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The lit city: València in the texts of Max Aub

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ABSTRACT
The city of València often appears in the works of Max Aub. Sometimes in descriptions of the author's childhood between 1905–1910, and others—most of the time—during the years of the Spanish Civil War in the El laberinto mágico novels, especially in Campo abierto and Campo de los almendros. In this article I analyse the texture of these representations, what the València he describes is like, which of its features he emphasises, the neighbourhoods his characters inhabit and live, etc. In other words, how Max Aub—from exile—builds a new map of the city, remembering it with surprising precision and linking it to smells, sounds, feelings, and particular people and places. I also observe the contrasts between this city and the real València that he visited in 1969 and which he describes in his 'Spanish diary', La gallina ciega. His writing about the impact of this shock gives us insight into the meaning that his imagined city had on his work. València, the illuminated city, traversed by the smell of magnolias and orange blossom, and where the author studied at secondary school, is the scene of the lost paradise of childhood, and also one of a collective project. The map of the lost city is where the Second Spanish Republic became reality, where an imagined community linked to sentimental and family memories, became real. It was there that this collective project came to life and got its emotions, and this is how it appears in his fiction written from exile.

Keywords: exile, memory, city, Spanish Civil War, Spanish Second Republic, 20th Century, València, Max Aub.

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València was a very special city in Max Aub's writing. He arrived [in Spain from France] in 1914, at 11 years of age and, more importantly, studied at high school in València, and in his words, one is from where one studies for their baccalaureate (Aub, 1995, p. 243). Therefore, he spent a good part of his childhood and adolescence, his period of schooling, in València where he put down roots and became a writer and activist. Hence, it is not by chance that the city of the [river] Turia plays a large part in his *Laberinto mágico* [Magic labyrinth], or that he returns to this place, again and again, in texts laden with nostalgia. Nor is it accidental that his visit [to València] when [he wrote] *La gallina ciega* [The blind hen] were especially disturbing. Thus, he perceived València as a palimpsest, which one must read in search of its successive layers of writing; but always, as Walter Benjamin put it (2010, p. 350), the deeper Max Aub's exile, the more the memory of his buried past would become an exercise of constant excavation. Traces of all the strata traversed to produce it remain in his writing,

and the precision of his cataloguing incorporates his emotions. With all this, the illuminated city of a night in 1936 evoked at the beginning of Campo abierto [Open field] is doubly lit up in his writing from memory.

On the night of 30 August 1969, Max Aub visited València for the first time since his departure for exile. He gave an account of his impressions in La gallina ciega. In the newspaper *Diario español* (1971).[1] Essentially, as in other sections in the newspaper, he reiterates his surprise: On the trip from the airport to home I did not recognise anything other than Gran Vía [...]. They diverted the river. Wide streets, tower blocks, avenues. As if València were Guadalajara, Barcelona, London, Paris; a little less but not so much (Aub, 1995, p. 144). València became any other city and no longer corresponded to his memories of it. Later in the text he writes, the prodigious thing is how València, losing [its] character, has grown, and makes us suppose that the less it has—like others—the wider its streets (Aub, 1995, p. 168).

But he also wrote other things. Because sometimes in those alien streets he recognised scenes he remembered. Hence, he read them as a palimpsest: I went down to the street to see, a hundred meters from the door, the one that was ours: number 13 Admiral Cadarso. It is, of course, the same; our first house. Genaro [Lahuerta] and Pedro [de València] painted a mural in the large dining room there (Aub, 1995. p. 145). Beneath its appearance the memory of the streets and houses beat on, and Aub's description reintroduces the viewer to them.[2] Nevertheless, it is not enough. "*Tengo fotografías*" [I have photographs], he adds immediately afterwards. At times, the reader of these palimpsests becomes an archaeologist, a researcher, and themselves need the photographs as an external document. It seems to be the memory of another person, another life, ontologically distinct from the urban fabric, mute in its immediacy.

If these were his immediate impressions having just arrived, walking through those streets again and conversing with its inhabitants, did nothing but confirm that impression:

> [This which was my city no longer is, it was another. This current one, so like others, is fine, in an excellent condition for today's people who are used to it of course, in the same way [I was] to the one I had before. They have lain down without respect nor remedy; opened avenues, made fountains spout, diverted the river. The people are happy and proud of so much novelty. [...] They do not miss the past times, among other things because in fact relatively little [of the] past was worse. And since intelligence neither enters nor leaves, goes nor comes, they ignore freedom, they do not have political ideas...] (Aub, 1995, p. 190).

