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ON NARRATING THE 2008 FINANCIAL CRISIS AND ITS REPERCUSSION¹

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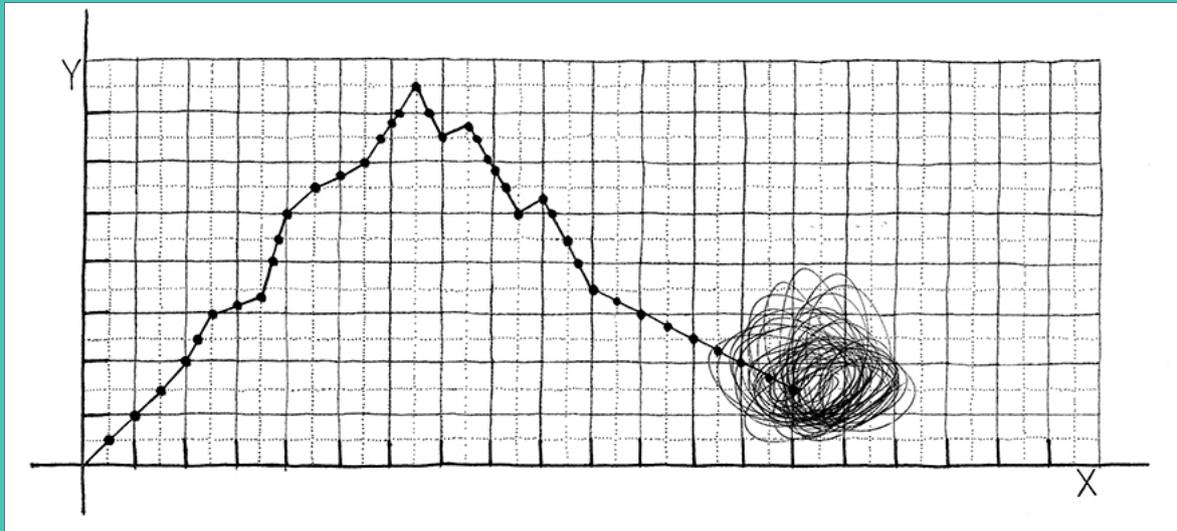
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Abstract || The article proposes a set of keys for a first approach to the study of the Spanish novelistic production around the 2008 financial crisis and its repercussions. Firstly, we contextualize the main research lines that have attended this recent object of study. Secondly, we pose a model of analysis based in thematic operational nuclei, while problematizing the term “novel of the crisis” used by the majority of the Spanish cultural critics. Thirdly, we explore a case study, the novel *Cenital* (2012) by Emilio Bueso, as an example of the creation of an alternative imaginary of the antecedents of the crisis. Lastly, we propose a new concept, “disinherited literature”, as an entry point to the novelistic corpus that has narrated the historical landmark of the 2008 crisis.

Keywords || Literature of the crisis | Disinherited literature | CRIC | *Cenital* | Emilio Bueso

0. Introduction²

To date, few studies have focused on the analysis of the cultural narratives generated around the 2008 financial crisis and its repercussions in the Hispanic world. Among these contributions it is worth noting those being carried out in the Horizon 2020 Marie Curie RISE Excellent Science project, “Cultural Narratives of Crisis and Renewal (CRIC)”, coordinated by Jorge Catalá Carrasco and Patricia Oliart from Newcastle University (which we are involved in) as well as papers that have been appearing fairly dispersedly (Sanz Villanueva, 2013; Silva, 2013; Wieviorka, 2013; Ingenschay, 2014) and the book *Cultures of Anyone* (2015) by Moreno-Caballud. As such, the current monographic issue of *452°F. Journal of Literary Theory and Comparative Literature* aims to fill a considerable gap in the reflections on the historical milestone (cultural, social, political and economic) that the 2008 financial crisis has represented.

Here it is clearly necessary to outline, albeit briefly, our starting point. Generally speaking, there are two publications that CRIC considers pioneering: the monographic issue of *Hispanic Review*, “The sustainable imagination: cultures economic crisis in Spain today” (2012), and the book edited by Castells, Caraça and Cardoso, entitled *Aftermath: The Cultures of the Economic Crisis* (2012).

We should also add to the above the research work of Paul Crosthwaite who, working in the field of English-language narrative, published an esteemed collected work in 2011 entitled *Criticism, Crisis, and Contemporary Narrative: Textual Horizons in an Age of Global Risk*. The approaches of this work were further developed in a later article — “Is a Financial Crisis a Trauma?” — published in 2013. Although Crosthwaite’s ideas focus on the study of a corpus of English texts, the international nature of the 2008 financial crisis (as shown by Castells [2010] in a news article published in *La Vanguardia* with the headline “Las culturas de la crisis”, and Catalá Carrasco [2016] in a recent interview with the newspaper *Levante*) means that the concerns of the crisis are relevant beyond the geographical boundaries of the area it occurs in, so that some of Crosthwaite’s approaches — and those of the participants in the 2011 book — are also effective for analysing the complex and multifaceted subject matter we face.

