

THE SUBJECT FROM TOP TO BOTTOM. REPRESENTATION AND SUBJECTIVITY IN JOSÉ MARÍA ARGUEDAS AND JOSÉ REVUELTAS

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Recommended citation || ZABALGOITIA HERRERA, Mauricio (2013): "The subject from top to bottom. Representation and subjectivity in José María Arguedas and José Revueltas" [online article], *452°F. Electronic journal of theory of literature and comparative literature*, 8, 144-155, [Consulted on: dd/mm/aa], < http://www.452f.com/pdf/numero08/08_452f-mis-mauricio-zabalgoitia-herrera-en.pdf>

Illustration || Raquel Pardo

Translation || Alec Plint

Article || Received on: 22/05/2012 | International Advisory Board's suitability: 07/10/2012 | Published: 01/2013

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Abstract || In this article a comparative process is performed between two novels, *Los ríos profundos* by José María Arguedas and *El luto humano* by José Revueltas. Their breakthrough character around the central continuity would make them seem close or similar acts, either in front of History or in front of the national and continental literary systems, in which apparently are part. However, and through reflections related to subjectivity complex and a representation limit, these enunciations are shown as different acts in front of indigenous subjects (but also popular and marginal). As well, as specific versions of dialectics, ideology and consciousness.

Keywords || Comparatism | Dialectics | Representation | Subjectivity | Indigenous.

According to Julio Ortega, the work of José María Arguedas can be interpreted as a dialogical map of Peru; it is a place where everyone speaks and identity is defined by the place of the speaker. In this regard, his writing presents itself as a gradual subversion of the social hierarchic (dis)order by an order that can be seen as natural (cfr. Corrales, 2011). In other instances, however, his work must be seen as a break or deviation from an established tradition. This is due to a process of representation that sees the novel as an instrument privileged with the task of accounting for the livelihood of subjects, who were marginalized or ignored during the colonial era and the period of national emergence. When compared with the usual kind of *indigenismo*, and also with the modern novel from Peru's capital, the works of Arguedas, in particular *Los ríos profundos* (1956), can be seen as problematic in the sense that the subjects' speech –a Spanish *contaminated by Quechua*– gives an account of a language that *nobody* used to speak. For Ortega, this is the language of the future, it is to be considered as a utopia as much as a dialectic. Equally, according to William Rowe, there is an element that is «profético en la obra del peruano; una capacidad para hablar del futuro que vendría dada por un extraordinario esfuerzo de análisis e imaginación» (Rowe, 1996: 14).

In Mexico there is also a literature that, in a sense, *seeks* to take responsibility of a certain repressed subjectivity, raising it –free from sublimation and objectification– to the plane of literary representation, bringing it *into dialogue*. This is the literature of José Revueltas; his second novel is of note because it is set in a rural location and this *gives voice* to a variety of Mexican subjects belonging to the first half of the twentieth century. Critics, conforming to Mexican literary *tradition*, associated this work with the beginnings of the *nouveau roman*, and at the same time with the *mestizo* culture emerging in Mexico. Yet, they also highlighted the emergence of given subjects that had not long previously been interpreted as, or reduced to, objectified forms of speech or mannerisms. Or they were seen simply as a *type* present in post-revolutionary Mexico, a place where the educated would exhaust all the cathexes that this new society, interested in the rural world, was projecting onto subjects allowing for cohesion between national identities.

In any case, the key elements of both *El luto humano* and *Los ríos profundos* are subjective multiplicity; confrontation between cultural universes; the possibility of historic-temporal continuities alternative to those established in the West; the presence of myth and its subversive nature in the face of history; and plurality of narrators. Yet, in spite of these and many other points in common, neither of these works occupy the same place within their national or continental canons, and although they are both examples of nonconformist, decentered and alternative literature, their approaches still differ.

(Rama, Cornejo Polar, Lienhard).