Indeed, if the new avenues had caused him an uncomfortable sense of estrangement, the opening of new *calles* (streets) and plazas (squares) in the historic centre confirmed his diagnosis and increased his bitterness. He shows his surprise and displeasure at the enlargement of Plaza Patriarca, which displaced the University's entrance from its centre and instead transferred the visual protagonism to a centre of doubtful taste thus for him: Suddenly: The University. Where was Calle Tallers? [...] From the corner you now see, on the wall of the University, some white marble statues that remind me of the Hippocrates in front of Social Security in Mexico. They could not put up with the smooth façade (Aub, 1995, p. 155). To him, Plaza de la Reina seems "*ahora solar perpetuo*" [now a perpetual open space] (Aub, 1995, p. 564), and this appears not to be a mere aesthetic judgment, he writes: Where is Calle Gracia? Plaza Pellicers has disappeared, the *Escuela Moderna* [School of Modernism] (what is it doing here?) *Avenida del Barón de Cárcer*. Here, then, my mother died [...]. Everything new and transferable (Aub, 1995, p. 205).

1 In this work I quote the 1995 edition, with a prologue by Manuel Aznar Soler.

2 Interestingly, this way of reading the city is reminiscent of what Hugo Achugar would detect many years later about Latin American cities and using the same metaphor: The usual way of reading Latin American cities now is to look for traces of the past or, in other words, to read the living memory of the city. These readings of memory suggest that the city is a palimpsest (Achugar, 1997, p. 22). To a certain extent, the Max Aub coming from exile was also a Latin American reader.

The new avenues bury individual and collective memory in their emptiness. It is not only that this city is not the one of his memory, but also that Aub reads his lack of memory on the city map, his alleged Francoist adanism. In Aub's words, the city does not value its past because it only knows the present and the immediate past, which, in fact, was worse. It has no respect for its past because it does not know of it (Aub, 1995). It has no historical memory, perspective, capacity, or will to re-link with the past prior to the Spanish Civil War.[3] The joy with which the old is erased is a perfect example of the joy with which its ignorance is exhibited by Aub and his generation. As Aub states, where there were empty lots, there are now houses, and, on the contrary, where buildings were previously erected, streets are now bustling (Aub, 1995. p 164). The city is foreign to him in the same way that the city had been distancing itself from what it had once been. The republican city was also on this plane. Erasing the plane would wipe away every bridge with it.[4]

The buildings are different, "*al jardín se lo ha comido una nueva construcción*" [the garden has been eaten up by a new construction] (Aub, 1995, p. 186) and they extend beyond the limit of what the city was, in Aub's words: This is the difference: that with half a century more, most of the city, of the countryside, [has been] newly built on, grown, new (Aub, 1995, p. 186). Or, he says, they do not keep a memory of what it was: only I remember it now, as I pass by what was [once] the *Casa de la Democracia* (Aub, 1995, p. 299).[5] Or a plot remains as an urban witness of the emptiness: "*De la tienda solo queda el solar*" [Only the empty lot remains of what was the store] (Aub, 1995, p. 291). Or their ruin is accelerated: "*Todos los sitios de mis novelas en trance de caer bajo la piqueta*" [All the sites from my novels are in the process of falling under the pickaxe] (Aub, 1995, p. 166). The inhabitants are different, he says, —Later I [went] to see Almela y Vives bookshop, which I [knew was] close by. —He died two years ago (Aub, 1995, p. 156). The new inhabitants have no memory of the old ones, he states: Miñana lived there opposite. Yesterday. Buried in Yugoslavia. Nobody will ask me about him (Aub, 1995, p. 146); nor do they remember Max Aub or those who populated the València of his fictions and that are a sign—and synecdoche—of those who lost the war. In Aub's words, It injures me, it hurts me that there, fifty meters away, at Lauria's dairy, Vicente waited (waits) for Asunción, that—a few meters further along—in Balanzá house, Chuliá tells his stories, and that nobody knows (Aub, 1995, p. 295).[6] There it is.

3 In his classic study on the subject, Fagen (1975, p. 158) gave this general impression of Aub: "Only two generalisations can be made: first, every refugee who went to Spain believing that their associations were still important factors in the resistance against Franco, have been shown that their groups never played an important role in that resistance; second, any person who went to Spain expecting to find an atmosphere of revolution, soon recognises, after visiting, that the revolutionary element is too small". The separation between the imaginary and the historical expectations of Spaniards (and of Valencians) of the inside and of exile are absolute at this level. However, in his attempt to draw a highly penetrable and communicative panorama between intellectuals from within and from exile, Gracia (2010, p. 186) would convert Max Aub and Rosa Chacel's attitudes of "ethical and political distrust" in one particular case.

4 Vicente Llorens had accurately described this sentiment about exile in a 1948 essay: But in the memory of the exiled, the country suffers not only, so to speak, a process of sublimation, but also of stabilisation. The idealised homeland also endures as a fixed and unchanging image. [...] [There is] nothing more unpleasant for [the exiled] than the transformation, after their departure, of things whose appearance were [once] familiar to them. A dilapidated old house, the new look of a street, the transfer of the fountain from the old square, all this disturbs them as a kind of infidelity to their loving and constant evocation (Llorens, 2006, p. 123).