In addition, this initial overview of pioneering transnational and interdisciplinary studies in the fields of Humanities and Social Sciences must be rounded off by other benchmarks, such as Flesher and Cox’s contributions in the work *Understanding European Movements: New Social Movements, Global Justice Struggles, Anti-Austerity Protest* (2013); the conceptualisation of crisis and renewal processes proposed by Bauman and Bordoni in *State of Crisis*

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1 | I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Jorge Catalá-Carrasco and Dr. Patricia Oliart, coordinators of the Horizon 2020 Marie Curie RISE research project “Cultural Narratives of Crisis and Renewal – CRIC”, for their support and help.

2 | The reader will note that in some quotations the page number does not appear. This happens when the source format is digital and the electronic media does not offer page numbering. In such cases, the accuracy of the source can be checked simply by entering keywords into the search option, which will allow it to be quickly located.

(2014); the analysis of contemporary capitalism in Piketty's noted study *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, and the excellent overviews presented by Judt in *Ill Fares the Land* (2010) and Varoufakis in *The Global Minotaur: America, the True Origins of the Financial Crisis and the Future of the World Economy* (2013).

Our intention here is not to develop a canon of academic works on the crisis but, rather, to offer a theoretical starting point as well as a shared space of ideas to move around in and on which to base a first general analysis that can be transferred to different places and times. In this sense, all of the authors and studies mentioned above converge around a fundamental principle of observation, since they consider that any financial crisis also constitutes a symbolic crisis. This idea, already suggested by Paul De Man in "Crisis and Criticism" (1983), links to the etymological sense of the word "crisis" (*krinein*), whose meaning in relation to the world of medicine is highlighted by both Crosthwaite (2011) and Bauman and Bordoni (2014) in their works, when they remind us that "'Crisis' and 'criticism' (as well as the latter's immediate cognates —'critic', 'criticize', 'critical,' 'critique') both have their roots in the Greek *krinein*: 'to separate, judge, decide'" (Crosthwaite, 2011). However, "Recently 'crisis' has become linked to the economic sector essentially to indicate a complex and contradictory condition, which cannot be defined as 'inflation', 'stagnation' or 'recession', but in which a series of causes and effects is combined in a jumble of conflicting issues" (Bauman and Bordoni, 2014).

Indeed, the traditional conceptualisation of the term "crisis" now carries a negative meaning because, in the discourse of power, the economy occupies a dominant position in the configuration and the narrative representation of contemporary reality. However, as pointed out by Crosthwaite (2011), and as expounded subsequently by Jorge Catalá, Patricia Oliart and Carles Freixa at the first CRIC international congress (held on June 2015 at Newcastle University), the notion of "crisis" also implies the possibility of rupture, renewal and reconsideration of those social, economic, political and cultural structures that have been dominant until now, and whose fracture triggers the alternative construction of ideological positions and intellectual/symbolic mechanisms that operate collectively and individually within a particular historical context. In this way, it could be said that:

Culture and institutions are the foundations of any economic system (Ostrom, 2005). Since culture (a specific set of values and beliefs orienting behaviour) is a material practice, we should be able to detect the signs of such culture in the spontaneous adaptation of peoples' lives to constraints and opportunities arising from the crisis. (Castells, Caraça and Cardoso, 2012)

Against this background, despite the fact that since the start of the 2008 financial crisis it has been emphatically insisted that we are immersed above all (or only) in an economic crisis, from our perspective we are dealing with a recession that goes beyond the financial framework and represents a symbolic crisis, whose ramifications and discursive mechanisms have destabilised the components of our societies to the point that they seem “disjointed”, in the sense expounded by Derrida in *Spectres of Marx* (Derrida, 1993).

Therefore, within our globalised and interconnected cultures, the successive disturbances caused by the 2008 financial crisis have generated a set of very specific social, cultural, political and economic responses, while at the same time articulating a process of structural readjustment that has been (and continues to be) shaped under a new paradigm of social relationships formed around transnational parameters that are framed within transactional relationships of economic and financial capital, as well as symbolic capital. Hence the cultural narratives from this time of crisis and renewal do not just enable different spaces of resistance and consumption or give rise to the possibility of alternative discursive fields, but also build and describe the cognitive reality that we engage in socially and intellectually.

Thus, if literature is human discourse (in the way Michael Foucault explained in *L'archéologie du savoir* [1969]) par excellence, in which previously-established structures can be challenged, or an effective means of proposing alternative scenarios of renewal thanks to the mutability and contingency of the symbol — and the novel, more so, thanks to its entirely free nature — then literature represents a privileged space in the mental configuration of our transnational and globalised societies. That is why, in one way or another, every novel embodies the unfolding of a crisis and a process of renewal in its founding sense. Therefore (and following the ideas of Lisa Zunshine [2015] set out for the Anglophone tradition), the contemporary novel as an overall genre produces a cognitive map to better understand the destabilised nature of the post-2008 financial crisis world.