Now, if we look beyond this *core structure*, common to both works, and take the theories of Derrida on national or continental criticism, what these two works also share is a subversive intention, constant in all Latin American literary experience. This is a boundary in place for the representation of indigenous subjects, whether they are marginal and/or popular. In reality this could be the most clear and probable agglutinative and cohesive denominator of Latin American experience. From this perspective, it is conceivable that both novels rework the mapping out of subjectivities; this questions fixed identities; adjusts the discursive orders of *indigenismos* and the closest regionalisms; and it places new subjects in opposition to the well known *established subject* (be it homogeneous or *mestizo*) from national tales and other similar writings. Yet, there is another element that serves to unite them, but at the same time, which serves ultimately to demonstrate that they are experiences from another tradition. This is to do with the fact that in their achievement is found the intention of unveiling a plan; the proposal of some kind of future construction or some kind of variant of *negative dialectics* –in the sense that Adorno uses the concept– which constitutes a truly *antiestablishment* option; a firm rejection of the principles of unity, omnipotence and superiority of the *concept*. (Adorno, 1990: 8). Affirming this identity would have meant for both writers, the reduction of a vast multiplicity to a violent homogeneity, which insists upon equating individuals as *doers of their deeds* and ideal beings with axiological value, and therefore perpetuating its dominance.

A point of comparison could be the presence of subjects whose sense of belonging to an educated society is, at some moment, confronted with a reality that overcomes and decentres them (Cornejo Polar, 1996:839). Consequently it is possible to embark on a journey that reveals these novels as similar, yet irreconcilable works; they are comparable in their principles of ordering and disordering of subjects, their speech and experiences; although they differ in terms of the new boundaries imposed by the notion dialectics that they put into forward, and equally in terms of these boundaries that are a result of the conditioning of discursive, ideological and historical materiality. Like enunciations coming at fundamental moments of post-colonial Latin American experience –such as the apparent *liberation* of certain subjects– both works account for endpoint that the apparently comparable, though divergent, historic processes of development would have led to. They give an account of those subjects who would conform to a modern, heterogeneous reality that would soon enough become more complex, dynamic and difficult to grasp. They also express the relationships between given subjects —«sus hablas elocuentes, con los suyos y en su mundo» (Cornejo Polar, 1994: 220)—, including the specific relationship that the

dominant representation complex would end up establishing with an assorted difference that was already impossible to deny.

In terms of presenting the cartography of different subjects that destabilizes the unity of national heterogeneous tales, both novels present themselves as constructs that cause unknown modes of consciousness and culture to emerge. In this respect, the Peruvian's project seeks to establish how different cultural subjects ought to speak, whatever their degree of indigenosity, be it *mestizo* or migrant in character. Indeed Mexican's project, starting at the precise moment at which the reality of post-revolutionary Mexico is *discovered*, manifests a certain confusion concerning the *indio-campesino* that it sought to represent. As the novel advances, this confusion begins to untangle; a typology is established that is governed by the subjective logic of ideological boundaries that preconfigure its story-telling capacity. And which, coupled with the construction of the utopian conscience of a socialist, revolutionary *campesino*, leads to the obligation to classify those beings that are situated across the wide spectrum that exists between one pole and the other. This spectrum is *mestizaje*.

In Arguedas, this resulting multiplicity, an "explosión del sujeto", writes Cornejo Polar, has the paradoxical effect of vividly retaining the memory of time and places left behind us, converting them into a second life like horizon that infiltrates the first one, reshaping experiences (Cornejo Polar, 1994: 209). In *Revueltas*, the result is a restructuring of the consciousness, which can rekindle the mental subtypes of ambiguity, *machismo*, the inferiority complex, indifference towards death, apathy, concealment from others and deceitfulness (Montoya, 2008). It is also possible to add an insistence upon excessive violence to this list. Any essence of what it is to be Mexican is linked to the notion of race and to historical experiences, more closely associated with indigenosity and these can only lose strength by becoming absorbed into a revolutionary consciousness, and this was not successful. In this respect, the learned *campesino-indio*, dressed up in culture, education and socialism, finds himself in opposition to the rural *campesino-indio*. *Revueltas* returns to the old dichotomy of colonialism and its metaphysics; he does not break from this binary that functions as the basis for this dialectic, whose approach to reality can only be achieved by means of unbalanced opposites. Finally, his vision of a Mexican socialism sees only one option: the assimilation of the *indio*. Except that the process of ladinization of the *indio*, which had already begun, would be the unfinished task of the unmasked revolutionary process. What the underlying subjectivity complex of *El luto humano*, then, forcefully comes to reveal is how the barbarism of a type such as the *campesino-indio* has already been corrupted by the erosive forces of an unjust capitalism. It also shows how a *campesino-indio* with "a good conscience", whilst refusing to let go

of an archaic and ritualistic form of life, as far as he is concerned, could end up becoming *the subaltern of subalternity*. This represents a restructuring of power that homogenizing literatures and those tending to portraying *campesinos* unfavourably, yet as coherent subjects, would certainly have been unable to demonstrate.