5 The *Casa de la Democracia* was the first secular school in València and was located at number 22 Gran Vía Germanías. As stated by Agagó et al.: At the end of the war, the *Casa de la Democracia* was seized by *Auxilio Social*; in the sixties, it was sold to the archbishopric so that a parish could be installed (Aragó, Azkárraga, and Salazar, 2010, p. 46).

6 As Ugarte (1999, p. 152) points out, *La gallina ciega* illustrates an inversion: the ingredients of his novels saturate his diary in the same way that his novels include chronicles, diaries and descriptions of characters as if they were real figures. Vicente Dalmases and Asunción Meliá are two of the main characters in the *El laberinto mágico* series of novels, because they unify it with their intermittent but transversal appearances. Especially memorable is the way in which their attempts to meet again endow the last novel in the series, *Campo de los almendros* [Field of almonds], with narrative density.

The city seems different, it has no memory, it is simply a different place.[7]

Memories and fiction, memories of the fiction, appear united here, in the writing of his return, in the texts of Max Aub. To a large extent, the València in Max Aub's writing is a remembered one, illuminated, reconstructed from memory while in exile, increasingly distant, and yet surprisingly bright.

It is València of the Spanish Civil War, but not only that [version]. A mythologised València, with a fabled origin, because, one is from where one studies for their baccalaureate (Aub, 1995, p. 243), the gateway to Einstein's space-time layer (Aub, 1994, p. 104). In this sense, the story 'La falla' [The *falla*] is striking; it was originally published in his collection *Ciertos cuentos* [Certain stories] in 1955,[8] which brought together fantastic stories that, in some cases like this one, are close to the realm of 'magical realism'.[9] It goes back to—it constructs—one night on the day of Saint Joseph "*allá por el 17 o 18*" [back in '17 or '18]. The memory of the *fallas* fiesta takes him—not coincidentally—back to the time of his childhood.[10] In those remembered fallas, Aub himself would have been 14 or 15 years old, similar to the age of the impossible narrator-witness who, nevertheless, omnisciently tells us the following about the [story's] central avatars: as I was saying, enough, Mr. Álvaro Gamón [...], professor of Psychology, Logic and Ethics at the high-school, to two of his students who had dragged him out to see the show (Aub, 1994, p. 101). Some of the main features that Aub repeats again and again in successive representations were already present in that childhood València.

This is the *cremà* that Arturo arrives late to, despite his son's insistence on leaving, confident as he was in his ability to always arrive on time. The description makes us remember the *fallas* which were just starting to become a major [annual] celebration:

> [In València, the night of Saint Joseph is not one of the night, but rather, of the day. The clamour is like light. The surrounding walls and trees participate; make things lighter, disturbing; everything is put into songs and couplets, take every trivial thing out to square, everything is the street-sellers' cries and burning: if wood [burns] more slowly and cardboard somewhat slowly, then fabric goes up in an instant, wax melts, straw scorches, everything is consumed upwards, in flames that seize the entire monument and the mood of the spectators.] (Aub, 1994, p. 100).

Fallas [monuments] made from cardboard, wood, straw, and wax becoming a mass communal party, in a populous and cheerful city, satirical and festive, vital and bright.

> [So many people! Calle de las Barcas was overflowing, even squashing hundreds of men, women, and children up against the walls, each standing as high as they could to get a better view; the smallest ones took advantage of their short stature: they were the best placed, astride, or even standing on their parents' shoulders. Others, already elderly, took advantage of the street lamps, by perching on them; most envied were the aristocrats on the balconies, squeezed up on high where no more would fit [...]. You could not even take a step.](Aub, 1994. p. 101).

Then, he says, the façades shone like the embers themselves among the joy of the curious people (Aub, 1994, p. 102).

7 I completely agree with Balibrea's reading (2008, p. 181): The most tragic component of La gallina ciega is not the verification of the Francoist repression that silences Spaniards, but rather, evidence of Francoism's victory that, first repressing it and then modernising Spain and incorporating it into a period of modern homologated capitalism, managed to create alienated and amnesiac citizens.

8 I quote this story from the edition of the *Cuentos fantasticos* [Fantastic stories] by Max Aub compiled in 1994 by Ignacio Soldevila Durante, titled Escribir lo que imagino [Write what I imagine].

9 From Max Aub's relationship with magical realism and the new forms of fantasy literature in Latin America that I have dealt with elsewhere (Peris, 2008).