1. The novel as a cognitive map

In 1967, Frank Kermode showed in *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* that novels “all imitate a world of potentiality, even if this implies a philosophy disclaimed by their authors”. Novels thus form cultural artefacts where all human discourses can be inscribed. In the same vein, in a 2008 book entitled *Borges: la ironía metafísica*, the philosopher Fernando Savater explained that we should not just

include narratives and poetry in what we consider as literary, but also include other “poetic” and “narrative” forms such as philosophy, theology, theoretical science, political constitutions or revolutionary proclamations. Savater believes that it is intellectually reductionist to insist that the fictitious or invented nature of literature conflicts with the conception of truth that we bestow on what we call the real world, in philosophical terms. Following Savater, literature is something given to us in every moment, that which creates and configures the moral conditions of our actions, that “scientifically” explains the “truth” of the world around us, that gives us an identity and a name, that drives our urges and that stirs our political concerns. In other words, from Savater’s perspective, the difference between words and objects, theory and practice, literature and the real world, is — paradoxically — perfectly literary at its core. Foucault had also concurred with these ideas previously when he stated in *L’archéologie du savoir* (1969) that knowledge is not only found in experimental scientific evidence, but can also be found in fiction, in reflection, in stories, in institutional regulation and in political decisions. Nevertheless, it is the multidimensional nature of novels that helps to form a cognitive map (Herman, 2013; Zunshine, 2015) of our shared “real world” and our individual and collective social challenges and, in parallel, helps to produce imaginary and real alternative spaces. Novels, therefore, are cultural artefacts where individuals confront the complexities and contradictions that beat at the heart of the symbols and rituals of consumption on which they articulate their own notion of citizenship and development capacity of public and private spaces (Habermas, 1989).

What have become known as the “novelas de la crisis” (Rodríguez Marcos, 2013) or, to express it more precisely, all of those novelistic texts that articulate their proposed interpretation of the 2008 financial crisis and its repercussions, therefore correspond with what Esther Peeron referred to in 2014 as “metáfora espectral”, and are accepted for their ability to provide visibility and symbolic capital to a cultural artefact that initially had none. Peeron, taking Derrida as a starting point, developed this approach by stating that:

In *Spectres of Marx*, Derrida attributes a futural dimension to spectrality, which he sees as pertaining not only to “those others who are no longer”, but also to “others who are not yet *there*” (xix, emphasis in text). The specter is both *revenant*, that which returns from the past, and *arrivant*, that which is to come, “the future that cannot be anticipated (168)”. (2014: 14)

Indeed, and in agreement with the previously-stated considerations, the articulation of the visible/invisible binomial creates the possibility of revealing (on the part of the authors of the so-called “novelas de la crisis” [Bensenouco, 2013]) the symbolic contradictions and disturbances that take place in the private and public domain during the crisis situation. Thus, the characters and narrators of the so-

called “crisis novels” actually confront a process of “visibilisation” as historical characters. This radical historicity, denied by the self-interested public construction of institutional powers’ hegemonic discourse, is what the so-called “crisis novels” try (consciously or not) to draw up, articulate and highlight through multiple modalities.

Once at this point, the problem faced by academic criticism is: how, in what way and against what criteria can we make an inventory of the different types of novelistic narration on and around the 2008 financial crisis and its repercussions. It should be noted that we do not intend to establish a hierarchical categorisation of the “crisis novels”, but rather we intend to offer an efficient approach to a corpus of work characterised by its diversity and the plurality of its proposals. In his “On Exactitude in Science” — a short story included in *The Maker* since 1961 — Borges already considered the ineffectiveness of those “maps” that ended up occupying the same area as the territory they claimed to represent. Hence, if Borges taught us in his *A Universal History of Infamy* (1935) that to be able to produce knowledge, focusing on what we can remember is not as important as having a clear consciousness of the judgements that occur in any selective forgetting — which, at the end of the day, is what all intellectual construction is based on — then, for our part, we should also know the risks and deficiencies of our starting point and of the final aim of our research. Perhaps, as Hogan explained in *The Mind and its Stories: Narrative Universals and Human Emotion* (2003), there has been a certain anxiety in literary studies because of the “difference” — due to legitimate ideological reasons in opposition to colonial thought patterns — that has produced a certain simplifying reductionism. However, as Hogan proposes, it is also possible (and necessary) to mark out certain “literary universals” that, with no ambition of producing a canon or even a taxonomy, help us summarise a group of key readings that enrich the intellectual experience of the literary text and contribute to a better understanding of the “mapping” of our societies.