There is, however, something more meaningful at stake in this comparison between one novel and the other. This is to do with the narrative voices in play. In *Revueltas* the descriptions of the three types of *indio-campesino* come from a perspective which guards the authority of an essayist of ideas, and are complemented by the vision of the priest, a figure still representative of *criollismo* in rural areas. Whereas in *Los ríos profundos*, Ernesto is established as a future possibility, as a *migrant subject* who is aware of the unstable and precarious coherence of a reconciliation of the dual-heritage of *mestizo*. He is able to be “el ayer y el allá, de un lado, y el hoy y el aquí, de otro” (Cornejo Polar, 1994: 209).

Revueltas' subjectivity complex, then, contrasts a progressive *indio-campesino* with a being, who is essentially Mexican and plunged into misery, hunger and hatred. This *indio*, already dead in the plot's chronology, wished to transform the land; his doctrine envisaged a “new man”, which is ultimately, the desire of a great part of Latin American and Mexican contextual theory. It is on this level that ideology leaves its trace and reality is modeled (Asensi, 2011). If signs of unequal modernization are apparent in Mexico as across Latin America; then in the case of the Mexican's novel, a new hierarchy hastens to *close down avenues* for possible subjects, and to restrict them in their character to being actors –though unstable ones– of modernity. On the other hand, in the case of Peruvian's novel, they insist on delving into their own interior, recalculating their fragmentation and destabilization, both of which are provoked by determined positions between two continuities. In spite of the fact that not only amongst *Revueltas*' *campesinos* do *two times* coexist, and also because elements of modernity are contrasted with archaic norms, it is necessary to ask: How it is that the consciousness of the self and the other are presented as a fatal, though stable synthesis, apparently eternal in age?

It seems that what *Revueltas* maintains is a symbolic European order, leaving nothing out and including that old tradition that Marx had already clearly identified in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* and that Spivak returns to in his incidental work of 2009. This is to do with the ancient debate between representation (mimesis) or rhetoric as tropology, or the latter as persuasion, as a speech from “memory” that becomes no more than a “performance” (Spivak, 2009: 58). And of what must the subjects be persuaded? Why must they have names? What metaphors must be attributed

to them? The function of the author in *Revueltas* is more than this interpreter that Marx envisaged in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, that is to say a spokesman impregnated with class consciousness, who preaches attentive to difference, who preaches to a particularity, yet without neglecting the indigenous-marginal-popular representation boundaries, to which he has previously made reference.

At given moments, both novels narrate similar matters: journeys; given subjective confusion that dominant forces try to reorder; the role of the church and its *criollo* priests; and strike episodes. This not only gives an account of the differences underlying the subjective realities of Peru and Mexico at the midway point of the century –the totally non-correlative manner of dealing with indigenous subjects– but also demonstrates how, in a way, when confronted with distinct epistemic frameworks, modernizing forces brought fictional possibilities to very different areas. In Peru, in Churata as much as in Arguedas, the plural subject that undertakes different experiences –situated in divergent times and traditions– acquires a multiple essence “dispersa, entreverada, capaz entonces –y por ese mismo– de abrir una amplia gama polifónica que incluye el sutil tejido de dos idiomas” (Cornejo Polar 1994:215).

Whereas the changing voice that speaks in *El luto humano* achieves neither silence nor stealth when it passes from one subject to another, from one position of enunciation to another. At times the voice will represent the consciousness of the most bloodthirsty *indio-campesino* whose morality is distant from that which underlies the consciousness of the working class; at others, the consciousness of the *indio-campesino* swept along by the forces of modernity that know nothing of how to deal with this man or the archaic practices that he upholds; or that of the revolutionary *indio* who is “acculturated”, but by the forces of a telluric and national Marxism. What is important is perhaps both this boundary that self imposes itself in front of the most genuine of indigenous subjects, whom we describe with tenderness and violence, though from a distance and as a *concept*. And also the fact that placing oneself outside of capitalist liberalism does not mean abandoning the position of a strong, centered subject, authoritarian in many ways, and in no way disposed to fissure an accomplished and well constructed identity (Cornejo Polar, 1994:215), one that would *have to* be imposed upon the different subjects from the Mexican countryside. And if this subject is in crisis in Arguedas, it rather appears to underline its quality as a performer in Mexico –yet like Marx’ Bonapartean interpreter– preserving its identity –and position– that is like, as Cornejo Polar (1994:215) would say, the *guarantee of its own existence*.