10 A brief study on this text can be found in Peris (2004).

But València is also characterised by its natural elements. The loss of this characteristic would be one of the things that, as we have seen, Aub would detect with displeasure in his trip in 1969. Now, however, faced with a child's disappointment, their fathers can compensate by taking them to the seashore. The Mediterranean, "*el agua, enemiga del fuego*" [water, enemy of fire], would become a space outside space, a suspension of time that ceases to be linear and [instead] becomes pendular, like waves, which Aub paints as the: systole and diastole of the sleeping Mediterranean (Aub, 1994, p. 104). Therefore, Aub states, when they return to the city, which illuminated the horizon with a wide reddish halo (Aub, 1994, p. 105), the *cremà* has, inexplicably, not yet begun. The fallas, thus, enter the mythical space of childhood in which parents retain their omnipotence. Max Aub situates the founding image of father and son in them, from memory and distance, and uses the night of Saint Joseph, the recurrence of fire, as a true time portal. This is also representative of his literature. It is nothing else than a sustained attempt over decades to restore the society of the Republic in his novels. Therefore, it is not strange that when he returns to València, he feels that Vicente is still waiting—waiting again—for Asunción in Lauria's dairy.[11]

Nor would it be strange that during the bombing of Barcelona on 18 March 1938, narrated in *Campo de Sangre* [Field of blood] (1945),[12] among the crowd sheltered in the subway, just when, in Aub's words: Paulino Cuartero, with eyes closed, became a boy again, I cannot stop hearing a Valencian who asks with ironic bitterness, "*¿dónde están los buñuelos?*" [where are the *buñuelos*?]. Thus, the omniscient narrator focuses on the anonymous refuge companion who: in a blink of an eye, again sees round, puffed up, crunchy, glistening, buñuelos and, from this image [he transports us] to the Calle San Vicente and with it, the entire city in festivals come into his mind as a subjective handle [he uses] while listening to the explosions of bombs above, on the surface:

> [The badly cobbled street. Between cobblestone and cobblestone, turned-over boulders surrounded by so many carts that they go from outside to San Vicente, via Silla and Ribera, there are such differences in height that the carriages tumble [in potholes]; the tyres slip throwing up dust after the blows, the pavements are interrupted by stoves and screens that protect them to improve the combustion.] (Aub, 1978).

Again: "*San José en Valencia, no se cabe*" [Saint Joseph in València, does not fit], and the impossibility of evoking the memory of a taste: What do *buñuelos* taste like? (Aub, 1978, p. 486). In the memories of the anonymous people on the metro on the day of Saint Joseph with no fallas, as in those of the 1955 narrator, Max Aub again writes about the symbolic handle of the popular celebration of urban modernity, of relegation to one's own past, and of the cyclical return of the community.[13] The popular fiesta feels—invents—just like what remains while everything changes. The absence of fallas that year, its memory during the bombing, simultaneously describes evidence for the rupture of the succession of the years and the resistant affirmation in the memory of the individual's identity, of the continuity of the *fiesta*'s cycle, at least within sentimental memory, amid the collective catastrophe.

11 Part of the criticism emphasises the distinction between two very different lines in Aub's work. In some cases, it serves to transversally divide his work into two: 'information work' and 'fantasy work', to paraphrase Torres Naharro, as Ignacio Soldevila does (2003, p. 98). However, Aub himself often spoke of a transcendent realism which at times seems to overcome realism by way of its metaphysical or symbolic deepening, although, key to its reading, it is: realism in [its] form but without wishing to nullify the writer, as Soldevila himself later explains (2003, p. 110). Despite the mythification of time and fiction as a space where its irremediable condition can be transgressed, as proposed in this story, I find it interesting to suggest the continuity between both facets of Aub's work, and its deep thematic unity around some fundamental axes. Time being, without a doubt, one of them.

12 In this work I quote the edition by Alfaguara from 1978.

13 According to Ariño: the largest festival in modern times should be secular—at least ambiguous—and Valencian, thus: the fallas [...] took a long path and metamorphosed in such a way that they became a that peculiar large-scale festival of modern València (Ariño, 1992, p. 52).

Of the six novels that form part of the series *El laberinto mágico*, those penultimate national episodes, as Oleza calls them (2002, p. 45), the ones which most centre on the city of València are *Campo abierto* (1951)[14] and *Campo del los almendros* (1968),[15] with the transversal presence of the couple, Asunción Meliá and Vicente Dalmases, and the members of the El Retablo theatre group; in other words, the characters whose oblivion we bitterly saw in *La gallina ciega*. The first and last days of the war are narrated in these novels, respectively. *Campo abierto* starts on 24 July 1936, with Gabriel Rojas, a typographer at [the newspaper] *El Pueblo*, who desperately goes into the street looking for a doctor for his wife who has just gone into labour, thus defying the danger of snipers. This is why in the book: all the balconies of the city are illuminated. All the windows are open. There was never so much light in València, not even in Viveros when there is a street-party, or in the Alameda when the fair is on (Aub, 2001, p. 286). The city lived by these characters begins to delineate: Gabriel passes by the Dominicans [...]. Past the lights of the factory, the school, crosses Calle Colon, alone. He goes into Calle Doctor Romagosa (Aub, 2001, p. 287). After his unsuccessful journey in search of the doctor, he goes back home. But then, Aub writes, a dry noise, a blow. Black. Gabriel Rojas falls to the ground, like a sack. He is hit from behind, in the middle of his head, where his hair begins to shine, like shoe shined by a cobbler (Aub, 2001, p. 288). The fascist snipers who sow terror in the illuminated city turn the streets into a space of war, a minefield, an open field.