Thus, considering the above so far, we propose the possibility of articulating the following “operational nuclei” from which to approach the reading experience of the so-called “crisis novels” and which boil down to spectral modalities that show the symbolic crisis that the historical characters of the texts are immersed in. It must be noted that this dynamic is not unidirectional but multidirectional. In other words, the historical characters do not just build the “mundos posibles” (Albaladejo, 1986) in which their condition is made visible, but they also take form as a result of this interaction. Therefore, we offer the following possible cartography of the crisis texts produced in the Hispanic world, in which we mention, as a guide, at least one significant example of each operational nucleus:

I) Crisis novels in the rural world: Antonio Castellote, *Caballos de labor* (2012).

II) Crime fiction crisis novels: Carmelo Anaya, *Baria City Blues* (2009).

III) “Joker” (humour) crisis novels: Eduardo Mendoza, *El enredo de la bolsa y la vida* (2012).

IV) Dystopian crisis novels: Emilio Bueso, *Cenital* (2012).

V) Novels about the repercussions of the crisis: Sara Mesa, *Cicatriz* (2015).

Within this nucleus, we can distinguish five methods of “visibilising” the resultant historical subject of the 2008 financial crisis:

a) Resistance novels: Isaac Rosa, *La habitación oscura* (2013).

b) Novels that construct an imaginary social alternative: Rosario Izquierdo Chaparro, *Diario de campo* (2013).

c) Novels about the property and financial bubble: Rafael Chirbes, *En la orilla* (2013).

d) Precariat novels: Elvira Navarro, *La trabajadora* (2014).

e) Emergency novels: Pablo Gutiérrez, *Democracia* (2012).

It must be pointed out once again, to leave no room for doubt, that the categorisation we propose here is only a possible cartography. Its purpose is no other than to manage a complex space in which these operational nuclei have been articulating the living conditions of some literary texts against others.

Pascale Casanova reminded us in *The World Republic of Letters* (2007) that Valéry had already presented the idea that literature inserts itself into structures of intellectual trade, which he called “spiritual economy”. In fact, Valéry even spoke about the “great market of human affairs”. In a section of this book called “The Bourse of Literary Values”, echoing Valéry’s idea, Casanova added that:

“A civilization is a form of capital”, he went on to say, “whose increase may continue for centuries, like that of certain other forms of capital, and which absorbs into itself its compound interest”. All this, to Valéry’s mind, was evidence of “a wealth that has to be accumulated like natural wealth, a capital that has to be formed by successive strata in people’s minds”. (Casanova, 2007: 13)

Thus, Casanova affirms that the logic of the world of letters is governed by transactions of literary capital that take place in an intellectual space subject to fluctuations. In our opinion, this intellectual space is now specifically destabilised as a result of the 2008 financial (historical) crisis, and it (and in particular the novel) requires a new and different approach from a transnational perspective.

If we look closely at the operational nuclei that we proposed above, all of the novels mentioned address different forms of crisis that have favoured at least three different areas: a) urban space as resistance territory (Gutiérrez: *Democracia*, 2012; Rosa: *La habitación oscura*, 2013; Navarro: *La trabajadora*, 2014); b) the ideological and discursive battleground (Chirbes: *Crematorio*, 2007; Rosa: *El país del miedo*, 2008; Olmos: *Ejército Enemigo*, 2011; Chirbes: *En la orilla*, 2013; Izquierdo Chaparro: *Diario de campo*, 2013); and c) the geography of the individual and collective disturbances experienced following the redefinition of the private and the public in Spanish society during recent years (Rosa: *La mano invisible*, 2011; Amat: *Eres el mejor*, *Cienfuegos*, 2012; Mendoza: *El enredo de la bolsa y la vida*, 2012; Prado: *Ajuste de cuentas*, 2013; Gutiérrez: *Los libros repentinos*, 2015; Mesa: *Cicatriz*, 2015; Ruíz García: *Todo está bien*, 2015; Trueba: *Blitz*, 2015).

Therefore, we must note that above all it is the notion of the contemporary subject that is in crisis in these novels – the way we narrate who we are — now that the constituent elements of modern identity (occupation, material possessions, social and economic status, the relationship between the self and the state) have been redefined toward three new types of individual subject, whose coordinates converge and combine asymmetrically depending on the individual circumstances of each subject that appears in those novels that deal with the crisis and its repercussions (published from 2007 onward): a) the precariat-self; b) the entrepreneurial-self; c) the consumer-self (Slater, 1997; Armano and Murgia, 2014).

