Indies, and finally, authorizing, although with some restrictions, foreign commerce. If, rendering tribute to the protectionist ideas of the age or perhaps driven by a motive of high politics, he absolutely prohibited all communication between the colonies and foreign ports; he nevertheless permitted the extraction of gold and silver from the Mother Country, metals which, abounding in excess since the discovery of the New World, raised the price of goods and labor. The results of this wise measure were as immediate as effective: pouring the surplus cash throughout Europe, he opened a vast market to trade; the public wealth increased extremely with the returns; and the lost equilibrium of mercantile balance was reestablished, the nation being freed from finding itself poor in the middle of a superabundance of those stagnant precious metals.

The suppression of the obstacles imposed on colonial commerce and the concession to all of the ports of the realm of the franchises enjoyed by Seville and Lisbon alone contributed in great measure to the reinforcement of national unity; because, the benefits to industry and agriculture that trade with overseas countries produced were so plentiful that the different kingdoms were tied together in an unbreakable knot by reciprocal rights, utilitarian convenience, and the association of material interests: bonds tighter and more powerful than those created by political connections, regional spirit, or the force of arms.

Moreover, with this reform the development and prosperity of the colonies accelerated, because the emulation and competence, born under the protection of free commerce, soon confirmed the virtue of an economic law revealed palpably by experience.



Four Centuries of Good Government

Such was, in summary, the interior policy of King Don Miguel.

With regard to the exterior, he had as a constant objective the lofty interests of Christianity and civilization, the defense of national unity, the well-being of his subjects, and the security of trade. Attentive, above all, to the geographical location of the Peninsula, which constituted the nucleus of his vast dominions; with plenty of lands in the far East and West to be colonized, with an enemy on the opposite coast of the Mediterranean to subdue, he understood that Iberia should live, as much as possible, distant from all noble interference that would not affect the future of the homeland in a direct way. Thus it is that he did not make an effort to conserve the kingdom of Naples, an eternal cause of discord with France, sure that the possession of that territory could distract him from more advantageous enterprises. Conversely, he retained and strengthened Sicily which, because of its character as an island, was easier to defend from enemy attacks, and, because of its strategic position, constituted one of the noteworthy fortresses to continue the war against Islam.

To overcome the latter and conquer those countries, separated from Spain by a strait, was the purpose of his whole existence, and to this policy, followed with perseverance in subsequent centuries, is owed the formation of the great Ibero-African state, which has as its boundaries to the north, the Garonne; to the south, the Atlas Mountains; and to the east, the desert of Libya.

To reach such lofty goals and, above all, to defend the distant colonies, he dedicated himself, with particular predilection, to the fostering of the navy and to the creation of permanent armies, a patriotic work, which his successors continued with the same zeal, and thus, neither the Venetians and Turks at first nor the Dutch and English later could face up to the maritime power of Iberia, which in this way was able not only to bring a happy ending to the work of the conquest of Africa, but also to save from foreign greed the extensive colonies of South America and above all the rich Hindustani empire, where the Portuguese had founded the first factories.

The policy of the nation established on such a foundation; the traditional dynasty sincerely united with the popular institutions; the throne linked with public liberties, which the spirit of the times has continued perfecting without revolutions nor violence; the high powers inspired by the great interest of the country; the path traced by Don Miguel I followed without interruption for the space of four centuries; should it surprise us that Iberia, in spite of its vicissitudes, of its crises, and of the great conflicts emerging in Europe and America, is still the greatest world power?

That great King, imitating his illustrious grandparents, the Catholic Monarchs, did not have a fixed residence in any of the cities of the Peninsula, but in the subsequent reign an attempt was made to designate the definitive capital of the Monarchy. This issue was the motive for great rivalries and discords among various populations of the former kingdoms and the Sovereign refused to resolve the questions without the cooperation of the Courts. With this motive, he convoked for the first time in a single body those of the various kingdoms, also giving a vote to the important cities and towns that lacked one. This innovation, received with universal approval, was a great step toward perfecting the parliamentary system.

The Courts gathered in Toledo, and after animated debates, the ruling of public interest prevailed, sustained especially by the representatives from the towns who were using their right to representation for the first time.

Toledo was declared the capital city of Iberia.

The Courts, nevertheless, upon proposing this measure to the King, earnestly beseeched him to visit with great frequency the large cities of the ancient realms, to see their needs up close.

Situated on the banks of a mighty river, in the center of the Peninsula, with an extensive meadow, numerous inhabitants, flourishing industries and active commerce; abundant in construction materials; neighboring the charming site of Aranjuez; full of monuments that testified to its age-old glories; and residence of the chief Archbishop of Spain; Toledo seemed the spot destined to be the heart of a great power.

Four Centuries of Good Government



It was agreed that subsequently the representatives of all the kingdoms would meet in Toledo whenever they were convoked by the King to deal with issues of general interest, without disturbing the partial gatherings of each of them on questions of regional character, and afterward the Courts voted in favor of a tax to support the construction on the plain of a magnificent building, admired by locals and foreigners, where the Chambers of the kingdom still celebrate their sessions.

Around that monument, symbol of native liberties, distributed in wide plazas and spacious streets laid out in rows, the modern city was edified. There, on the banks of the Tagus, by day, one can admire the mansions, property of the most illustrious families of the country; numerous and artistic churches in the style of the Renaissance; the Royal Palace, situated on the left bank of the river, which outdoes the Louvre and the Tuileries in its extension and magnificence; great museums, where the works of Iberian genius turn heads and the advances of its civilizing conquests are studied; the University and notable educational establishments, which offer to the youth, without any stipend, the bread of the soul, and to true merit and proven knowledge, their just and liberal recompense; vast barracks, lodgings for those who on foreign soil brandish arms never spotted by Spanish blood; sumptuous Courts of justice, solicitous and diligent protector of trampled reason; the Town Hall, center of noble impartiality and civic perseverance; comfortable and elegant coliseums, arenas only of national art; the Ministries, glorious conclusion of recognized competence and proven uprightness; the magnificent Stock Exchange, universal market of values and sanctuary of probity and good faith; the Bank, active servant of foreign credit and faithful guardian of domestic; parks and promenades with a profusion of statues erected to the illustrious sons of Iberia, and in magnificent abundance, elegant fountains and murmuring cascades; a countryside filled with centuries-old trees and picturesque villas, where the fatigued spirit can find the sweet rest of home at the breast of Nature; numerous factories,

whose steaming chimneys glorify the conquest of man over matter; and finally, the glorious city of three million souls, the worthy capital of the largest and most powerful of empires, which, in its greatness, eclipses Paris and London.

The channeling of the Tagus from Aranjuez to its estuary contributed in great measure to such prosperity. The portion of the benefits from the colonial mines which corresponded to the State was invested in this colossal (above all for the age) work. Near the end of the sixteenth century the construction ended, and since then 200-ton ships can navigate the river.

The invention of the railroads, which began to be built on the Peninsula in the second third of this century, was also a powerful auxiliary to the enhancement of Toledo, and especially of its industry and commerce. The plan of the railways responded to the general necessities of the country: the routes conformed to these and to the economy, without taking into account, in the least, personal or local influences, and in this way, very economical prices were obtained in the rates of transport. Thus it is that the coal from Puertollano and Bélmez is carried to Toledo at such a low price that it competes with the English brought by waterways.

Thanks to this increased communication, the industries that existed in the past were revived and developed in the center of the Peninsula and, freeing themselves from imminent ruin, they avoided the impoverishment of some provinces which, possessing generally unrewarding soil, need the collaboration of the factory to avoid being dragged into a laborious and miserable way of life.

The selection of the capital, although it seems a simple historical incident, exercised a great influence on the destiny of our homeland, for establishing the former in a center where commerce, industry, and agriculture could develop on a great scale infused a utilitarian and practical sense in the governing of the State, gave a constant example of the love of work to the rest of the country, opened plenty of room for individual initiative, and distanced ambition, which saw before itself more protracted prospects for sterile battles between politics and bureaucratic hopes.

Four Centuries of Good Government



In the second chapter, we will make known how the kingdom came through the great crises that arose in the world, and particularly the one produced by the emancipation of the South American States, and we will see the prodigious increase of public wealth in the whole Peninsula sheltered by internal peace and the wise policies of the national dynasty, faithful interpreter of the lofty interests, of the traditional necessities, and of the true aspirations of Iberian society.

II

Religious sentiment, which tended toward unity, widespread hatred toward the enemies of the faith, and, perhaps, the influence of economic errors and worries produced, during the reign of Isabel and Fernando, the proscription in Spain of the Hebrew race. Also, the *Moriscos* were for the most part expelled from Granada, in spite of the Capitulations of La Vega, broken first by the former with their turbulence and rebellions.

Although he inherited from his mother an aversion to Jews,⁴ the great damage that the exile of these industrious inhabitants caused to commerce and to public wealth could not be hidden from the clear aptitude and good judgment of Don Miguel, and thus it is no surprise that, working as a skilled politician, he would abandon in this matter an intransigent and rigorous system, an example followed later by France, England, and Italy, which, after casting out of their territory the children of Israel, would again admit them and tolerate them.

Much more dangerous was the continued presence on the Peninsula of the *Moriscos*, because that coarse, ignorant, and rebellious people constantly threatened the general tranquility; but the Great Monarch, without internal discords to calm, nor European wars to entertain, nor disputed majestic rights to protect; sure of the power that gave him the consolidation of his eminent national policy, undisturbed

and undamaged by exotic influences; armed with surplus material means to reduce to impotence any act of force; inaugurated a procedure that, with the passage of the years, would unite and blend that race with the Iberian. He opposed oppressive cruelty with generous tolerance, arbitrary persecution with solicitous justice, forced baptism with Christian persuasion, extermination plans with the pure tenets of the Gospel, the sword with the cross.

It was necessary to create special missionaries, instruct them in the language of the *Moriscos*, enlighten the latter (whose attachment to vulgar superstitions was born of their rustic condition), overcome popular concerns, eradicate abuses, and facilitate mixed marriages.

Thanks to the persevering zeal of the Crown, seconded by many prelates who, as enemies of expulsion, asked for the use of gentle means to convert and catechize the descendants of the Moors, the agricultural ruin, impoverishment, and depopulation of the Peninsula were avoided. A notable triumph of common sense over a fanaticism which might have been forgivable after the eight centuries of religious battle!

A consequence of this battle was the establishment of the Holy Office in the time of the Catholic Monarchs; but Don Miguel, although he could not remove himself completely from the spirit of his era, tried to prevent the rigors of that institution, agreeing to the petitions of the Courts, which asked that the King “decree that in the office of the Holy Inquisition justice be done, observing the sacred canons and the common rights, and that the bishops be the judges, consistent with justice.”

He also, using prudent measures, put a stop to the increase of ecclesiastical amortization, thus satisfying the cities’ attorneys, who expressed themselves in these terms: “Let no one be allowed to bequeath real estate to any church, monastery, hospital, or religious brotherhood, nor allow them to inherit or buy them, because, if this were permitted, in a short time, everything would be theirs.”

The appearance of the Reformation in Germany and the terrifying religious wars that the plague of

4. Before she gave her hand to King Don Manuel of Portugal, Princess Isabel, daughter of the Catholic Monarchs, imposed on him the condition that he exile the Jews. (Footnote from the source text).

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heretics brought with them could not help but inspire a profound anxiety in the sovereign who governed the destiny of Iberia, but soon experience showed him that, without any need to light inquisitorial bonfires, the principle of free inquiry, a doctrine that has never found true resonance among meridional peoples, would not take root in our soil.

The catholic princes⁵ solicited a peninsular alliance to combat the sectarian rebels, and although they always encountered decided moral support, they never obtained material assistance from the Migueline dynasty, faithful to his policy of abstention from European conflicts. Would not the incessant war against Islam offer a more beneficial field for his activity, and more in keeping with national traditions? Should not the conversion and conquest of the vast territories of the Far East, whose sea route was found by the Portuguese, and of the Western World, discovered by the Spanish in the middle of the wilderness of the Ocean, take up all of his strength and virility?