The narrator's precision in the first chapter is constant throughout the series. The novels written based on memories not only put the Republic fighting against fascism back on its feet, they send all its opposing voices into endless debate; not only do they create a complete cultural field in the reader's mind's eye, they also create a social space and public opinion, as explained, for example, by Pérez Bowie;[16] not only do they cover the vicissitudes of war, but they also reconstruct, from exile, the plan of the lost city. Thus, the theatre company lives its dream to act in a real theatre, entering through the open door of the stage of the Eslava Theatre (Aub, 2001, p. 296).[17] Asunción and Vicente are, in fact, in Lauria's dairy, in Plaza Emilio Castelar, while "*el resol dispara el edificio de Correos*" [the glare of the sun beams off the Post office building roof] (Aub, 2001, p. 304).[18] Aub confirms, Asunción was: in an improvised barracks in the Jesús neighbourhood. She stood guard in front of the Monteolivete barracks in the early days of the uprising (Aub, 2001, p. 305) and then: had to go, permanently, to a military barracks in the Sagunto neighbourhood (Aub, 2001, p. 306). They told him about the news of his father's arrest, Aub says, upon arriving at the Wooden Bridge (Aub, 2001, p. 307). They meet again in the *Juventud*,[19] find Llorens, the *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (CNT; the National Confederation of Labour) representative on the 'Show Committee' in the Apolo theatre (Aub, 2001, p. 311)[20] or look for it in the CNT venue, in Plaza Emilio Castelar (Aub, 2001, p. 311).[21] The pulp-fiction writer Luis del Val lives in Calle Garrigues (Aub, 2001,

14 In this work I quote the 2001 edition as part of the publication of the *Obras Completas* of Max Aub, coordinated by Joan Oleza.

15 In this work I quote the 2002 edition as part of the publication of the *Obras Completas* of Max Aub, coordinated by Joan Oleza.

16 According to Pérez: Aub approaches his chronicle by accumulating brief and fragmentary stories that multiply the images of a universe whose centrifugal and fractural character makes any attempt at global and coherent understanding impossible (Pérez, 2001, p. 48).

17 On Calle Pi y Margall, a street still in Ruzafa: Aragó states: In its programming the magazine alternates between work by García Lorca, Benavente, Bernard Shaw, and Eduardo Marquina (Aragó, Azkárraga, and Salazar, 2010, p. 144).

18 Plaza Emilio Castelar—the current Plaza del Ayuntamiento [Town Hall square] had been recently enlarged as a result of the demolitions carried in the Calle La Bajada de San Francisco neighbourhood; during the years of the Republic it had been configured as 'the new city centre' and Aragó et al. state: the stage for political change at the time (Aragó, Azkárraga, and Salazar, 2010, p. 114).

19 The *Juventud Socialista Unificada* (JSU; the Unified Socialist Youth) had its headquarters at number 25 Calle Pascual y Genís (Aragó, Azkárraga, and Salazar, 2010, p. 207).

20 The Apolo theatre was in Calle Don Juan de Austria (Aragó, Azkárraga, and Salazar, 2010, p. 144).

21 Specifically, in the Banco Vitalicio building (Aragó, Azkárraga, and Salazar, 2010, p. 206).

p. 384); the Uruguayan, on the corner of Calle San Vicente and Calle María Cristina (Aub, 2001, p. 399); and Santiago Peñafiel, lives on Calle Guillem de Castro (Aub, 2001, p. 447). The narrator accurately traces the routes of his characters in the city plan: Jorge Mustieles crossed [...] the Calle Las Barcas, in front of Ernesto Ferrer's hardware store until he reached the Party's door—that of the radical-socialist party—where the 'Actualidades' cinema also was (Aub, 2001, p. 347).[22] Later, Aub again walks with us: The *Lonja*. The market. Calle San Fernando. Calle San Vicente, Plaza de la Reina, Calle del Mar, Calle del Governor Viejo, the Civil Government (Aub, 2001, p. 368), then: Plaza de Tetuán. The Communist Party.[23] The general captaincy. La Glorieta. Las palmeras. El Parterre (Aub, 2001, p. 370). Or, he says: It's ten in the morning. On the right the Torres de Quart, on the left, the Tros Alt (Aub, 2001, p. 385).