Without detracting from any of the previously-mentioned novels, and to illustrate the above scenario, we will focus on *Cenital* (2012) by Emilio Bueso, published by Salto de Página. We are interested in this novel because it stands out in proposing a discourse on the crisis that moves away from the realist aesthetic to instead create a dystopian world. The choice of dystopia deserves our attention because the majority of the novels that have approached the 2008 financial crisis have taken on a perspective that is closer to the models and referents of today's readers. As such, the special feature of *Cenital* is found, above all, in how its proposal distances itself from realism. Indeed the dystopia of Emilio Bueso's novel offers an alternative cognitive map to that of the reality consolidated by the discourse of hegemonic power; that which forms part of the broad spectrum spanning from

financial austerity to the fragmented commercialisation of symbolic and financial public capital.

2. The case of *Cenital* (2012) by Emilio Bueso

Faced with the general trend in the novelistic production of the crisis that favours urban spaces, shows individual identity crises through job loss and the appearance of the precariat-self, and that articulates stories of condemnation and social emergency,³ *Cenital* (2012) offers a view of the crisis that is different to previous coordinates and proposes a possible post-crisis world, in which a collective subject is the protagonist and Destral, the main character, a vehicle that draws different spaces and lives together.

The plot of the novel is simple. Oil reserves run out, food distribution becomes impossible and Spain, along with Western civilisation, collapses. Destral, using a blog, gathers a group of people who foresee the end of societies based on the consumption of fossil fuels. Between them they manage to form a village that is self-sufficient and resists the attacks of the hordes that try to seize their resources. It is a non-linear narrative and, from a formal point of view, his writing does not constitute a landmark in modern literature. However, the post-apocalyptic world that he creates is symptomatic of the disturbances caused by the 2008 financial crisis and its repercussions, just like the beginning of the novel predicts:

Toda revolución comienza con el sueño de un hombre corriente. Todo hombre corriente despierta a menudo de una pesadilla. Ésta es la historia de un hombre excepcional, de su sueño. De su pesadilla. De su fortaleza. Comienza con un despertar. Con el día en que Destral abre los ojos y descubre que la pesadilla es real. (Bueso, 2012)

Our main character-vehicle (in the sense that he conveys the plot and the actions of the other characters) is an intern. The intern is an example that perfectly embodies the spirit of the precariat, whose status of vulnerability and uncertainty has now come to shape the individual subject that had already started to build the ultracapitalism of the Great Depression in 1929 and that Lorca denounced in the celebrated verses of *Poeta en Nueva York* (1930), by writing in the poem “La Aurora” that “La luz es sepultada por cadenas y ruidos / en impúdico reto de ciencia sin raíces. / Por los barrios hay gentes que vacilan insomnes / como recién salidas de un naufragio de sangre”. In Emilio Bueso’s novel there is a similar sense of condemnation when it states:

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3 | See also the excellent work by N. Michelle Murray entitled “Capital Ruptures: Economies of Crisis and Urban Space in Javier Moreno’s *2020*” appearing in this dossier of *452°F. Journal of Literary Theory and Comparative Literature*. Our approaches are complementary and Murray rightly studies another of the few dystopian novels that have been produced within the framework of the 2008 financial crisis and its repercussions.

Tras las cortinas del mundo están acechando unas sombras que nadie sabe a quién pertenecen, se frotan las manos que tendrían que estar moviendo los hilos. Con todo, nadie sigue el rastro del dinero hasta el final, nadie sabe quién es el hombre fuerte. Lo mismo podría pasar que tras la cortina no hubiera absolutamente ningún hombre fuerte. Que, al otro lado de los hilos, no hubiera un titiritero. Que todos los ricos estuviera en quiebra de tanto enriquecerse. Que, en este enorme Titanic en el que nos hemos montado, ya no anduviera nadie al timón; que los marineros y el capitán hubieran abandonado la nave hace tiempo, aprovechando la idiocia de esa masa de pasajeros apollardados que baila al son de una música enloquecida, mientras la inmensa y todopoderosa nave se hunde lenta pero inexorablemente. (Bueso, 2012)

A mass of passengers like the one that Lorca anticipated in “Paisaje de la multitud que vomita”, when he wrote: “Son los muertos que arañan con sus manos de tierra / las puertas de pedernal donde se pudren nublos y postres./ La mujer gorda venía delante / con las gentes de los barcos, de las tabernas y de los jardines”. And that ties in with the crowd of people that walks toward disaster through waste and excess; an excess that is mirrored in the following fragment from *Cenital*:

La humanidad es una bicicleta sin frenos sobre la que pedalea cuesta abajo un niño lelo.
Os han dicho que ésta es una crisis económica más y eso es lo que os habéis creído. Algunos ya estáis empezando a pensar que esto podría ser peor que la Gran Depresión, pero todos creéis que el lío se ha armado cuando algunos banqueros han pasado a prestarle dinero a gente que nunca podrá devolverlo; y ya está, eso es todo.
Pero... Un momento... ¿Bancos concediendo créditos hipotecarios a masivas cantidades de ciudadanos insolventes? ¿Eso tiene algún sentido? ¿Por qué iban a hacer algo así casi casi todas las entidades bancarias si su principal cometido es garantizar las ganancias? [...] Puede que os guste pensar que la tormenta pasará y todo volverá a ser como antes, o tal vez os cueste preguntaros qué es lo que podría esconderse tras esa cortina de humo. ¿Por qué habrán estado los bancos concediendo miles de hipotecas jugosas a sus peores clientes, a familias dotadas de empleos precarios? ¿Qué hizo que se desprendieran tan irresponsable y alegremente de su dinero unos analistas de riesgos financieros cuyo cometido y cuyo talento consistía precisamente en valorar la solvencia de los ciudadanos? (Bueso, 2012)