The rivalry between Iberia and England, both powers being colonizers, could do no less than bear as fruit repeated and bloody battles on the sea and in the colonies; but, as the former had advantages in naval forces over the rest of the nations, thanks to the superiority of its resources, it always saw its campaigns crowned with success, making vain the efforts of the Albion arrogance, which coveted the valuable Hindustani Empire. The result was that England, finally recognizing its impotence, limited itself to the colonization of North America.

France, also jealous of our increase, invoking its illusory rights over Roussillon and over Navarre, tried, on different occasions, to invade those territories, without ever being able to cross the border, which was so well defended by a system of fortifications, constantly perfected in accordance with advancements in the military arts, that it made the sacred territory of the homeland invulnerable.

These unfruitful attacks, united with the setbacks which, mounting an offensive, our arms caused for those of our neighboring nation suffer on the northern

slopes of the Pyrenees, ended up convincing the Government of Paris of how much the friendship of such a powerful State mattered to it, which, by the way, neither interfered in foreign affairs, nor fueled the torch of discord in Europe, nor claimed its rights to the Italian Peninsula, where Germany, France, and Venice spilled their blood in perpetual battles.

While the rest of the nations, pitifully confusing the rights of nobility with the interests of the people, disputed the possession of territories (many times without intrinsic or strategic value); while the commercial Republic of Venice declined rapidly toward its close, because maritime discoveries had produced a revolution in trade; the Iberian Empire proceeded ardently with the war against the Crescent Moon, the colonization of its vast and extensive overseas provinces, and, in the shadow of a never disturbed internal peace, the promotion of its material interests.

If emigration to the Indies carried off talent from the arts, the Government, following the path traced by the Catholic Monarchs, stimulated the naturalization of foreigners, and if experience made manifest economic errors and administrative abuses, the Royal power—distant from courtly luxury, deaf to personal influence, intractable to the yoke of royal advisors, and attentive alone to the people's necessities, faithfully reflected in the representations of the Courts—promptly came to the rescue with solicitous zeal.

The Courts necessarily had to acquire notable development and improvement after many centuries of uninterrupted and undistorted practice, and therefore, one should not be surprised that the principles of the French Revolution, which disturbed Europe and America, barely found an echo in Iberia, for here rights and liberties, which in other places could only be won through violence, had been introduced through a series of slow and progressive evolutions.

But if in the sphere of ideas that event did not exercise considerable influence on the Peninsula, it did have a great deal of influence on the foreign policy of the Court of Toledo. The latter tried in vain to persevere in its constant resolve to live removed from European conflicts. When it found its colonies

5. The word "princes" here refers to popes and cardinals.

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threatened by a cosmopolitan propaganda, which had not affected the Homeland, when it became persuaded of the cunning of the neighboring nation and of the intrigue of the States of North America, which had just been emancipated from England, to produce an uprising in the South against its mother country, then and only then, the Peninsula threw its sword into the balance of the destinies of Europe, and its entrance into the Holy Alliance was enough to annihilate and destroy that spirit of war, which was astonishing the world with its exploits.

Thanks to this material intervention, the Iberian Monarchy extended its borders to the Garonne River, but, in exchange, had to resign itself to losing its extensive provinces on the American continent, where the fire of insurrection had been propagated in a formidable way during the war with France.

The campaign was bloody, although short, for soon the Government became convinced of the pointlessness of prolonging a fight, which would compromise its future interests in Latin America. Then, instead of stoking hatreds and resentments with senseless intransigence between the emancipated colonies and its former mother country, it was proposed through an apt policy to soften harshness, overcome obstacles, and instill in the nascent republics sentiments of peace and of harmony.

Inspired by this spirit of conciliation, the Government hastened to recognize the independence of the republics, encouraging them in their first steps in political life, uniting them to the Peninsula with treaties related to commerce and an offensive and defensive alliance, joining them in a South American confederation, and only reserving for itself some islands in the Mexican Gulf, so they would serve as a perpetual bond of the same race between the New and Old World.

This policy, based on the principle of mutual protection and of reciprocal defense, resulted in impeding the United States of the North, when they became strong and powerful, from expanding their borders (as they coveted) at the expense of the rich territories of Alta California and of Texas; and thus, the greed of the

Anglo-Saxon race failed before the unbreakable union of the Iberian from both hemispheres.

Under the maternal protection of Iberia, the new American republics grew and developed without internal discords and without the convulsions inherent to States where political customs have not become deeply rooted; and in the space of a few brief decades, thanks to the richness of the land, the immigration stimulated by peace, the improvement of the economic system, and the progress of civilization, they achieved the highest level of prosperity and grandeur in the moral and material orders. Thus today we see South America crisscrossed by a vast network of railroad tracks; the inexhaustible treasures of the rich, vast, and different regions that extend from the Sacramento River and the Antilles to Cape Horn exploited; the seas sailed by numerous mercantile squadrons that hoist the star-spangled flag of the great southern Confederation; the latter respected by all nations and existing free from the impertinent reclamations and angry officiousness of England, of France, or of the United States; industries for domestic consumption established, which have annulled the exportation of foreign products; the mountain range of the Andes opened along the Bariloche Gorge, through the railroad line which unites the flourishing Republics of El Plata⁶ with its sister, the cultured and civilized Chile; and finally, the Isthmus of Panama broken open to interoceanic navigation, thanks to Ibero-American initiative, without the need for outside support or foreign protection.

Should such wonders amaze us, if the mother land, accustomed to self-government, bequeathed to Latin America the common sense, the individual initiative, the liberty of work, the emancipation of commerce and the political customs—the product of an uninterrupted series of wise and prudent reforms, which had converted Iberian society into the most perfect of Europe, through it advances from the point of view of morality and of its material progress?

6. Bartolomé Mitre (1821–1906), the first elected president of the Republic of Argentina (1862–68), had proposed the idea of a “República del Plata” in 1857, independent of the Argentine Confederation (1831–61).

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But shifting our eyes from the nations beyond the Atlantic, which are essence of our essence and blood of our blood, and rendering to them the tribute of our eternal sympathy, let us turn our view to this small Mediterranean Sea, cradle of civilization, which, with the passage of time and by the unyielding force of things, our homeland, faithful to its traditional policies, was called upon to redeem from the barbarism of Islamic fundamentalism.

While the conquest and colonization of the north African coast advanced, the necessities of defense demanded the occupation of various islands of the Levant, which functioned as forts set up against the Ottoman Empire. To a great extent, Sicily, which already belonged to the Aragonese crown before the union of the peninsular kingdoms, served as the base of operations. The Ionian Islands of Crete and of Rhodes, and others of the archipelago, and in the end Cyprus, constituted the prize of the naval victories of Iberia, whose squadrons ended up destroying the maritime power of the Sublime Porte.⁷

And when Turkey, worm-eaten trunk of a tree planted in sterile land, gave clear indications of its total ruin; when the oppressed Christian vassals rose up with the cry of independence; Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, and that noble Romanian people, who boast (with legitimate pride) about their ancient Spanish lineage, owed their liberty to our assistance.

If these conquests to the East of the Mediterranean were of scant mercantile value on a scale of points, while the enemy stopped free trade with the Far East through the Red Sea, they acquired an importance of the first order since this route opened to commerce, and above all when the Suez Canal placed the Peninsula just twenty days of direct navigation from its Hindustani possessions.

The constant protection dispensed by the Iberian governments to ventures of common utility produced the channeling of the Tagus, about which we were speaking in the previous chapter, that of the Guadalquivir to Córdoba, that of the Ebro to Zaragoza,

and that of many other rivers, either for navigation or for irrigation.

In keeping with what the Courts had been demanding since the sixteenth century, asking “that forests be planted throughout the kingdom and that the ordinances of those that existed be kept,” woodlands were promoted on a grand scale, a farsighted measure that resulted in the benefit of an increasingly prosperous and flourishing agriculture, even on the extensive plains of La Mancha and of Old Castile, where with the passage of years, thanks to the influence of the woods, the productivity of the soil was improved. Innumerable highways and roads in a perfect state of conservation facilitated trade everywhere, and when the railroads were invented, Iberia was one of the first nations to adopt them, building in the space of twenty-five years many thousands of kilometers, without needing foreign help; such was the mass of resources enclosed in its breast and such was the enterprising spirit of its sons.

The Suez Canal open, the transactions of the Peninsula with our empire in Hindustan and the Far East converted Barcelona into the principal port of the world, because of the great number of ships that visited it, and into the most important industrial center, its enhancement reaching the point that today the population of that celebrated city amounts to two and a half million inhabitants. At the same time, Tarragona, Valencia, Alicante, Cartagena, and the other ports of the Mediterranean coast prospered, enriched principally with the commerce of the Levant, while Cadiz, Seville, Lisbon, Porto, Vigo and the whole Cantabrian coast entertained active trade with the States of Latin America and with our colonies in western Africa.

In the lofty spheres of power, a political sense superior to any praise dominates, and no useful reform that will have practical results is presented or proposed that is not carried out without specious pretexts nor negligent abandonment nor parliamentary obstructions nor frivolous and ridiculous fears.

The incompatibility of every public post with that of deputy to the Courts has been a guiding principle since the sixteenth century, in keeping with the express

7. The Sublime Porte refers to the government of the Ottoman Empire.



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desires of that body, to which the Crown always attended with solicitous zeal.⁸ The latter also provided that elections be verified with the greatest liberty, without influencing directly or indirectly in the appointment of representatives.

Thus it was that the Courts were always surrounded by prestige, which gave them their authority and independence, because the people saw in them the faithful reflection of the aspirations of public opinion and of the necessities and interests of the country.

But if such political and material progress has been realized in our homeland in the course of four centuries, what great misfortunes would we not lament now if death, snatching away in the flower of youth Don Miguel I, the last male offspring of the national dynasties, had elevated the House of Austria⁹ to the Spanish throne, converting the nation, mistress of so many peoples, into the fief of a family foreign to our customs, of a different breed, enemy to popular liberties, obligated to protect patrimonial rights

in Europe, which neither directly nor indirectly affected the Peninsula, incarnation of the despotism that sacrificed the reason of State to a personal right, target of the hatreds and resentments of powerful princes, obligated to defend the dispersed territories of its inheritance, and, in brief, lacking the self-denial and high-mindedness sufficient to abandon private interest in favor of the vital origin of the Iberian nationality and of the consolidation of its political and geographical unity!

Perhaps then it would not have been possible to definitively complete the fusion of the former kingdoms, nor could this great Euro-African power have been constituted, for today the locomotive travels from the green countryside of Gironde to the scorched regions of the Sahara, crossing the Strait of Gibraltar, thanks to an undersea tunnel twenty kilometers in length.¹⁰

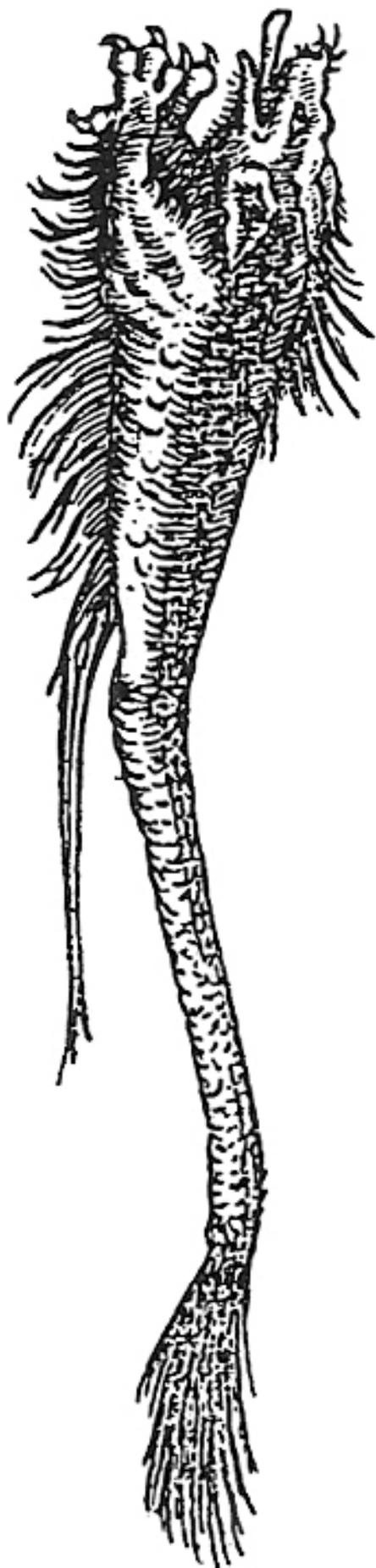
A gigantic work reserved only for Iberian genius, as a perpetual testimony of its elevated and civilizing mission on the African continent!