An even earlier [version of] València, that of Aub's childhood—that of Arturo Carbonell in 'La falla'—emerges as the portrayals of the characters are traced. Vicente Farnals, "*socialista y jugador de fútbol*" [socialist and football player], had studied at the Escuela Moderna, in Plaza de Pellicers (whose disappearance he regretted), in 1969:

> [The boys went down Calle Ruzafa in the morning, crossing before the bullring—the father hated the national holiday—carefully crossing the train tracks, they surrounded the high-school; they followed Calle Arzobispo Mayoral until Calle de la Sangre, then Calle Garrigues, furtively looking to the left and right, through Calle Gracia where the "bad houses" were, to the Plaza de Pellicers, where the trip ended and the desks began. Sometimes they would cross in front of the station, through Plaza Emilio Castelar and they would sit at the Marqués de Campo fountain to watch—avidly—the lively commercial activities of Calle La Bajada de San Francisco, or they would go and contemplate and discuss the photographs nailed in the entrance of the El Cid cinema, where they showed anthology movies.] (Aub, 2001, p. 331).

The city of València went into the war without entirely ceasing to be what it was. This is Vicente Dalmases' perception of it, he was much more concerned about declaring his love to Asunción than the coming political events:

> [He loved her—and the light, the dust, the cobbles, the shop windows, the low houses in the Plaza de la Reina, the yellow trams with their trolley-cars on slopes, the red manila shawl with white and green flowers that hung loosely from the shoulders of an old mannequin in 'La Isla de Cuba' at the time seemed like walkways to help him navigate through the city without feeling his feet. He saw her everywhere without hitting on the exact memory of her figure: in the coffee moon, in the sky crossed by electricity cables, in the distant green of Plaza Wilson—before Prince Alfonso—by the matt grey asphalt of Calle de La Paz—before Calle Peris y Valero (the nomenclature changes according to the colour of the chosen City Council)—by the shining rails and in the passing lackadaisical of youngsters eager to waste time. He stood before the glass of an 'El Águila' showcase. He saw himself reflected, transparent, and the street traffic rushing behind him.] (Aub, 2001, p. 302).

The city limits that diffuse into nature (as we saw in the story 'La falla') are also described again and again in *Campo abierto*, and as Caudet points out (Aub, 2002, p. 14), usually by evoking an odour: Vicente, with his hands in his pockets, slowly crosses the flower bed, wrapped in the heavy smell of the magnolias (Aub, 2001, p. 314). Or: the wide river course of the Turia, all sand, with a vein of water and its festoons of grass (Aub, 2001, p. 363); there, from the parapet: the big flayed trees begin to whisper. From the sea comes the

22 According to Aragó: Number 10 Plaza Emilio Castelar, on the corner of Calle Barcas [...], which had previously been the Cid cinema, organised matinees for the children evacuated from war zones (Aragó, Azkárraga, and Salazar, 2010, p. 135).

23 At number 3 Plaza de Tetuán, in the Cervelló Palace (Aragó, Azkárraga, and Salazar, 2010, p. 206).

air, from the sea, by the wide mouth of the river (Aub, 2001, p. 365). Or, Aub writes: The smell of magnolias arrived; as always, it moved him (Aub, 2001, p. 343). Similarly: the pasty, heavy, oily smell of the magnolias (Aub, 2001, p. 370) smells sweet, smooth, soft, like a blanket of stars (Aub, 2001, p. 379). He also says: The smell arrives voluptuously submerging the city, with premeditation: nature's presence and revenge [...] València covered with the scent of orange blossom, València in the hands of the orange trees. València white and soft with the weight of lemon-groves. Oranges between tangerines and lemons. Illustrious València, profound València, València drunk on orange blossom (Aub, 2001, p. 332).[24]

A modern, populous, vitalist, and liveable city "*más campesina que marítima: mercantil*" [more rural than maritime: mercantile] (Aub, 2001, p. 392); [one] with rivalry between ValènciaValència and Gimnástico Football Clubs—which later became the Levante Club (Aub, 2001, p. 328)—[memories] of theatres and cinemas, that of full cafés: Barrachina, Lauria, Martí. A lot of light and a lot of horchata, a lot of meringue milk, and coffee (Aub, 2001, p. 371); of Café Colón and the Ideal Room, the populous market, with shops, stalls, and trams, of: high colourful awnings to combine with the sun's brightness lent to each object, each stone, each iron (Aub, 2001, p. 386). Despite everything. In spite of the betrayals, such as that of Amparo, Asunción's father's second wife, who puts his photo on a Falange identity card, so the anarchists would execute him (Aub, 2001, p. 321). Despite the corpses found in the most unsuspected places, like that in the Slavic Concierge, hanging from a gallery (Aub, 2001, p. 298). In *Campo abierto*, the war still seems to be a historic opportunity to strengthen the Republic and social justice that completely defeats fascism and oligarchical resistance. Hence: He went to the open balcony and looked out onto the deserted street [...] Now, because of the war, the revolution, he felt tied to the street—they call them arteries, he felt how his blood ran through [the city], through [this street] and others. He felt that València was his. His and everyone's, all together: because they defended it, writes Aub (Aub, 2001, p. 343). In *Campo abierto*, time—the city, the community rooted in it by the collective project—still seems to march on for the characters, in the same sense as hope does. Both for the narrator, who is pleased to return, as for Arturo Carbonell after walking along the beach, at that precise moment in time.