The world that Lorca proclaimed in his “Grito hacia Roma (Desde la torre del Chrysler Building)” is made real in *Cenital*. If Lorca wrote “Porque no hay quien reparta el pan y el vino, / ni quien cultive hierbas en la boca del muerto. / ni quien abra los linos del reposo / ni quien llore por las heridas de los elefantes/. No hay más que un millón de herreros / forjando cadenas para los niños que han de venir”, even the “cadenas” collapse in the future that takes shape in *Cenital*. A future in which “sin petróleo barato se paralizan los transportes [...]”. Las gallinas ya eran vistas como un lujo por muchos aldeanos y eso que apenas las alimentaban con insectos y grano estropeado. Mucha gente apenas recordaba ya el sabor de la carne roja” (Bueso,

2012). And it is not only the distribution of food and primary materials that disappears, but names too, because even the individual identity is redefined:

Nicknames. Apodos. Los nombre en clave con los que se habían conocido en Internet, cuando Destral comenzó a reclutarlos, antes del Hundimiento. En los meses en los que se veía claro el inminente colapso de la economía y, con ella, de la civilización occidental. Casi nadie sabía el apellido de nadie en la ecoaldea. (Bueso, 2012)

The individual subject undergoes a new configuration and is manifested in the ecovillage in a way that was not possible for them before the “Sinking”. Social relationships produce a renewal process, which the novel is a testament to when it explains that:

En sus tiempos de ingeniero apenas tenía amigos. Tenía contactos. Contactos en el teléfono móvil, en el mercado laboral, en su gestor de correo electrónico y en su sistema de mensajería electrónica instantánea. Doscientos treinta y cinco contactos, mil caras en el Facebook, cero amigos. Su entonces novia y un puñado de cordiales compañeros de oficina eran toda la compañía que había conseguido procurarse. Ahora, en 2014, era el líder de una sociedad convertida forzosa y espontáneamente en una especie de comuna *hippie* que pugnaba por subsistir ante un escenario de agotamiento general de los recursos primarios. (Bueso, 2012)

As such, we find ourselves before a “possible future” in which the precariat-self is made visible and is subjected to a process of redefinition where the “spectre” of the intern moves from the periphery to take a central place as the leader of an ecovillage. The ecovillage is the result of a social renewal process that has emerged in reaction to the 2008 financial crisis and, at the same time, poses a new articulation proposal for the imaginary collective and the public space. It is now a public space in which the use of a skill that helps the community is the basis of each character’s identity. The ecovillage is a type of organisation that could well be called Utopian — something that links well to the messianic tone of the whole novel — but it certainly makes the reader wonder at the historical reality of the world through confrontation and hybridisation with the fictional reality of the novel, a wonder that is based on the inclusion of familiar landmarks for the reader:

La clave de su éxito había sido que el Hundimiento nunca les cogió por sorpresa. Destral comenzó a levantar y a fortificar aquel refugio cuando todavía no habían quebrado las primeras megacorporaciones norteamericanas, antes de que se derrumbara el castillo de naipes de Wall Street, antes de que el 15M pusiera en evidencia la fractura social, antes de que la banca española suspendiera todas las transacciones. Así que había conseguido procurarse a buen precio algunas infraestructuras de vital importancia: sistemas de riego por goteo eficientes y sostenibles, bombas mecánicas de agua, compostadoras, un par de grupos electrógenos que apenas se empleaban desde que

la tierra había empezado a racanearles el aceite, tornos de alfarería, molinillos, aperos agrícolas, un arado, grandes reservas de sal yodada, algunas semillas, bicicletas... (Bueso, 2012)

There is certainly a clear reminiscence of W. Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) — in fact the novel is directly alluded to in the book — but, in contrast, the context of Bueso's book is not the result of an accident, but rather a situation of sustained crisis where the precariat-self and the consumer-self assist the exponential increase of economic and social inequality (much like in a shipwreck) that is portrayed in the following excerpt of the work:

Cuando un sueldo son mil euros, una hipoteca son mil euros, una tele gigante son mil euros y una tonelada de arroz son mil euros te das cuenta de que el sistema ha fracasado. Hay cosas que no tendrían que ponerse al mismo nivel tan alegremente, digan lo que digan las leyes de la oferta y la demanda; diga lo que diga la libertad del mercado, diga lo que diga su mano invisible, esa que todo lo arregla salvo las nacionalizaciones de los grandes bancos norteamericanos. La misma mano invisible que te ha vaciado los bolsillos.