8. The petitions of the Courts to which the author alludes are historical facts, although their results are not. The deputies of the Courts of Castile expressed themselves thus in 1578: "Moreover, some servants of Your Majesty, having come as deputies of the Courts and ministers of justice and other people who take risks, it follows that it seems to them that they have little liberty to propose or vote for what would be best for the Kingdom, and yet another inconvenience, which is that they are always held as suspect by the other deputies and they cause disagreements among them, we plead that Your Majesty command that the aforementioned cannot be nor should be elected to said office." (*Footnote from the source text*)

9. The House of Austria was also known as the Habsburg dynasty. In this paragraph, Fabra describes what historically happened in Spain after Charles I became king of Castile and Aragon in 1516.

10. The idea of an undersea tunnel to connect England and France was first proposed in the early nineteenth century and attempts were made to begin the project late in that century. The 50.45 kilometer Channel Tunnel or "Chunnel" was finally begun in 1988 and completed in 1994.

Brain machine



Introductory Note and Translation
by Glyn Hambrook

This is a translation of a Spanish work published in 1906 that I was prompted to undertake when I learnt in April 2011 through various reports on the exhibition ‘Out of this World. Science Fiction but Not as You Know It’ (British Library, 20 May-25 September 2011) that H.G. Wells’ *The Time Machine* was beaten to the post by almost eight years by Spaniard Enrique Gaspar’s time travel narrative *El anacronópete*. For the last decade or so I have been exploring the work of the translated piece’s author, Rafael de Zamora y Pérez de Urría (1861-1908), third Marquis of Valero de Urría. He only published one ‘literary’ work—it is generically ambivalent in character—and it is from this that the translated piece is taken. The work in question is *Crímenes literarios*, a curious creation perched on the cusp between Fin de Siècle literature and the Avant Garde movement. *Crímenes literarios*, which might be translated as *Literary Crimes* or *Crimes against Literature*, was published at the author’s own expense in Oviedo, Spain, in 1906. ‘Máquina cerebral’, or ‘Brain Machine,’ was one of four ‘literary crimes’—so called because of their transgression, by virtue of their unorthodox or ambivalent generic character, of literary norms—garnered in this tome.



Brain machine

This ‘crime’ takes the form of a publicity brochure or commercial prospectus, composed in a somewhat unorthodox style for such a document, for the products of a fictitious North American company that has invented an artificial brain. Their ‘brain machine’, the manufacturers claim, can outperform, and therefore should replace, human intelligence in a variety of capacities and realms that hitherto had been deemed to be the exclusive province of human agency. It anticipates not only developments in and the aspirations of the developers of artificial intelligence, but also aspects the information society: digitisation, the world-wide web, and user-led technology for instance. The text that appears in *Crímenes literarios* is an elaboration of an article—one might describe it is a humorous spoof—first published in May 1892 in the Madrid satirical paper *El Día* and a few days later in the prestigious *La Vanguardia*’s business section.

A pointer to the reader: in the prologue to this narrative (called a ‘premeditation,’ in keeping with the idea of literary crimes) in *Crímenes literarios*, it is explained that the style of the text is not that of a typical publicity brochure, as it is a generic fusion of brochure and literary caprice and mixes aspects of both. For this reason, in the translation no attempt has been made to emulate consistently the manner of a prospectus to the exclusion of other characteristic features of the original. One example of these is a somewhat ponderous syntax, which has been retained except where readability and intelligibility would have been unjustifiably compromised if the segments concerned had not been parsed and then sub-divided into more than one sentence, or restructured, or, where possible without diluting the original, condensed. ●



Don Iscariotes Val de Ur
 Professor of Palaeography at the University of Polanes
alias
Rafael de Zamora y Pérez de Urría, III marqués de Valero de Urría
Brain machine

*The New Universal, Radilectrical,
 Literary Company Limited.*

*Head office: Broadway, New York
 Capital \$ 20.000.000*

I. Introduction

Our gigantic organisation, the appearance of which on the industrial scene is destined to transform life as we know it, aims, as its trade name makes clear, to make available at accessible prices by the latest methods of mechanised mass production literature of all kinds, in prose or in verse; to supply the whole world with novels, plays, poems and epistles that entertain, describe or simply impart a moral; to produce, in short, all that which until now—but not for much longer—has gone under the preposterous, vacuous and outdated names of poetry, rhetoric, fine arts, humanities and other labels of a similar ilk, all of which are erroneous, inaccurate and degrading.

Anyone who believes that intelligence is peculiar to mankind, and that consequently only human beings can compose and write literature, need only take a stroll through our colossal production plant. Even the most inattentive of visitors cannot fail to be convinced that this premise is a cheap myth, a vain illusion, a deceitful abstraction; for we have succeeded in banishing human agency and replacing it, to everyone's boundless benefit and profit, with indefatigable and infallible automated devices such as our powerful *phraseselectrical* or *psylotipical* prose-writing machines and our pulsating *radiostichial* or *rythmoplastical* poetry-generating devices, a concise description of which we propose to provide once we have explained the perfect alignment and convergence that exist between the pressing needs that have in the course of the last few years, become increasingly apparent in the publishing industry, and the strategy that our Company has devised to meet these exigencies.

Ours is a century of relentless innovatory effort, an age of portentous advances occurring in unbelievably

rapid succession, a period of unprecedented progress, an epoch that has taken hold of mankind and propelled it on a sustained hegira of prosperity and wellbeing. It is evident, nay, blindingly obvious, therefore, that times such as these call for a literature that is produced in such a way and in so many guises that it can be deemed truly scientific in nature; a literature of geometric precision, as balanced as an equation, yet still remaining as diverse and pleasing as spring flowers; a literature that would free humanity in one glorious and vigorous stroke of the financially worthless and morally bankrupt freaks and wretched foetuses born of the pen of guttersnipes of would-be-writers, contemptibly pale and frail versifiers, and, in short, the whole bunch of stunted, malformed creatures who until now have presumed to designate themselves by way of title and profession, men of letters.

No-one of sound mind, principles and intentions can blithely ignore that we are fed up to the point of revulsion with this nauseous rabble of impotent scribblers; and that each of us in our heart of hearts is resentful and aggrieved that we, for fear of being accused of intellectual deficiency, have felt compelled to swallow and ingest the disgusting, worm-ridden offerings of scrawny, thin-blooded cliché-mongers, to whom, moreover—and this can only be explained as the consequence of a series of atavistic aberrations—we accord the title of geniuses, to whom we erect monuments they ill deserve.

Once we turn on literature the salubrious, avenging beam of scientific positivism, even Shakespeare will be shown up for a fraud; Hugo, a lunatic; and that unworthy wretch Cervantes, a disgrace to humanity worthy only of ridicule. We'll wonder how we could ever have deceived, demeaned and debased ourselves for generations by holding such men in awe; and we'll feel so ashamed and scornful of the admiration we professed for them that even suicide will seem meagre penitence for our madness. But now we are saved: *The New Universal, Radilectrical, Literary Company Limited* has appeared on the horizon bearing the blessing, beneficial beyond description, of the redemption for which we yearned.



Brain machine

So, we hope you will forgive us if we indulge our pride, and like angels bearing light as bright as suns to illuminate the gloomy depths of this terrifying night, we banish to the abyss of nothingness on our left hand the primeval darkness, and with a sweep of our arm unfurl to our right the splendid dawn of literary rebirth, while we proclaim to the whole world:

'Behold our literature generated by machine! Dismiss any God, any soul, any creative force other than that of the divine dynamo and the holy rheostat: they alone are the Muse, the spirit, creative spirit, the inspiration! Roll up! Roll up! We can rebuild and restore you so that you will be ever immune to and protected against the protracted meanderings of human thought; we can shield you forever hereafter from the criminal ploys of sophistry. Here we are, at your service, to offer the enriching, redeeming, priceless treasure of lilted lucubration and poised prose, without defect or imperfection, generated, as these are, by serene, composed machines. Gone forever is fetid, scabby, suppurating poetry—fill your lungs with the soothing, refreshing breeze of the delightful *Rhythmoplastia*. Gone forever is narrative poured clumsily into the chipped moulds of contemptible routine—from now on, everybody, rejoice!—ask for the one and only, sensible, rational *Psilotype!*'

Time constraints and limitations of space oblige us to confine ourselves here to basic and essential considerations, and to convey our plans and designs as succinctly as possible. We therefore refer anyone who wishes to delve into these matters in greater detail to our *Grand Illustrated Catalogue*, price \$5, payable in postage stamps or by postal order. And now, without further ado, and as we have indicated, we will proceed to give an overview of our devices and how they operate.

II. How our devices function as artificial human brains

Thanks to the painstaking research by our eminent compatriot Edison and the portentous discoveries in which it resulted, it is now commonly held to be

axiomatic and an indisputable truth that electricity is made up of two elements or parts. One is dense, thick, base and viscous, electricity's excreta, if you will. The other is tenuous, diaphanous, ethereal and refined, and corresponds in effect to that which some pathetically ridiculous and ignorant fogies persist in referring to as the soul or spirit; but which to any self-respecting, educated positivist goes under the name of *primordial or hyper electric fluid*.

Taking as our point of departure this fact and the conclusions deriving from them, we followed up our curiosity as to what would happen if we then added to the equation the outcomes of other research of no less value and worth, albeit conducted by a foreigner—in this case the Frenchman Curie's studies of the properties of Radium. After extensive and rigorous trials, we have succeeded in developing a filter fine enough to purify, refine and sublimate the aforementioned *hyper electrical fluid* sufficiently to produce *Radilectric*, while at the same time infusing this distilled essence with a stunning vitality. In this new extremely volatile state, it possesses a formidable energy exceeding by far that something that fools are in the habit of exalting and proclaiming, from the crumbling towers of spurious glory, as genius, talent, a gift from the gods. In reality, their resonant eulogies are as hollow as echoes, a discordant booming as pointless as the dismal, aimless fluttering of the owls and bats that nest in the musty bell towers of ineptitude.

Now let's see how, at the end of the long and complex operation to extract the *radilectrical fluid*—the laborious character and technical complexities of which we will not risk boring you with by describing here—we harness it in such a way as to yield energy that is singularly efficient in *intellectual* terms.

Our system comprises in powerful banks of spherical condensers each made by combining steel, tourmaline, zinc and a blend of certain phosphates into a device the shape and size of an average, healthy, well-formed human head. These are what we call our *Cephalias*.

Furthermore, we had become aware of the singular and undeniable influence that the capillary system and scalp exercise on the production of literature by



Brain machine

humans, whether in the guise of a flowing mane that veils the temples of a writer with its exquisite curls or a severe case of baldness of the kind that leaves the forehead exposed, as it were, as far as the nape. For this reason, our workshops always keep in stock an extensive array of artificial scalps and wigs replicating a range of circumstances, from the most desolate wastes of relentless alopecia to the shimmering luxuriance of the finest heads of hair, woven in gold and platinum. These prostheses, moreover, can be adjusted to fit any of the aforementioned crania, so that when the latter enter into operation by being subjected to radi-electric treatment—that is to say, when they go into composition mode—they display all the symptoms and manifest all the signs of the most intense inspiration, or the most languid and pleasurable tranquility: the metallic hair stands right up on its end or droops limply around the nape, or a layer of droplets of condensed steam cover like pearls the smooth and shining dome of the artificial head.