In the first of the three parts of *Campo de los almendros*, we return to València city. In the second, we accompany thousands of republicans crowded into the port of Alicante, fruitlessly waiting for boats that would allow them to escape from the approaching fascists. In the third, we come to know the concentration camp that gives the series its title.

The novel starts with Ambrosio Villegas, now interim director of San Carlos, humming the *L'u i el dos*, before the Renaissance columns of the Ambassador Vich's Court (Aub, 2002, p. 43), in the old convent of El Carmen (at that time, the Museum of Fine Arts)—the same one that Max Aub will miss in his 1969 visit as it had already been replaced by the convent of San Pío V, where it continues today (Aub, 1995, p. 182). Villegas enjoys his position, which he knows is ephemeral, stating: Of course, until the others arrive! Well, more than a few will crave the position! The doorman asks: And us? What are we going to do? Ambrosio Villegas looks at him and, Aub writes, doesn't know how to answer (Aub, 2002, p. 46).

The València of March 1939 had changed a lot since the summer of 1936 and the decomposition of what was left of a social order, structure, culture, and complete power could now be read on its streets. The narrator still finds time to raise the plane of the city and inform us, for example, that Pepa Chuliá lived in Calle Isabel la Católica (Aub, 2002, p. 78), that Juanito Valcárcel and Aunt Concha lived in the Carmen neighbourhood (Aub, 2002, p. 151), and

24 This is one of the omnipresent images in his memory of València. In his diary entry for 13 February 1941, written from his experience in prison in Marseille, we read: There in front of me is my wide Valencian beach. On 12 April 1941, his remembers and evokes the herbalists of Calle de Gracia and Calle de Adressadors (Aub, 1998, p. 58 and p. 71).

Dionisio Velázquez, in Calle Colón (Aub, 2002, p. 233). Or to remind us that Asunción and Monse work at the Institute of Calle de Sagunto (Aub, 2002, p. 71), Rafael Saavedra lived at his aunt's house, on Calle de Caballeros (Aub, 2002, p. 126), Paulino Cuartero was staying at the Hotel Inglés (Aub, 2002, p. 184), or that Vicente Dalmases bumps into Paco Bolea leaving what was once *Diario de València* and had become *Verdad* (Aub, 2002, p. 151).[25] Or that: the basements of the Torres are full of the Prado Museum's works of art being protected from the bombings (Aub, 2002, p. 88).

The city continues to glide towards the fields that surround it and penetrate it; and also, towards the sea. Thus, also in this novel, a character—Asunción—when she sees the trees, she realises that spring will begin in no time (Aub, 2002, p. 56). Of course, Aub goes on: the motionless magnolias of the Glorieta collect the daylight in their varnished leaves (Aub, 2002, p. 68) and continues: the dry Turia that, nevertheless, gives life. It does not live and yet gives life. The work of men: it serves, gives, vegetables grow next to it, it gives life to herbs, flowers, trees (Aub, 2002. p. 181).

However, the defeat is evident in the same streets surrounding the characters of the previous novel:

> [Asunción goes to Plaza de San Agustín, without lights [...]. In the city, in the dark, people move like spiders or worms. They come and go, running, step by step, nobody calm. Fear? What to do? See who? Suddenly, nobody. The mind empty, like the square: everyone on the pavement, glued to the wall, sheltering] (Aub, 2002, p. 55).

The city, once illuminated, is now dark. Aub tells us, to go to Jovers' house, in his desperate search for Asunción, Vicente Dalmases: goes by tram, to the Gran Vía, getting off at the corner of Almirante Cadarso. Apparently, "*todo está igual*" [everything is the same], even "*le abre una criada*" [a maid opens the door to him], but "*ninguno de los chicos está en casa*" [none of the boys are home]. José, is wounded in the hospital of Onteniente and Julián and Julio's whereabouts are unknown, or cannot be revealed (Aub, 2002, p. 150). In the same buildings, Aub now paints a very different atmosphere: In front is Calle Santo Domingo and Calle Capitanía General, military personnel and civilians enter and leave, they stop cars, others leave. The grey sky is heavy. The Filipescu façade of the convent with its doors closed. The enormous wall of cumbersome stonework had never brought Villegas so much love, admiration, and sadness (Aub, 2002, p. 68). These are the hours immediately before the flight, of the escape, Aub writes: Capitanía General, Cuartel de Santo Domingo, Cuartel de Artillería. Go, come, leave and run. Half-open doors, open doors. They leave, it doesn't matter who, mis-sentence; they go and come, taking steps in vain, the majority smell a rat; they walk along corridors, go up, go down (Aub, 2002, p. 226). From the Plaza de Emilio Castelar, at the corner of Calle Ribera, trucks leave at night for Alicante (Aub, 2002, p. 240).[26]