Este mes han quebrado varias corporaciones titánicamente grandes y ahora el gobierno del Tío Sam va a intervenirlas y a nacionalizarlas para que no quiebren. Si eso no evidencia de una vez por todas y para siempre que la economía neoliberal es peor que el timo de la estampita, yo no sé qué es lo que os queréis creer. ¿Queréis creer en el capitalismo? ¿Queréis creer, pongamos, en el paradigma de igualdad entre los ciudadanos? ¿Son iguales ante la ley dos fulanos que no pueden pagarse el mismo bufete de abogados? ¿Son iguales ante el mercado laboral dos trabajadores que provienen de sistema educativos diametralmente opuestos? (Bueso, 2012)

Indeed the characters in *Cenital* are lost to start with, but the ecovillage and its anarcho-primitivism gives them a purpose; a vital, social objective. However, in the majority of the urban novels written about the crisis by other authors, the approach to the world prior to the year 2008 is much less daring and rebellious. In *Cicatriz* (2015) by Sara Mesa, to name an example, the protagonist finds herself in a constant state of identity-related uncertainty caused by job loss, but her actions and thoughts are easily-digested by the system as they are more the expression of a state of discomfort than a radical stance of opposition and construction of an alternative public consciousness as proposed by *Cenital*. The plaintive “satisfaction” of many of the so-called “crisis novels” contrasts with the radical option of economic resignation raised by Bueso, stating in his text:

Esta mierda del capitalismo nos tiene más absortos que una novia puta. Su funcionamiento es muy simple, consiste en crearte deseos absurdos e inalcanzables para que tú te desesperes tratando de satisfacerlos. La alternativa a todo eso a corto plazo es la economía de subsistencia. Plantas patatas en invierno, las defiendes de las plagas en primavera, las riegas en verano, las recoges en otoño. Es así de simple. (Bueso, 2012)

Thus, Bueso suggests a process of renewal and of improvement of capitalist structures through a kind of anarcho-primitivism which is expressed as the only way of building a simple, pure and effective community after the great collapse. For the new post-apocalyptic character devised by Bueso, this is the only social model that is recognisable and acceptable for the members of the ecovillage. Even for those characters that had assimilated strongly hierarchical structures in the pre-Sinking work:

Saig'o no es un tipo muy agradable. No saluda a nadie ni a nada que no sea una bandera. En todo el poblado no había una bandera hasta que Agro puso la enseña diagonal verdinegra del anarcoprimitivismo a ondear en lo alto del pararrayos de la casa de paja de Destral. Así que ahora Saig'o saluda a ese trozo de tela antes de cada ronda, de cada patrulla y de cada amanecer. Cosas de militares. (Bueso, 2012)

The model underlying the ecovillage, the possible post-apocalyptic future, is forged in the historical present of unemployment and inequality that is particularly adverse for young people in the context of the high unemployment rates of the 2008 financial crisis. Bueso maps this social reality and transfers it to the scenario that serves as the basis for the construction of the popular consciousness of the village when we read that:

España ha forjado una generación de universitarios que se jodieron los mejores años de sus vidas aprendiendo mucho porque les dijeron que la formación académica iba a ser su mejor apuesta de futuro. Luego empezaron a trabajar en unas condiciones infames porque les dijeron que todo era empezar. Acto seguido se hipotecaron para toda la vida porque les dijeron que eso sí era invertir de cara al futuro. Y, ahora que su futuro se va al garete, muchos se preguntarán qué se ha hecho de sus sueños, de su juventud y de su futuro. Cuando las cosas se pongan realmente mal, muchos querrán que les expliquen por qué sus casas, sus sueldos y sus títulos ya no valen absolutamente nada. En Grecia, con todas esas revueltas ya está pasando precisamente eso, en España pronto será peor. Mucho peor. Como dicen en mi barrio, nunca jodas con el que no tiene nada, porque no hay peor enemigo que aquel que ya nada puede perder. En este diciembre del 2008, el diez por ciento de los sin techo de Madrid y Barcelona son titulados universitarios, licenciados en miseria aplicada por la universidad del libre mercado. Y eso es sólo el principio. (Bueso, 2012)

Thus, in the novel, criticism and historical social protest are linked to the possibilities of change in a possible world within fiction. The main tragic experiences of the 2008 crisis and its repercussions make up part of the cognitive map of a pre-Sinking world which is, essentially, the social reality of our world even in 2016. Hence Bueso's novel goes further than most of the realist narratives that have dealt with the issue of the crisis, if only to describe the horror of a dystopia where only agricultural- and community-type cooperatives can

guarantee survival. But it is limited to outlining the identity-related uncertainty that job loss brings without proposing a different model or a possibility of change.