It now behoves us to disclose what precisely these devices known as *Cephalias* contain; and it is nothing other than an appropriate and mathematically measured amount of a smooth, parenchymal pulp, the chemical composition, shape, convolutions, depressions and lobes of which are exactly the same as those of a well proportioned and healthy human brain. It differs only in weight, and in that it contains a greater element of phosphorous, a certain specific amount of radium, and through the meanders of its vascular system runs and flows not blood but an undegradable liquid that we call *Hemopsiquina* which, when blended with the two elements mentioned above, restores and nourishes the pulp and protects it against deterioration of any kind, as this can result in the terrible attacks of mechanico-literary imbecility that caused us so much trouble in the first phase of trials. By now it will be clear that the pulp or dough-like substance known as cerebrine, which requires no further description, functions as a sponge-like store or repository for the precisely calculated amount of the aforementioned *radilectric fluid* required to do the job.

Each one of our devices is then, in effect, a real human cranium, created by us, containing a perfectly functioning, genuine literary brain, capable of operating independently with total scientific precision and which, thanks to the care we have taken in its assembly, cannot make mistakes, nor malfunction, nor succumb to fatigue or deterioration—unlike human brains, which at every turn come up against innumerable obstacles deriving from human vices, emotions and the deadly tyranny of physiological functions.

As far as the operation of the *Cephalias* is concerned, the process could not be swifter or simpler. At the turn of a key or the flick of a switch, the link is opened between one of our model printers and one of the *Cephalias*, duly primed with fluid of the appropriate type and in the appropriate quantity, and out comes the work of literature. And all the while this is happening, a highly sensitive device called an *intensometer* monitors with precision the consumption of *radilectric*, so the operator knows when to raise or lower the current. And within a short time, just enough, that is, to generate the product, out from the printer comes a work of whatever type was required, from the most modest popular verse to the loftiest epic, from the most lymphatic treatise to the most copious or substantial work, bound as luxuriously or as simply as you like. As you can see, the way our system works, like everything that is authentically practical, is as simple as it is magnificent.

III: Broad Horizons: Our Company's Vision

When we reached the stage at which the foundations of our method had been established, when our machines were functioning smoothly, and when the organization of their operation had been honed to perfection, our determination to boldly go where no one had ever ventured before presented us with an unexpected and considerable challenge, in the guise of our own native language. So we set sail on the merciless ocean of unstinting endeavour until we reached at last those triumphal regions where progress pauses on its



Brain machine

journey ever onwards to settle on the indestructible throne of the definitive, whence it shines forth in all its brilliance.

It is quite inconceivable that our company should confine its activity to the limited sphere of supplying our shareholders with literature in the English language only. The goals we envisaged lay far beyond; our goals were of a higher and more magnanimous kind, and any pause or delay along our glorious path seemed to us an intolerable affront to our ambition; nothing will stand in the way of our aim to transform our already great enterprise into a market of vast proportions, a colossal emporium, where peoples from across the whole world, without trivial distinctions between language or nationality, can ingest literary sustenance of the most varied, healthy and abundant kind.

There is little point in enumerating here the array of impediments, obstacles and hitches of every kind that we had to overcome before reaching such an auspicious and satisfactory result; nor will we tax your patience by recounting how we swung painfully between hope and discouragement, sometimes convinced that we had arrived at last at the luminous summit of much desired success while at others plummeting from the craggy precipices of disaster, which, fortunately, was never total and always redeemable; neither will we tell of the swamps of doubt in which we lay submerged for so long, wondering whether we should confine ourselves simply to producing translating machines, or how we forged ahead, with Herculean effort, in the determination not to fall short of our goal to invent and manufacture new, super-powerful and prodigious banks of *Cephalias* adapted to the multifarious exigencies presented by the many different languages of the world.

To those of you who are kind enough to be reading this prospectus, we say: there is no need to dwell on any of this. Sit back, relax and enjoy the incalculable advantages that are the fruit of our endeavours. The moment has arrived to pat ourselves on the back and to celebrate the fact that although those nightmares and heartaches will remain forever engraved in our

memory, they are now happily in the past. The ferocity of the struggle and the horrors of the battle render the taste of victory all the more pure and sweet.

We are now in a position to offer the public all kinds of *Rythmoplastia* (poetry) or *Psilotype* (prose), in not only every language spoken in civilised countries but also in every form of slang, baby-talk, grunting or hooting—however incoherent and devoid of conceptual substance one imagines them to be—that passes for language among the less developed peoples, commonly known as savages. And so, a complete literary output that hitherto could only be obtained by subjecting the imagination to such a challenge as to provoke a collapse of the mental faculties can now be had for a financial investment that is very modest, when one considers the invaluable return it yields.

And so we have established a monopoly on regenerating literature, and in recognition of this we have founded the Universal Literary Trust. All modesty aside, we have every right to proclaim out loud that in order to reach this pinnacle of success, we never recoiled or baulked in the face of fatigue or privation, not even when some painful financial sacrifice was necessary. For once the final formulae had been committed to paper and resolved and our state-of-the-art devices were ready for operation, the *New Universal Radilectrical Literary Company Limited* immediately dispatched across the globe a vast team of highly trained, dedicated radilectricians, who intrepidly scoured the globe from pole to pole, each of which, for the large number who perished in the execution of their sacred mission, turned out to be a final resting place. May those unsung, sublime heroes rest in peace in their snow-covered graves! Let us take consolation in the fact that in commercial terms, the loss was negligible. We can be near enough certain that the only inhabitants of these desolate, far-flung places are pinnipeds, polar bears, whales and cachalots—worthy mammals all, to be sure, but not given to loquacity—and so our explorations could not have uncovered any linguistic or commercial value; nor, indeed, will they be able to, until *zoophonetics*, that discovery of the great Val de Ur, has established itself globally.



Brain machine

As for the other explorers, whether they roamed across the elysian meadows over which the waters of civilisation flow, or penetrated the murky depths of barbarism, all returned to head office weighed down with rich glossological booty and treasure, stored in the portable batteries that they carried with them for this purpose, and each of which, thanks to impeccable forward planning, was charged with the variety of *radilectrical fluid* appropriate to the speech of the peoples and nations they visited. Consequently, we can now generate texts in any living language.

But however far we have extended the perimeter of the sphere of operations that we have traced, it still falls short of the scope that our enterprise, in its majesty, envisages, and is far below the dazzling pinnacle of perfection to which the *New Universal, Radilectrical, Literary Company* wishes to soar. Therefore, we have extended the frontier of our ambitions still further, so that now we can offer to scholars, philologists, palaeographers, exegetes, grammaticians and others a veritable wealth of literary works, composed by ‘erudition-enhanced’ models of the *Cephalia*, in every ancient and even in prehistoric languages of which we have been able to retrieve a trace, any written remain, however meagre or depleted it may be.

Consequently, we now have in stock in industrial quantities and ready for delivery to our customers, a delightful collection of texts written not only in Latin, Greek, Hebrew or Sanskrit—the standard models, as it were, though still of fine quality and produced to the strictest specifications, of our ‘Ancient Times’ range—but also others produced in tongues so venerable and primitive that our achievement puts the intelligence and perspicacity of the Champollions, Masperos and Max Mullers of this world firmly in the shade. Our selection is too extensive to list here; we therefore refer readers who wish to know more to our *Grand Illustrated Catalogue*, price \$5, payable in the aforementioned variety of ways.

Obviously, in order to extract any remaining sap contained, or any residue of nutritive juices stored up in the dead languages that lay fossilizing across the vast expanse that constitutes their necropolis, we were com-

pelled to have recourse to procedures quite distinct and far more meticulous than those employed in the case of much more recent languages which, because of their strength and freshness, are substantially easier to handle. To this end, then, our most illustrious *radilectrical engineers* had to invent *paleopneumatic literary suction pumps*, endowed with the veritably miraculous capability of combining powerful suction with the necessary delicacy, that would extract by literally sucking out the dried up, ancient material of bone, stone, metal, paper or of membranous composition that we had gathered, the sparse residual traces of *radilectrical fluid*, so that this could be pooled and distributed among the condensers known as *erudition-enhanced cephalias*, the operation of which would transform it into books, scrolls and tablets—interesting enough in their own right—that we can now make available to the public at a reasonable price.

We’ll take the liberty of mentioning here that on certain occasions, when very ancient languages were involved, the extraction or hoovering of *radilectrical fluid* posed obstacles that if not insuperable, certainly made the task extremely difficult. The sources were so shrivelled, dried up, mummified, and the amount of fluid left so minuscule—not to mention the fact that it was also extremely diluted and, moreover, scattered over thousands of fragments and tiny remnants of documents—that isolating the material required infinite patience and lynx-like perception. Then, we had to distil in a vacuum whatever meagre residue the suction process yielded, before transferring it to the *cephalias* for the final phase of production. And of course while so doing, we were obliged to take the strictest precautions in order to ensure that none of the fluid was lost or contaminated by any foreign body, for if either had occurred, the consequences would have been disastrous for us financially as well as damaging to the cause of science.

Given the tiny amounts in which the substance was available and the extreme care required as well as the time involved in the manufacturing process, it will come as no surprise that the process by which this *paleopneumatic* literature is produced is more than a



Brain machine

little laborious, although not as much as one might imagine—for which reason it is available at only 25¢ per 100 symbols, characters or morphemes to customers who can present proof of their credentials as specialists in the field.

IV. General benefits that our Company can bring to the world.

We have outlined above the lofty aims of the *New, Universal Radilectrical, Literary Company Limited*, as well as the means it has at its disposal to pursue these to completion. It would therefore be superfluous to review at length the immense benefits which our Company is destined to bring to the world.

Notwithstanding, we would like to take the liberty of reiterating, even at risk of labouring the point, the principal benefits, in the belief that the more comprehensively we list them, the more firmly they will anchor themselves in our readers' minds. What is more, this will also impress upon them our commitment—as Yankees and proud of it—to utilitarian, commercial, and practical aims as well as to the eradication of writers, those abominable parasites who scorn the holy dollar, filthy imbibers of insubstantial illusions, who boast that bringing books into being is an activity over which the human mind can claim exclusive rights. To credit human intellect with a real existence, as if it were a living thing, is a complete and utter sham; what is more, if we were to cut short debate regarding the intellect's true nature, and instead of channelling it as befits across the broad, salubrious and secure plains of scientifically-grounded financial planning and beneficial profit, we mislaid it in the putrid, pestilential abyss of a twisted ideology, we would be guilty of a base stupidity that could have fatal consequences.

We openly admit that we see no difference whatsoever between composing a poem, grinding several pounds of chocolate beans or curing a few hams, other than the entirely incidental consideration of the method and utensils used in each case. For what these processes all share is that essentially the sum of the

activities and the essential aspect of the task fuse and become one and the same in the outcome of a single physical, industrial and mechanical process.

Fine Art has already understood this. It has shaken off the shameful yoke of abstraction and monstrous aestheticism, opening its arms in sisterly embrace to Photography the liberator, which, on a daily basis puts on offer images, in the form of picture prints, of those delights and marvels for which only a short while ago we were condemned to depend on the ineptly-handled brushes of grubby, paint-smearers daubers. Music too has seen the light. Even if the infection from the toxic emanations of certain conventional production practices still persists, this will soon be purged; indeed, music has already set out on the road to full recovery and regeneration, thanks to those admirable automated mechanisms that have victoriously sidelined the preposterously unconvincing, soulful onstage antics of *virtuosos*. And this thanks no less to the good offices and assistance of the redeeming Phonograph, which shreds and grinds up in its discs and cylinders the teeming horde of singers, whose very presence is intrusive and a source of irritation.