If one looks beyond these matters of consciousness, ideology and history –all of which without doubt would have been in the thoughts

of both writers, just as much due to the times, as due to the failures of national projects and the development of modernizing forces—the main difference regarding the act of representation of different subjects lies in the realms of intention. Though for the Mexican, this intention is neither completely open –nor dressed up in Marxism and its narratives of subjective aperture and sensitivity– to preserve the West as a subject (Spivak, 2009:43). Above all, from the premise that Revueltas himself defined as Mexican *dialectic realism*; the epistemological framework that would have condemned his literature to be placed within these boundaries, showing acculturation and assimilation of the *indio* as fundamental steps on the route to *mestizaje* which then would have formed part of a utopian universality. At this moment, matters become decisive, for example, the possibility of granting an *indio* a proletarian consciousness –giving us the *campesinado*–; the establishment of a bond with myth and the prehispanic past as a means of confirming a homogenous identity; the longing for a revolutionary subject who surpasses ethnic groups, race and class; and the reification of certain Mexican categories that have already been made active by Samuel Ramos, Octavio Paz and all the national, cultural or anticultural machinery.

In the past, some kind of proposed future has been spoken of as underlying a one or another novel. In this sense, the novel of Arguedas opens the door for a utopia that is not a “síntesis conciliante sino pluralidad múltiple [...], que no abdica frente al turbador anhelo de ser muchos seres, vivir muchas vidas, hablar muchos lenguajes, habitar muchos mundos” (Cornejo Polar, 1994: 217). This demonstrates its character as a variant of *negative dialectic*, which overlooks synthesis and sets it against a multiform plurality that is situated, in every sense, on the lowest rung of any social scale, a place of the most powerful, negative and sabotaging “truth”¹. On the other hand, the novel of Revueltas with its notion of the countryside and its *indios-campesinos* organized as *lumpenproletarians*, and with the premise that this action implies, with regards to how we must deal with difference, alterity and the various types marginality resulting from the processes of colonization and the shaping of countries. What this leads to is a future impregnated with class consciousness, a framework from which indigenous *indios* are ultimately excluded.

And this is perhaps a problem of Marxism in general and of national projects in particular. Revueltas, without any doubt, situates the rural subject on the map of representation, and nothing is left off, not even the rural subject’s deep conflicts, a risky deed in the eyes of homogeneity. Although perhaps when compared with Arguedas or Rulfo, Revueltas remains on that level where, according to Hannah Arendt, the author becomes a re-producer, whose action «está tan indisolublemente ligada al flujo vivo de actuar y hablar» (Arendt, 1998: 210-211), this coincides with certain necessities of representation

NOTES

1 | The term ‘sabotaging’ refers to Manuel Asensi’s (2011) recent notion of “criticism as sabotage”. In summary, the Valencian theorist argues that every cultural or literary text exercises a in-depth modeling of the world, beginning with simple syllogisms that he presents as visions of reality and experiences. In this framework, his critical notion not only proposes the sabotage of performative mechanisms that condition our lives, but also recognizes the existence of “sabotage machines” that act within this framework. Without doubt, Arguedas’ novel would be one of these

(Herlinghaus, 2004: 21). These are the Marxist discourses that are most distant from Marx' own discourse, his dialectics and class essentialism. We are led to reflect upon how this conviction could have been reproduced in a set of later literatures, which are indebted in many ways to Revueltas' emblematic novel, and in this way establishing a certain closure to the conflict. In the passages referring to indigenous people in *El luto humano*, it seems to be very clear: they are living in a time that has not yet reached them.

In Revueltas's novel, it is during the moment of the strike narrated by the narrator interpreter, complicit with the internal voice of Nativity (the educated *campesino*), that the boundary of representation appears at its strongest. This moment has its counterpart in *Los ríos profundos* in «El motín», a kind of event that can be beneficial to give an account subjectivity and representation complexes. In Arguedas' novel, he uses a rebellion, which perhaps breaks with the novel's structure, but is capable of including a variety of beings, passing over the diversity of consciences and their racial and/or cultural margins. Asensi comments:

Lo importante no es ser blanco, mestizo o indígena, sino la posición ideológica [...]. En el modelo de mundo creado por Arguedas no hay racismo, no hay destino biológico, sino tomas de posición en función de un *pathos* y un *ethos* que se sitúan en el nivel de la sensibilidad. Dicho de otra manera: Arguedas falla a favor de la ideología (Asensi, 2012: 66-67).