Indeed *Cenital* offers neither an economic or social answer to the specific problems that European and transnational societies, like Spain, are suffering to a greater or lesser degree following the 2008 financial crisis. That said, it does build an alternative scenario that is by no means complacent, using a narrative — that of the crisis — which in most cases remains in lamentation, complaint or accusation and that always revolves around the loss of the individual character in a scenario of uncertainty. In *Cenital* the loss and the search for meaning are focused on the collective; on common space, on the public. There is a moment in the book where the character-vehicle states the favour of common interest over the individual in the following terms:

Mi nombre no importa. Soy el fundador y corresponsal de un grupo antisistema que está preparándose para decrecer de forma neoprimativista, hacia una economía de subsistencia autosuficiente. Estamos montando una ecoaldea en forma de cooperativa agraria. Buscamos nuevos socios que quieran unirse a nuestro proyecto. Te ofrecemos la oportunidad de hacerlo porque pensamos que tal vez dentro de poco ya no te quede ninguna oportunidad en la vida. (Bueso, 2012)

Far from conceptualising the crisis as a situation that will pass and be followed by a time of prosperity, far from understanding the crisis as an ordinary event in a predictable cycle, *Cenital* reveals within its pages a spectral citizenship whose dystopian and rural coordinates form a map of the radical – in the sense of “root” – nature of the changes that have taken place since 2008, which have meant a substantial modification of the contemporary historical character in which the citizen has been replaced by the precariat-consumer. This has led to a widening gap of inequality in a frenetic drive toward the search for profitability, which has disturbed the symbolic capital upon which our societies are represented to the point of economic cannibalism, now not only of class, but transnationally from north to south in the European context. Cannibalism, incidentally suggested in the novel, may be the metaphor for austerity policies that have led to the impoverishment and the reduction of the Spanish middle class from 2008 onward.

3. Disinherited literature and conclusions

In the year 2008, precisely, the historian Henry Kamen published a valuable book that has gone largely unnoticed in the Spanish academic world: *The Disinherited: Exile and the Making of Spanish*

Culture, 1492-1975. Kamen suggests that Spanish culture has been forged throughout history through processes of expulsion. In this manner, successive waves of citizens — citizens with professional, artistic and intellectual talent — have been “disinherited” for political and economic reasons. The characters in *Cenital*, as we saw, belong to a visibilised community of outcasts. The 2008 financial crisis and its repercussions have produced, in our view, a new individual disinherited of citizenship and protection — the precariat-self + the entrepreneur-self + the consumer-self⁴ — whose most extreme future is designed in this Emilio Bueso novel that we have used as an case study.

As such, rather than facing crisis literature, we find ourselves before a new disinherited literature — in the same way that a new disinherited historical individual exists — in the material and financial sense given by the Dictionary of the Real Academia de la Lengua in its last edition: “Poor, lacking livelihood”. But, furthermore and also, in the symbolic and ideological sense. As we indicated at the beginning of this paper, the 2008 crisis is also a symbolic crisis — that is, a disturbance in the way we represent ourselves and discursively construct our place in the world and the mental mechanisms our societies are built on. The resulting cognitive map, built by means of fiction, takes us into new territory; we are not facing a resurgence of the social novel of decades past, because technological revolutions have placed us before completely new virtual and physical networks (Castells, Caraça and Cardoso, 2012). In this new territory, disinherited literature is the product par excellence in a hyperconnected, global and transnational world, whose social fabric both breaks down and renews itself with tragic consequences for broad segments of society.

Before venturing to evaluate or qualify this new disinherited literature positively or negatively — and what is more it cannot be explained solely in terms of national norms or with central and peripheral parameters — it is the duty of academic criticism to focus on the why, how and scope of its texts. The years and the novels’ readers will be the judges and witnesses of how they withstand the test of time. However, these novels are unquestionable proof that the cultural, political and economic paradigm of our society has changed within an historical process, whose imbalances can only be corrected by considering the constellation of crisis stories that this new disinherited literature articulates through a set of operational nuclei such as those we have proposed here.

NOTES

4 | The configuration of the “entrepreneur-self” and the “consumer-self” is doubly perverse because, although they are common characters in all capitalist systems throughout history, the 2008 financial crisis has jeopardised their citizenship and social security while at the same time they live under the illusion that they have the opportunity to change their fate with the effort/merit of their work (entrepreneur-self) or in the fantasy of believing that they have room for choice and that their consumption preferences are truly free (consumer-self). It would be very interesting, in a future study, to create a genealogy of the figure of the “self-employed”, the “businessperson” and the “user-consumer” in the contemporary Spanish novel. The “precariat-self”, the “entrepreneur-self” and the “consumer-self” that I propose here have all been dispossessed of their civic sovereignty.

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