Henceforth, Literature too can experience this enlightened renaissance, as the implacable hammer of our liberating Positivism shatters, saviour-like, the clanking chains that bound it, allowing it to emerge rejuvenated and spruce from our workshops, instead of suffocating slowly as it drags itself contemptibly through the glutinous mud of a lifeless swamp of stultification.

And now let us proceed to demonstrate, as we have promised to do, some of the most important overall benefits that our Company brings to the literature sector of the industrial Cosmos.

From now on, literature will be a material thing, a tangible object, and a commodity that can be weighed, measured and priced. It will have a share price in the stock exchange. And by linking it to the flow of international import-export, it will open up to one and all a new, crystalline and abundant source of inexhaustible wealth.

And so we have resolved and expunged the unbearable unreliability of literature, that irritating inconsistency, those fluctuations in type and volume that until

Brain machine



now have undermined consumer confidence, leaving customers feeling let down. From now on, we can guarantee that literature will be perfectly uniform, and available in a range of qualities—*Delectable, Tasteful and Standard*—according to the quality the customer requires and the price he wishes to pay. We wish to reassure our customers that the *Standard* range is of a perfectly acceptable quality, being far superior to those products of the human brain that until now unjustly claimed the monopoly on creativity.

As far as literature is concerned, our reform will usher in that long awaited time when idea and form, the objective and the subjective, the noumenon and the phenomenon will merge without distinction and become fused like an alloy in one unique and indivisible synthesis. Today we can provide the most irrefutable and conclusive proof that contemporary physiologists never wavered in their quest to reconcile truth and doctrine, even when these were founded on discouragingly inadequate premises.

Unswerving in our pursuit of avenging justice, we will send to the gallows numen, inspiration, the creative breath, muse worship, that grotesque myth and obsolete charade that for centuries has beguiled humankind, misled it and kept it in a primitive state, causing more devastation in the process than the fateful plagues that swept the world in the Dark Ages. And from the same avenging gibbet from which we have dangled the detested idol, we'll string up its priests and acolytes: the authors, poets, bards past and present: now the time has come for these executioners of our wretched race to know themselves what it feels like to be the victims, and to see our altars awash with *their* blood.

From now on, reading will no longer be a matter of wasting one's time in futile digressions about how well wrought a sentence was, how elegant the diction was, how elevated the style was, or any other of the innumerable trifles of a similar kind. Because it will be obvious from even a cursory examination of the book that it is exclusively the work of an impassive machine, and so the reader can concentrate solely on the educational value or pleasure of the experience without further delving or racking his brains over trifles—much

as, when we tuck ourselves up between the sheets, we feel no compulsion to reflect on the loom on which they were woven, nor go into raptures over the warp, or count spellbound the threads of the weft.

V. Specific benefits

Thus far we have provided an overview of the general benefits—benefits that are in a sense fundamental, in that they embody our credo—yielded by our great literary manufacturing enterprise. We will now proceed to consider some of the more specific incidental benefits deriving from these, which, although secondary, are no less important, precisely because they express and give concrete form to the excellence of our industrial endeavour. Here are some examples:

Customers may choose from a luxurious range of libraries, available for immediate delivery, that come complete with catalogue, shelves, balconies in carved wood or wrought iron and other accessories. These libraries, a stock of which is ready for dispatch from our warehouses, can hold between a maximum of one million and a minimum of five hundred books, each bound in durable covers, and printed scrupulously on the finest quality paper.

Special discount 'library' rates are available, reducing the price of each book to between 25 and 50 % of what it would cost if purchased individually.

We will also, for a standard price, create promptly any kind of library to the specifications of customers who, out of personal taste or because their pursuits demand it, have specific requirements that fall outside the range that even our vast warehouses are capable of holding in stock.

To theatre impresarios, directors of theatre companies (be they touring or resident), set designers, stage managers and others who make a living out of the stage, we can offer a comprehensive range of plays—tragedic or comic—constantly updated and adapted to the latest taste in theatre.

Subscribers can also benefit from an attractive range of payment plans in addition to the standard



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one, as well as having the option to buy firm at a significant discount rate, the products of their choice.

Our products for the theatre come with a guarantee of success, barring acts of God, in theatres in major cities, with flexible tariffs according to the level of success: *satisfactory* (10 successive performances guaranteed), *enjoyable* (100 successive performances guaranteed) or *spectacular* (1000 successive performances guaranteed). Special tariffs apply in the case of provincial theatres.

If because of circumstances beyond our capacity for anticipation, our products fail to deliver the resounding success predicted, we will not only refund the cost of the product without requiring its return but will also provide compensation for any loss of outlay and income deriving therefrom.

We are about to complete the complex financial and technical calculations that the vast sphere of action of our literary trust obliges us to undertake in order to extend our operation through one hundred radioelectrical branch libraries, which will allow us to spread across the globe without limitation the nurturing and beneficial influence of *The New Universal, Radilectrical, Literary Company Limited*.

Each of the aforementioned branches will be staffed by a select team of polite, immaculately turned out and well educated assistants. They will be chosen for their distinguished demeanour, their elegant deportment, their seductive voice and the care with which they dress. They will glide rhythmically towards customers, reciting appropriate verses to delight the ear, and will be adept at blending the charms of the most exquisite urbanity with impeccable behaviour and irreproachable decorum.

However, we plan to staff our branches not only with these immaculately turned out, excellently trained and attentive employees, but also by quite a different category of personnel: those writers, poets and novelists (not to mention publishers) who are today considered the most illustrious, but are actually scruffy, impudent, unrepentant liars, puffed up with pride, without even one meagre dollar to fall through the hole in the tattered lining of their pockets. These are the individuals

who do most harm to the reading public, and consequently the tasks that they will be set in our branch libraries, and for which they will be paid the pittance they deserve, will be the most menial—sweeping the reading rooms, dusting the shelves, emptying the spittoons and similar chores. Employment in this capacity will, however, perform a double function, being both redemptory and philanthropic. For we have not given up on these debased creatures and believe that through this treatment they can in time regenerate, and, putting behind them their crazy obsession with sylphs and nightingales, suns and moons, crimson glows and pearly auras, will recognise the error of their ways. And so, after their stint is completed, they will be able to go out into the world to take up such useful and worthy occupations as those of rag-picker, chimney sweep, cess-pit emptier, and others consistent with their limited abilities and which provide evidence of the employee's dignity and entitlement to a decent wage.

We do not doubt that our sponsors will appreciate the truly altruistic and opportune nature of this initiative, which, while it coincides so conveniently with our own needs and provides a cheap way of keeping our establishments clean, also serves as a form of social cleansing by ridding the world of these virulent literary bacilli.

One of the aims that, as already stated, we have pursued to realization was the resurrection of ancient tongues, however archaic and decrepit, and the mechanical production of works written in them. We do not discount the possibility, however, that some malcontents or individuals whose interest in matters financial borders on fanaticism may find the relevance of such publications unclear or difficult to grasp; they might even suggest to us—and, they claim, with good cause—that any manual unskilled work such as delousing parrots or spaying pet cats is without question a more beneficial and healthy way of spending one's time than in deciphering day in day out the enigmas contained in hieroglyphics, pretty symbols or illegible scribbles, if, that is, these even prove to be decipherable.

But this objection, which might appear to some well founded, is in reality specious, if we recall that



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the scholarly experts for whose benefit such explorations were undertaken are on the whole a docile clan of modest and inoffensive individuals, whose innocent pursuits we are obliged to respect and encourage if we are not to upset the balance of human knowledge. For they—or, rather, their works, which are literary in appearance only—are the isthmus, the connection, the bridge that links the verdant river bank of literature, duly transformed by our reform, with the steep but fertile shore of science. And if we break this link, we risk plunging what is referred to as the intellectual world into an irreversible cataclysm.

Let us not forget, then, that the aforementioned sages, notwithstanding their gentleness, which is as habitual as much as congenital, can become irascible, crafty and vengeful when they feel themselves to be the victims of aggression or harassment, and if we were to appear to snub or spurn them, they might well take offence and exact a terrible revenge on us, by shamefully and lamentably misleading us about the meaning or interpretation of works and documents that offer a door into remote civilisations, and that for now at least they and they alone are capable of deciphering for us.

Finally, it should be noted that philologists, palaeographers and other linguistic archaeologists are generally open-handed and give little thought to cost when it comes to indulging their enthusiasm for their pursuit. And because, as we have already noted, the type of work they require for their research is, by virtue of its careful and laborious preparation, the most expensive of our range, it is clear that this dimension of our activity constitutes a source of income so limpid that it should not be muddied by excessive scruple born of a defective grasp of what is meant by utilitarianism.

We trust that even if the previous arguments did not convince those who take issue with us on this point, which we hope to be the only bone of contention, the one that we have just expounded will win them over. Moreover, we humbly beseech the worthy antiquarians in whose defence we have just spoken, to forgive the crude and forthright commercial terms in which we expressed ourselves. We do so only in the firm be-

lief that our words and intentions, far from mortifying or disconcerting them, will serve to underwrite even more firmly the merit of their undertakings, which we sincerely hope will mean for us even more lucrative and substantial orders.

Such is our concern for our readers' wellbeing that we would rather not risk exasperating them with an exhaustive account of all the benefits our Company can bring to the world. Some of these benefits, then, we will refrain from mentioning, even if it is not in our interest to do so. Before concluding, however, we feel it behoves us to point out just how much *The New, Universal, Radilectrical, Literary Company Limited* can contribute to ameliorating the condition of those wretched fellow creatures of ours who, living in isolation from all culture, remain even today manacled and whimpering in the dungeons of savagery.

Henceforth, our noble explorers will be able to bring before those unfortunate Zulus, Bushmen, Papuans, Arfakis and other hapless creatures in far-flung parts, the priceless gift of a robust, progressive and affordable literature, written, moreover, in their own languages.

Missionaries, whether they be Protestant or inclined to the Church of Rome, will be able to avail themselves respectively of our state-of-the-art bibles or our mechanical catechisms to bring rapidly and for a modest outlay the hirsute, howling hordes from the barbaric horrors of bloodthirsty fetishism to the pious meekness of brotherly love. For if in the mythical past, the likes of Linus and Orpheus, armed only with crude, home-made lyres, were able to move the very rocks and charm wild beasts, just imagine how today humans might be rendered docile and compliant with the vibrant instrument of our literature!

Praise be to our emancipating Enterprise! Praise be to our zealous technical and commercial managers, who are at once the agents of their own prosperity and the benefactors who distribute their wealth amongst Anthropology's dispossessed! And praise be to our patrons, who, by honouring us with their custom, garner an abundant source of beneficial reading material while at the same time contributing, for a modest out-



Brain machine

lay, to the spread of civilization across the globe.

And there we will conclude, other than to beg the indulgence of those of our readers to whom lyricism has but scant appeal for what may appear to be our rather exaggerated turns of expression. It is only our professional enthusiasm getting the better of us when we proudly present our mighty Enterprise's qualities and miraculous achievements.

VI. Accessories and other devices available from our Company.

It is appropriate and in keeping with the image we have presented so far that we should now list for you some of the state-of-the art accessories that we have made available to meet the needs of living in this phono-graphic-literary age. These, unlike our books, which can only be purchased wholesale until we open our branches, are available on a retail basis. The range includes the following products:

Automatic pens and pencils suitable for standard and domestic literature, such as personal correspondence, missives of the amorous or flirtatious variety, messages of congratulation, condolences and expressions of sympathy, threatening letters and the like.

Manual and portable prose and verse text-generation machines, which come in their own elegant case of cedar, walnut or mahogany lined with chamois, for those budding writers and literary aficionados among our worthy customers who aspire to rise above the plains of a pedestrian and homely style and soar to the dizzy heights of composition and diction. The accuracy of these devices and their combination of robustness and portability make them particularly suited to the needs of our worthy Tourists, Reporters and Pilgrims who wish to give a touch of artistry and elegance to their jottings, reports or travel impressions. So, should they find themselves in a particularly charming or picturesque location or before any scene deserving of description, all they have to do is to aim the device at the subject concerned and it will deliver in a matter of seconds, in polished verse or impec-

cable prose, the account of the experience that they wish to relate.