But in his strike episode, what Revueltas contrasts with the post-revolution disappointment, the evident failures of the agrarian reform and all of the rifts that the construction process of a homogenous State already presented, is ultimately a form of utopia. The strike has to be seen as a failure not only for the dominant side and its effects of social representation but also for commotion that is generated by the presence of the indigenous *indio* in the very subjectivity of the narrator and the novel's hero. Even before this episode indigenous subjectivity is narrated in totalizing terms: the indigenous character is seen as a nebulous presence totally lacking in power.

No eran [n]i sanguinarios, ni crueles, ni rebeldes, antes apagados, tristes, laboriosos, pacíficos y llenos de temor [...]. Constituían una fracción de un numeroso pueblo abatido y aniquilado por los gobiernos y que, con miedo tal vez de nuevas persecuciones, optaban hoy por la sumisión y la humildad (Revueltas, 2009: 81).

This is not putting in doubt the themes, concepts or metaphors that the author employs to describe the reality associated with indigenous subjects, who hang over the "*mestizo*" subjectivity of the work, though what stands out is the boundary that the very author-narrator marks out in relation to these subjects. This voice *enters*

and leaves these mestizos, dressed up with different impulses, and the *criollos*, transforming them to a consciousness that reflects as much as it shapes, yet the indigenous characters are impenetrable and one can only guess how they feel and what is happening to them via observation and interpretation. What is more, it would appear that they are not *humans*, and that their history has been brought to a close; *they live off credit*, to use a popular Mexican saying. Paradoxically, they are *hieroglyphic* transparencies in their misery. And they are tired, says the narrator, of the struggles that they have fought *before*.

During the strike, these “wretched” indigenous characters are used as “blacklegs”, deceived and inebriated. In the following fragment one can well observe how the historical and existential condition of the indigenous characters is synthesized from a rhetorical framework, although one cannot be sure of the boundary imposed by the narrative voice concerning their statute of otherness:

Antes de quince días presentáronse unos cuarenta indígenas, los pobres completamente borrachos. Habíanles ofrecido primero tequila y mezcal, pero lo rechazaron a cambio de alcohol puro. Las grandes copas de alcohol asestaban una puñalada certera, vertiginosa, y los indígenas pusiéronse dulces e incomprensibles al primer golpe y muy tristes, mirando con agradecimiento humillado y tierno al enganchador que de tal modo los regalaba [...]. Les daba tristeza pero a la vez una cólera, a medida que el alcohol penetraba. Eran el rencor y el sufrimiento. Aparecían de súbito sus dolores, y la impotencia terrible frente a eso pesado, oscuro y antiguo, les humedecía los ojos, y quién sabe por qué, siempre de agradecimiento, de sumisión y de súplica. Otra copa más (Revueltas, 2009: 158).

If this fragment, which is as terrible as beautiful, is projected onto a spectrum, wider than that of the relationship between the novel –a text whose literariness is emphasized– and indigenous subjectivity, it continues to be somewhat beyond the boundary of subjective representation, although there are times when it runs parallel to this boundary.

And on this point, the matter consists of establishing under which circumstances the act of introducing plurality and diversity would in fact be the establishment of a kind of cover that would conceal the real enunciating subject. Something that could be listed as an effect of representation and multiple subjectivities. According to this logic, the author who does not surpass the assumed boundaries of representation in their geocultural and historical context would be working towards a tangible goal: translating, transcribing and transforming short tales of “human matters” until the point where they have exhausted every sort of material, document and medium giving them a physical existence (Herlinghaus, 2004:21). There are,

however, others who would insist upon ignoring these boundaries; this kind of experience does not conform to the “worldly and objectifying goal” and

[e]stos narradores nos hablan desde los trasfondos y los patios interiores de las exclusiones modernas —divisiones entre representación y praxis, reificación y pertenencia, razón ordenadora e imaginación impura, reificación y pertenencia, en una palabra, la división entre *Historia* y los *relatos menores* (Herlinghaus, 2004: 21).

As functional as this division may appear; it certainly distances Revueltas somewhat from Rulfo, and the latter greatly from Arguedas. There is, however, a problem when this possibility is internalized. This is because of hegemony, state control and holders of power and the ultimately linear and ordered character of the literary and historiographic systems. Ranajit Guha (2002) accurately sees this as *the order of discourse*, whose tendency is to convert this type of *foreign* subject into a national hero. And as we know all too well, a hero loses all his powers when his deeds are fictionalized.

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