Will-makers, designed to avoid the lamentably irremediable and all too frequent situation whereby, as death approaches, decline of the faculties overtakes the departing person's ability to express their final requests and arrangements. We recommend anyone who considers themselves endowed with prudent foresight to acquire one of these devices and, following the instructions provided, to upload an inventory of property together with a comprehensive list of friends and relatives, so that when he or she is struck down by an ailment that could be life-threatening, the machine can without further ado be placed beneath the bed or on a bedside table, already programmed to draw up in scrupulous accordance with all principles an irrevocable will when the appropriate moment arrives.

We would only urge purchasers to ensure that they take in good time the most scrupulous measures to ensure that none of the potential beneficiaries of the will have the opportunity to come into direct contact with the machine while it is in operation. This is because even when the most modest of inheritances is involved, the sometimes conflicting and always very intense pulsations of electrical energy that the legatee gives off could neutralise or, worse still, distort or even completely reverse the intentions of the person instructing the will-maker, causing the device to become so confused and befuddled that it mixes up names and jumbles up amounts, and commits lamentable errors.

Radilectrical sermon generators, just the thing for the conscientious cleric who wishes to fulfil his duties assiduously even when 'pulpit fatigue' threatens to overtake him. These worthy mechanical acolytes are guaranteed against contamination by heresies and come with built-in scandal and error avoidance technology to guarantee that the congregation is never offended or misled. They can generate any kind of sermon, from the most down-to-earth, straightforward monologue to the most spirited and eloquent homily. What's more, the system not only composes the sermon but delivers it too: each device comes with its



Brain machine

own state-of-the-art phonograph. That's not all: a built-in platinum strip with adjustable incandescence function, allows the degree of fervour during delivery to be regulated according to circumstance and situation.

Accessories include *pulpit microphones* with an adjustable resonance control enabling the sermon generator to be used in any location, from the tiniest chapel to the most spacious cathedral.

A substantial discount is available to canon theologians.

Speech machines: every politician, orator and lawyer will wonder how he ever managed without this indispensable device. An ingenious system of valves and levers allows the user to generate at will speeches than can appease, move or captivate an audience, according to circumstance. Like the sermon generators, these devices have as standard accessory a phonograph, in this case with built-in 'anti-heckler' function to counter interruptions, and 24-hour, non-stop running time.

Potential customers are requested to note, however, that each speech produced by our devices has a maximum duration of four hours, after which the machine re-plays the same speech one, two, or as many times as are required. However, with each repetition the expression and tone varies automatically so that it will not dawn on the audience that they are listening to the same words and arguments over and over again.

There is no need to explain to our illustrious Ministers, Senators and Members the benefits of our speech machines. Not only will these devices save them the time and trouble of composing their oratorical masterpieces, but will also deliver them on their behalf without the immense effort involved, and without succumbing to oral dissection and pulmonary exhaustion. What is more, unlimited access to an inexhaustible repertoire of mechanical rhetoric allows the user to either lull the most animated and excited gathering into the most profound state of somnolence or, conversely, verbally batter into submission even the most weighty of oratorical opponents, be it through rapid, vehement, verbal punches delivered in relentless succession or through speeches so interminable

that they gradually but relentlessly wear down the adversary's resistance.

We also have, for use at parliamentary sessions, senate meetings, board meetings, general assemblies and other formal gatherings, a comprehensive range of *interrupters*, *question-raisers*, *vociferators*, *congratulators*, and *upbraiders*. These compact but powerful devices, when strategically placed around the room, will at intervals during the proceedings emit suddenly at an imposingly high volume the type of utterance they are programmed to deliver, in a variety of tones of voice, even rude or seditious should this be required, such as: 'the honourable gentleman is a coxcomb!', 'Play the game, cad!', 'Bar's open!', 'All aboard for a row up the Salt River!', and others of a similar kind. These exclamations come so unexpectedly and are delivered with such raw energy that no opposition can resist them and they are capable of bringing down governments.

Our latest range of products derives from the devices designed for the political arena but that have been adapted for use in the theatre. For it appears to be the case that in some establishments that are still resisting the influence of our new reformed drama, spectators who become fed up with seeing the same play night after night or with some unbearably insipid opening night, feel an overwhelming urge to vent a displeasure so acute that it requires strength beyond that with which nature has endowed them.

No true enemy of mediocre stagecraft should delay therefore in acquiring one of our *tungsten auto cat-callers*. These emit spontaneously an extraordinarily strident and sustained hoot or whistle, ranging from the sombre lowing of a ship's siren to the shrillest blast on an out-of-tune piccolo.

These devices are surprisingly discreet, in spite of their powerful amplification, for they will only operate at the appropriate moment and are small enough to be easily secreted about one's person, in a pocket, in an opera glasses' case, or in a hat. Here in the United States, ladies usually tuck them into the cleavage between the pearly domes of their bosom or hide them in the delightful waves of their undulating tresses. In

Brain machine



acknowledgement of this fashion, we have launched a new luxury range of auto catcallers inlaid with diamonds and gemstones of a quality to match the most tasteful and expensive jewellery.

We have also taken into account those occasions, particularly when theatregoers' ignorance or unresponsiveness predisposes them to remain mute and inert before stage events, on which a performance of worth may not always be received with the display of pleasure and approval that it deserves.

To counter this eventuality we have developed elegant *applause machines* and *precision claqueurs*, available in sets of ten or more and in three models, as follows:

- 1) Hinged hardwood batons and paddles that, when placed in pairs at strategic locations around the auditorium, knock together automatically at the opportune moment with a sound that is indistinguishable from that of metacarpal against metacarpal and finger against finger.
- 2) Idem linked to a phonograph that, simultaneously with the clapping, emits cries or murmurs of approval.
- 3) The device in (2) above built into lifelike mannequins, appropriately attired, that can be placed in seats in the auditorium and programmed to display pleasure and excitement, to look towards each other, to emit expressions of approval and to applaud thunderously. When these mannequins are in standby mode they look just like well behaved members of the audience engrossed in the performance. When they are activated, it is impossible to tell that they are not real people experiencing the raptures of delight.

We could proceed to enumerate more of our vast range of products and accessories, but we think it better to confine ourselves here to those we deem most useful and interesting. We humbly refer those readers who require further information to our Grand Illustrated Catalogue, available for \$5. And now, we will conclude by saying a few words about some of our plans for the future.

VII. Our plans for the future

So constant is *The New, Universal, Radilectrical, Literary Company Limited* in its strivings that even if its achievements to date are on a scale and impressive beyond all contemplation, it cannot but conclude that it still has far to go in its mission to improve the lot of humankind at the same time as it increases its own prosperity. A new ambition, therefore, pulsates in its fertile womb.

In accordance with our noble wish to share with the public at large our expectations, we would like to take the liberty of unveiling the three main projects on which we are working at the moment. The current influx of capital to support research and development and our determination to employ every means available to achieve these crowning glories of our enterprise make us confident that progress from the design stage to production will be rapid.

Our readers will no doubt have noticed the frequency with which we have in this brochure cited the case of the theatre, but will, we trust, pardon our apparent obsession in the knowledge that as the theatre has not only become one of the principal necessities of social life in this day and age but is also an exceptionally fertile breeding ground for wealth and commercial exploitation, it merits being singled out for special attention.

The importance we consequently accord to all matters appertaining to the theatre will make obvious the indignation we feel regarding the dense swarm of ignorant and incompetent actors and actresses who infest the stage today, and will explain why we are convinced that immediate action must be taken to remedy this situation, particularly as the few really gifted thespians in the world are either dying off, only to be replaced by inferior specimens; or they fall ill, depriving theatregoers of the pleasures deriving from their talent for extended periods of time; and what's more, because when they do perform, they always demand exorbitantly high remuneration. So, for each and all of these reasons, our enterprise is devoting itself to the construction of *androids* or *automatons* of both sexes,



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equipped with an artificial brain and fuelled by the same *radilectrical fluid* that powers our *Cephalias*. These will be able to move gracefully and charmingly about the stage, speak in elegant or noble tones, act with skill, and in so many words accomplish in a convincingly lifelike manner all the duties and meet all the demands of the profession as if they were real players of flesh and blood, but with the important difference that they will much more proficient because they are not prey to the inconsistencies of human behaviour, nor to the vagaries of whim, pride or ambition.

We are confident that it will not be long before we have built our first pair of automatons, which we call *mimophants*, and are ready to put them on public display in the great auditorium that we have built for this purpose at our headquarters.

The inventions that we have created to support legislative bodies—devices capable in many instances of carrying out more effectively the direct, personal and intentional actions of those bodies' members—are proof of our genuine and profound concern for the state of these institutions, which have become debased in the vast majority of countries that presume to refer to themselves as civilised.

However, the more we ponder such matters and discuss them with serious-minded gentlemen of weighty intellect, the more we come to the conclusion that in Parliaments (as the name implies) and in other institutions the foundations of which are verbosity and bragging, the only unique, substantive and necessary element is the material activity of speaking. Thought, for its part, counts for little, and translating ideas into action even less.

Something of this had become apparent to us—we might even say it was pretty obvious—by the time we were building the speechmakers that we referred to earlier, but a lack of confidence in our own criteria, even though these had been drawn up with the assistance of competent people, caused us to hold back. We still did not feel that the right moment had arrived to make the radical innovation that we will now proceed to describe, because if at that time it had failed, we would have risked not merely ridicule but ruin.

But now all our doubts have evaporated, and we are absolutely certain that the role played in politics by the complex mechanism of logical thought is totally insignificant. We have, therefore, eliminated it from the equation, and in so doing, reduced considerably our outlay. So now we are working on producing a set of garrulous, voluble parliamentary figures that our witty designers have named *Chatterboxes* or *Jaw mongers*, for they can gabble, gesticulate or reprimand others incessantly. But since at this stage of product development they still behave with a certain poise or measure, we realise that we have a little way to go before they appear completely lifelike.

Once we have ironed out this minor imperfection, we will turn our attention to producing whole Senates, Congresses, County Councils and Town Councils recreated in every principle (in the material sense of the word, of course), with their chairpersons, secretaries, elected representatives, ushers and other administrative minions. And once these are in place we can open constructive negotiations with other states, provinces, and municipalities regarding the supply of the administrative and governmental apparatus that they require, and which we can guarantee will be better than any they have had before.

Finally, we have put aside all self-interest and, motivated solely by our love for and empathy with our fellow human beings, we propose to create a *vast mental therapeutic sanatorium* in which scientific specialists will devote themselves to devising ways to use the surplus *radilectrical fluid* from our workshops to repair and restore human brains on which dementia or imbecility have taken their toll. We are completely confident that the venture will be successful, just as we are firm in our belief that, thanks to our efforts, one day every type of madness or idiocy will have been deleted from the ominous register of pathological conditions.

Recently we witnessed an experiment carried out by an eminent psychopathologist on twenty or so subjects drawn from the lower classes. The experience was as moving as it was conclusive. Prior to the experiment, the subjects had been artificially reduced to a state of cretinism beyond that which even nature is

Brain machine



capable of inducing. Their brains had shrivelled to the size of a mandarin; they grew extraordinary goitres that hung down as far as their knees; disgusting slobber dripped incessantly from their grimace-contorted lips; and a rasping grunt emanated from their foam-flecked, purplish jaws.

Thus were the conditions under which the doctor performed the therapeutic operation, a simple affair as it turns out, and reminiscent of the technique used in *electrocution*, that is to say, in the execution of criminals by electricity. Each of the patients was placed in a copper-plated armchair. A metal cap attached to cables was strapped to each subject's head, and connected to a *Cephalia* or battery charged with regenerative fluid. The subjects' ankles and wrists were secured by bronze bands to which conductors were attached, and then the switch was thrown.

After only fifteen minutes the changes that had taken place were marvellous to behold: the patients' bulbous necks had shrunken almost to normal size; the disgusting dribble secreted from their salivary glands had dried up: expression and the signs of awareness returned to their faces; their atrophied brains expanded until they regained their normal size and their spongy consistency. After an hour, these erstwhile invalids rose from their chairs restored to full health, intoning a congratulatory anthem—how distinct from the wretched grunting sound that they had been emitting before—and began improvising well-wrought verses in our praise. We wrote these down to keep as a glorious memento of such an impressive outcome.

Consequently it has been agreed that treatment in our sanatorium, which in a year at the most we hope to open to the public, will be made available at no charge to those of our customers who have placed with us one or more orders to the value of at least \$100. And for every fraction of \$100 spent, they will receive a complementary *mental regeneration voucher* (non-transferable) that can be redeemed in favour of a nominee of their choice.

Our customers should be aware that the benefits of our *mental therapy* can be applied not only to dilapidated, moth-eaten brains gnawed by the woodworm

of insanity, but also to those that are simply fatigued, befuddled or disoriented by one of the many minor but unfailingly irritating causes arising from daily life and are consequently in need of restoration and refreshment. Readers will also be interested to know that we are in the early stages of designing an ingenious surgical procedure, whereby patients can relieve themselves of their brains and forward them to us by recorded delivery in refrigerated cases. This will avoid customers the inconvenience of having to bring their brains in themselves as well as the discomfort of carrying them around in their skulls.

VIII. Conclusion

Now the task of presentation and demonstration that we set ourselves has reached its conclusion. And so, as *The New, Universal, Radilectrical, Literary Company Limited* enters the fearsome and sprawling fray of industrial activity, it raises from the arena its hand in salute to the public, beseeching it that by way of acknowledgement of its efforts to satisfy public demand, we are awarded the richly deserved prize of numerous orders. These should be sent to Iscariotes Val de Ur, Professor of Palaeography at the University of Polanes, who is our sole representative in the world.

Important note

1. This brochure was composed and edited by one of our advertising *cephalias*, Class B, Series III, Model h, number 54.
2. Our *Grand Illustrated Catalogue* is available at a price of \$5.

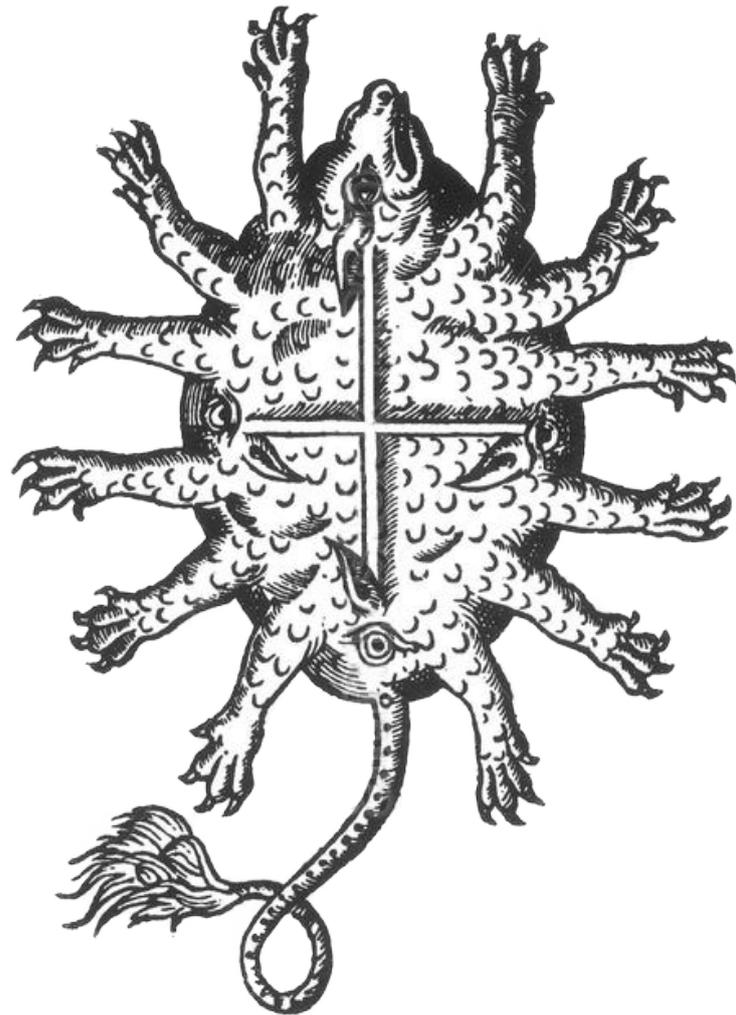
The Company
pp Prof. Iscariotes Val de Ur.

The Pharisee's Gospel

Introductory Note and Translation
by Álvaro Piñero González

Eduardo Gómez de Baquero (1886-1929), who used to write under the pen name 'Andrenio,' was one of Spain's main literary critics during the first third of the 20th century. He also wrote a couple of short story collections, in the main sentimental, save for "El Evangelio del Fariseo" (The Pharisee's Gospel). The latter was first published in *Caras y Caretas* (Faces and Masks), an Argentinian magazine read by Jorge Luis Borges as a young man. The final edition of this short story, whose translation is presented below, appeared in the volume *Escenas de la vida moderna* (Modern Life Scenes) in 1913.

"The Pharisee's Gospel" is not a commonplace piece at all. Reading it constitutes a strange experience, for, despite how brief it is, its words and the intellectual game it portrays stay with you for longer than it takes to read it. It is the story of an apocryphal gospel, recounted by means of a storytelling which successfully toys with metafiction, historiography, irony, exquisite plausibility, religious ambiguity and the canons of the best secular literature. It is Borgesian after a fashion, a fact worth being noted for it was written before Borges was even active. Moreover, the contrast between the ostensible objectivity and the nuanced filtering of the narration through various moral viewpoints —amongst



them, that of the Pharisees and of the modern scholars of the time when it was written— renders it a must-read for those appreciative of thought-provoking literature. Its balanced subtlety, from beginning to end, in combination with the elegance wherewith the author brings the story to an end, both in terms of content and style, beg for a tip of the hat and leave the reader with an aftertaste of riddles unsolved against a background of dogmatic smugness. ●



Eduardo Gómez de Baquero
The Pharisee's Gospel

Dr Topsisius found the peculiar manuscript during one of his visits to the Holy City; being a historian of the Lagids and other Eastern dynasties, he had been to Jerusalem before accompanying the romantic Portuguese nobleman Raposo in his pilgrimage to find the *Relic*, whose story was told years ago by Eça de Queirós. He came across the manuscript in the store of a hook-nosed, sallow-bearded, old Jew, by the name of Manasseh, who vouched for its authenticity –a futile gesture by all means, since Topsisius was both a philologist and a palaeographer, as well as distrustful of Jews.

It was but the copy of an ancient document and yet Topsisius thought it to be of great value, for he could tell by the antiquity stemming from the turn of the phrases it was no modern forgery, unlike the Saitaphernes' Golden Tiara acquired by the Louvre, but a faithful transcription of an old text unknown, in as much as such things can be achieved. Its author was a Mr Samuel ben Hillel, who must have been a half-Hellenised Jew belonging to the Pharisee sect and, according to the text, contemporary with Jesus. Should it be the original, the manuscript would be a unique piece in the world whose discovery would have raised Dr Topsisius to universal fame and showered him with many an enduring gain. Even if still a copy, the learned German professor deemed it such and had no qualms about presenting Manasseh with a fair number of piastres.

I was never proffered the opportunity to see the exotic document but heard Topsisius explaining its content. Before starting I must apologise first of all for the gaps of my memory and then for my poor knowledge of the Greek spoken by Hellenised Jews. I am liable to incur errors and anachronisms, which must be solely ascribed to my incompetence and in no way to the text purchased by our good German professor in Manasseh's store. The latter belonged to that kind of establishments one can find a bit of this and that: jewellery, slippers, manuscripts, Constantinople rose oil and marvellous fabrics, akin in their aerial thinness and their broidery to the Babylonian veils, of saffron and seven other colours, princess Salome took off one by one as she danced before the tetrarch aiming to cajole him into having the prophet Jokanaan beheaded,

for he had spurned her as some vulgar tradition would have it.

“To the sorrows this people has endured,” so it went one of the manuscript's excerpts I am translating into modern language, “there must be added the outrage brought about by the agitations of a man called Jesus of Nazareth, whom many a fool and a ignorant mistook for the Messiah. Little is known of his childhood, albeit even then he made people talk for arguing with the doctors of the law, quite an unheard-of sign of conceit and lack of respect for the elders. He left his family and wandered for a time in the company of scoundrels and low people: fishermen, beggars and even Samaritans, publicans and Roman soldiers. He spoke with women of ill repute, and pleaded for an adulteress, in a severe breach of propriety. It never bodes well to deal with morally lax women, even if only to discuss matters of the spirit. He showed his lack of patriotism when he advised to give tribute to Caesar. We all do it, and there is no choice, for we are so enjoined by the Procurator of Rome and the legions of Asia; all the same, at least we do it while grinding our teeth about such iniquity. He dared perform miracles on Saturdays, healing the ill in this day of rest, thus offending the law and upsetting the mores. He did no good to the merchants who, on the stairs of the temple, sold doves, lambs and bread for the sacrifices, as well as other articles, neglecting the respect and protection owed to commerce. By spreading dangerous preaching he stirred up the people. He attacked the foundations of society and the privileges of priesthood and elders alike, until the Sanhedrin, which was exceedingly weak and hesitant on this matter, turned him over to the Procurator, who had him crucified, and fairly so, amongst other wrongdoers. Those who kindle spirits and go against the established order are far more dangerous than the ones who steal our purse or cloak, for the former bring countless graver damages to the community.”

* * *

‘For me, this text,’ Topsisius shared with some of the diners and lodgers after a meal in the hotel where he



The Pharisee's Gospel

stayed in Jerusalem, acquainting them with his find, 'is a new Gospel and I would name it the Pharisee's Gospel. It is the story of Jesus, yet told by a down-to-earth man entrenched in the old ways; incapable of appreciating the divine, religious though he considers himself to be; a whitewashed tomb, to quote the Scripture, judging things from a customary and coarse viewpoint and applying to them narrow-minded, conservative notions. This is why I claim this document to be so valuable. It is the text which was missing: an account of Jesus' life through the eyes of a contemporary who was not a disciple of the Saviour, but one of his enemies.

'My dear colleague Dr Topsius,' replied Dr Lagrange, a French Assyriologist staying for some days in the Holy City on his way back from an excavation in Sippur, 'will surely allow me to express my astonishment at the importance attached to this strange manuscript. I believe it was recently penned. It contains words and expressions bespeaking of a modern forgery – a rather crass one indeed. A historian of the skill and the authority of Dr Topsius certainly shall not be fooled. Furthermore, the ideas it puts forth are not those of the Jews of the Augustan times. If it were better documented, it could be a worthy essay of scholarly transposition; and if its passages were more entertaining and its style purer, we would be speaking of an evangelical tale, in the line of those by Anatole France...'

'Sir,' interrupted Topsius, red with anger, 'Germany is not mistaken. The French levity is banned from our universities.'

'How dare you!' the French shouted standing up.

The other diners intervened to assuage them. These were monsignor Martinelli, a Roman prelate of intelligent, fine, medal-like Italian countenance; and the Count of Taumprew, former Austrian diplomat married to a billionaire Yankee – whereas his wife flirted in Nice, London and Vienna donning half of Gotha's collection, he, turned into a frenzied collector, travelled in pursuit of a green cameo which had belonged to empress Valeria and which, if unfound, would make for a deplorable gap in his collection.

'Pray, gentlemen, let us have peace,' *monsignore* said with a mellow voice. 'We all respect Germania and Gaul's prolific science, so well represented here, at this table, by the distinguished Dr Topsius and Dr Lagrange. Now, with regard to the manuscript, I must say I have made my own enquiries. I also saw it in Manasseh's house and was tempted to purchase it, but by providential chance I was given to know its origin. A Greek named Aristides Kakopoulos, a dexterous forger of old texts, is the author of this piece. Kakopoulos used to be Manasseh's accomplice until he fled taking some of his money and, I believe, a daughter too. But Ulysses can be sometimes more skilful than Zebulon. The Greek was, besides an inveterate rascal, an anarchist and it could have been that, driven by jocularly, he resolved to play a perverse joke on the conservative elements of society by depicting the conservative Judaea of the days of the Gospel as a foe of Our Lord Jesus Christ. And thus he did yet after a rather assuming fashion, that is to say, in clear want of partaking of the spirit of History, much like he himself was. No, my learned Topsius, this text ought not to be named the Pharisee's Gospel. It is an anarchist gospel – heretic and partisan – whose purpose is to indirectly eulogise disorder through making a revolutionary of our Saviour, turning him into the modern Christ, the anarchist Christ of the godless who have had enough of literary mysticism.

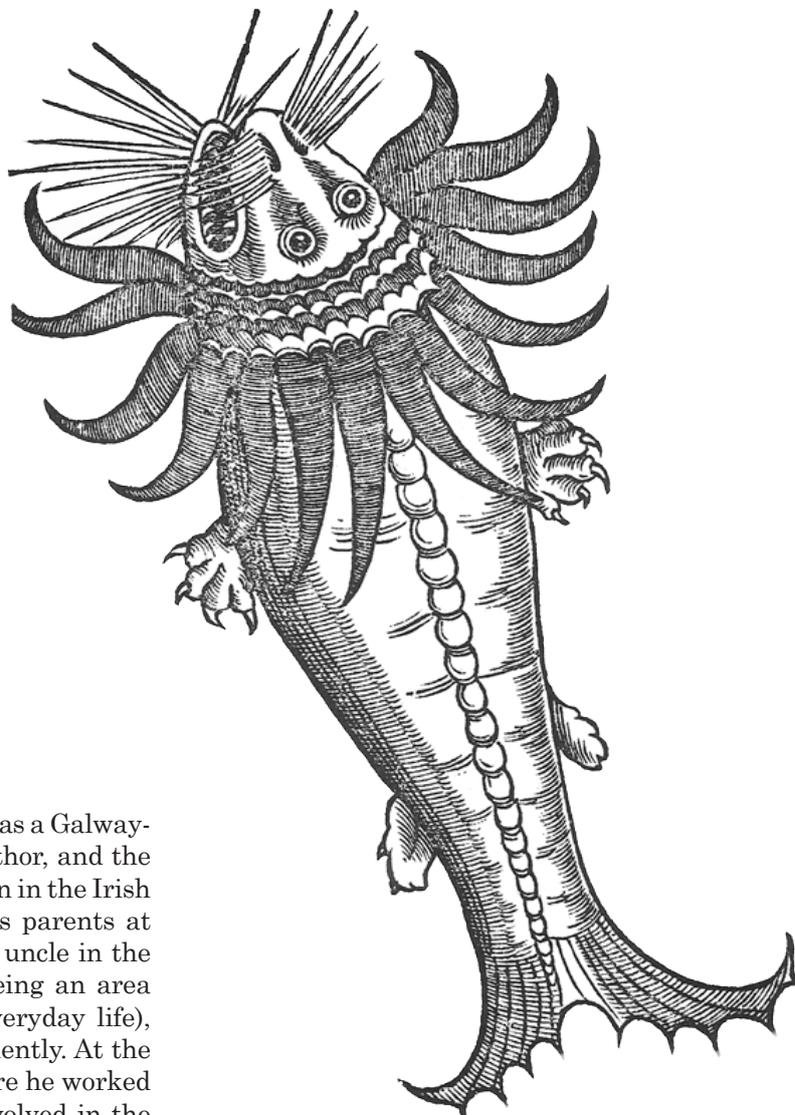
'Even then,' said the Count of Taumprew, 'would you admit, monsignor, there might be a teaching in this apocryphal text? Perchance it contains a lesson for the powers of the Earth which so sternly judge the innovators and accuse them of subverting the very foundations of society, upsetting the souls and corrupting the mores...'

'The author could have taken another example. Holy matters are to be treated sacredly, with faith and reverence,' replied *monsignore*.

There was silence. Shortly, Topsius left the dining room with his eyes flashing behind the golden glasses. His pace was firm and arrogant like a *Reiter's* of the Thirty Years' War.

The diners smirked discreetly. Doubt was in the air.

A Paper Found in a Box



Introductory Note, Translation & Notes
by Jack Fennell

Pádraig Ó Conaire (1882-1928) was a Galway-born journalist and prolific author, and the majority of his work was written in the Irish language. After losing both his parents at the age of 11, Ó Conaire lived with his uncle in the Connemara Gaeltacht (a 'Gaeltacht' being an area where Irish is the first language of everyday life), and there, he learned to speak Irish fluently. At the age of 17, he emigrated to London, where he worked for the Board of Education and got involved in the Gaelic League, a revivalist organisation working to restore the Irish language and Gaelic cultural traditions. He returned to Ireland in 1914, leaving behind a wife and four children in London, and supported himself through writing and teaching. He died suddenly at the age of 46, while visiting the Gaelic League's headquarters in Dublin. His acknowledged masterpiece is the 1910 novel *Deoraidheacht* ('Exile'), describing the angst of an Irish emigrant living in London, where the urban environment seems to take on a hellish, antagonistic life of its own. He also won critical acclaim as an essayist and a writer of short fiction.

When this story was originally published, the main body of the text was printed in Irish (insular uncial) script, while the quoted sections were in English, and in Roman type. The obvious difference

between the typefaces adds its own layer of meaning to the story as it was originally published (it is interesting to note that a young Flann O'Brien used the same trick to comic effect in his early short stories), but unfortunately, this visual impact is lost in translation.

This story was originally published in the May 29, 1926 edition of the weekly *Connacht Tribune* newspaper, and every article mentioned by the main character is a true story, printed in the May 22 edition. While it is not one of Ó Conaire's better-known works, it is significant for its imaginative criticism of the Irish Free State, and for the way it uses an optimistic vision of the future to address the post-Civil War mood of frustration and disappointment at the unfulfilled promises of independence. ●



Pádraig Ó Conaire
A Paper Found in a Box

When Burke, the first Warden of Galway under the New Law, stood to give the year's address before the people of the city on Saint Patrick's Day, 1966, he thanked the massive crowd that had gathered around him, who had elected him to oversee the city for the year ahead of them, and he promised that during that time, he would do his best to uphold the fame and honour of Galway. Having done this, he took an old, tattered newspaper out of his pocket, showed it to the people, and said this:

People of Galway (he said), yesterday and I looking through an old box with my father, I found this old paper, which was published forty years ago. It's called *The Connacht Tribune*, and it was put out on the twenty-second of May, 1926. People complain about how this great town isn't progressing as fast as we all want it to, but if I read some excerpts from this paper to those who will listen to me, they'll appreciate how much life in Galway has improved since this paper was published.

*

Listen to this piece here—a short account put before the Council about the dreadful condition of houses in Galway at the time:

“... a filthy condition ... the sanitary accommodation has been removed ... probably stolen ... the tenements comprise three houses devoid of any sanitary accommodation whatsoever ... the w.c. convenience has been locked up for the past two months ... to prevent waste of water from these premises, about twelve months ago, I shut off the water altogether—”¹

The Warden's reading was interrupted by incredulous noises from the crowd. None of the young people present would believe that life in Galway had ever been

that bad, until the Warden brought an old man up onto the platform to tell them that it was even worse than what had been described, and that he had lost his own father to a fever in the same place.

The Warden resumed:

“... lavatory locked up and not looked after by caretaker who holds the key ... stairs in a dangerous condition ... requires to be looked after to prevent accidents ... unsanitary and dangerous to the public health—”

Now, people of Galway (said the Warden), who would believe that the majority of the working class in this city lived in those conditions in our fathers' time! Would anyone think that we are all descended from those people who allowed such devilry to go on? We should all be proud today of the good, comfortable houses built for the working classes on the lakeshore, bay and riverbank; we should be proud, too, that Galway is now famed above all other cities in the country for its cleanliness. Though we have earned that fame, we should never forget that, two score years ago, our ancestors had earned the very opposite reputation for themselves.

*

But it was not filthy housing alone that worked to undermine the health of the people and sustain every disease in their midst. No one at that time would have had any way of knowing whether there was offal among the meat that was butchered and sold (the Warden said), meat that was rotten and was designated to be buried—something that it seems was not done. In the course of a report on the situation to the City Council, this short exchange took place between a Councillor and the Chairman:

“Chairman: It is to be presumed that they were buried.

Councillor: Have we any evidence that they were destroyed?

1. When this piece was originally published, the main body of the story was printed in Irish (insular uncial) script, while the quoted sections were in English, and in Roman type. The obvious visual difference in typefaces is lost in translation, hence the addition of quotation marks.



A Paper Found in a Box

Chairman: No...

Councillor: I am aware that some time ago meat that was rejected was buried, but it was taken up again the next day (sensation)."

A few of you down there are thinking that your own ancestors never did any such thing. We have this newspaper here to prove it; if any of you doubt me or the paper, you are welcome to read through the old Council minutes to your heart's content in the Warden's office tomorrow. More care is given to food in this city today: not a single morsel of it can be sold on the market, or in any shop, unless the seller testifies to the City Council that it is safe and healthy. A good few of you here today still remember the deadly disease that broke out in Galway thirty-five years ago, on account of food-stuffs that were not suitable for human consumption; but that can never happen again, because the laws we have now are properly enforced, and as long as I am Warden, I promise that this enforcement will continue. (Applause)

*

There is another important issue that the Council and the people of Galway had to deal with, according to the paper in my hand. If another city in Ireland has a better water supply than Galway today, I am unaware of it, but forty years ago, there were major shortages in the city in times of drought. Why? The city politicians of the time were to blame. Here's a nice little conversation from the Council:

"Councillor: I know what they will do.

Another councillor: They agreed to do something.

Yet another councillor: I do not think they will do anything."

And it appears that nothing *was* done! (said the Warden). There was the same reluctance to part with money back then as there is now. Sometimes the names

of people who don't pay their dues are published in newspapers, but it hasn't been proven that this does anything except embarrass them. Today's Council will have to do something similar, I'm afraid...

There was *poitín*² in this country at that time as well, and people were as fond of it back then as they are now, with the same consequent trouble. Here's an account of it:

"A desperate fight between a soldier of the National Army and two civic guards..."

Poitín, to be sure! As the report says:

"...the soldier, who appeared to be suffering from the effects of poteen-drinking, fought savagely, and after a two-hour struggle the guards succeeded in getting him to the barracks..."

Business matters were a subject of concern for people back then as well, of course. Believe me! That's the reason why cattle and pigs and sheep were exported, and the country was left without leather or anything else except what came back to us. We were selling honey to buy sweets, until the practice was changed because of how cheap livestock was in Canada and in other large countries. You all know how much of this country's great wealth came from that change, so there's no need for me to say anything further about it.

There are still many situations and issues that we need to solve in Galway today, but don't tell me that there has not been a great improvement since the time that the paper in my hand was published. Indeed, change and improvement will always happen in Galway, if the people dream of it.

2. *Poitín* (Anglicised as 'poteen' or 'potcheen') is a potent alcoholic spirit, usually distilled illegally in rural areas. Legal varieties have an average alcohol content similar to commercially-available whisky, but the alcohol content of illicit *poitín* can vary wildly from individual still to individual still.



104.

*Nauta Erythraeum pauidus qui nauigat aequor,
In prora et puppis summo resonantia pendet*

*Tintinnabula : eo sonitu, prae grandia Cete,
Balenas, et Monstra marina a nauibus arcent . e*

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