Therefore, this novel begins to open itself up to the past. As Caudet pointed out, the characters insistently recall previous moments: to oppose [...] contentedness turned to disappointment, hope to despair, life to death (Caudet, 2002, p. 21). In Aub's words: Paco Ferrís, València, Asunción, the Calle Lauria dairy, the School of Commerce. As if it were yesterday. Paco Ferrís is always the same. How is it possible that he has changed so much? The war. No, it's not like it was yesterday. Nothing is as if it were yesterday (Aub, 2002, p. 121). Also, for example, remember the optimistic day when: some young fascists took control of the radio station in Calle Juan de Austria, in front of *El Pueblo*, and Chuliá and some comrades managed to subdue them (Aub, 2002, p. 99–102). As well as when Villegas and Valcárcel pass in front of the Salesians, Villegas remembers the first days of the military insurrection, how all kinds of people flocked

25 In other words, in number 14 Calle Trinquete de Caballeros, which is now part of Plaza de Nápoles y Sicilia (Aragó, Azkárraga, and Salazar, 2010, p. 82).

26 Reading *Campo de los almendros*, no doubt, serves to disprove Marra's trial of Max Aub's work in his pioneering review of the narrative of exile (Marra, 1962, p. 193).

to join the 'militias' (Aub, 2002, p. 154) or in the doors of Serranos to that barbarian Escriche, dressed as a Russian general—just as he imagined himself (Aub, 2002, p. 155) or the time before: for example, the good times of Monse's uncle's passementerie in Calle Zaragoza (Aub, 2002, p. 73). The city of Bazar Colón (Aub, 2002, p. 73), of Mata and Planchadell's hardware store, of València, Gimnástico, and later, Levante football clubs (Aub, 2002, p. 74), of full cafés, and of garden markets, now seems definitively lost, like the fallas in the bombings of 1938 in *Campo de sangre*. From exile, the narrator (as well as many characters, aware of their defeat) evokes the beginning of a time of longing. According to Caudet: *Campo de los almendros* is the novel of a duel (Caudet, 2002, p. 22), and a book of the memory of characters that remember: the memory of memory.

After its three parts, the novel includes an addendum. In it, an anonymous narrator gives brief references to what happened in the city after it was taken by the fascists, from the execution of the last republican civil governor, Molina Conejero, on 25 November in Paterna, the monastery of Puig that was converted into a concentration camp, to the women's prison. It also denies the unfounded rumour that the Virgin of the Desamparados was shot, extended by the pro-Franco propaganda and, in fact, reminds us that the mayor protected the image, stating that: the day they entered very quickly came. The novel ends with two deaths: that of Doctor Peset, the rector of the Universitat de València, and that of that little girl from Alcira, the one who sang so well, who sang the Hail Mary to the nuns before she was shot. The narrator ends by revealing her name and identity, thus: Her name was Amparo, like the Virgin. She was my daughter (Aub, 2002, p. 568). The novel, the entire series, ends by giving just some examples of the destruction waged upon social and human fabric, even of its memory, by the Franco regime. A lot has already been forgotten; soon, everything will be forgotten, affirms the anonymous narrator. As we saw in *La gallina ciega*, Aub would test the depth of this truth. The memory, city, and country from which he exiled himself would no longer exist by then, and its texture would become that made only of memory and fiction. Only in his memory and texts would Vicente wait for Asunción; only in memory and his texts could he return to those streets.

In conclusion, we can find a complex representation of the city of València in Max Aub's writing. On the one hand, set at a time which coincides with the author's own childhood, the children in these fictions arrive late (or not at all) for the fallas *cremà*, or fascinated [with life], they travel a path from their home to the School of Modernity. On the other hand, his writing corresponds to the years of the Republic and the Spanish Civil War. In both cases, public spaces trace individual memories. However, the city remembered—with [so much] precision—is a historical city and a lived-in city.

València is modern and populous, with trams, theatres, cinemas, cafés, football clubs, horchata, and crowds. It is also a city integrated with nature, which penetrates it and makes it its own. At times, it seems to be part of the countryside, and spring—or autumn—completes the appearance of its streets. It is this that really distinguishes València from other cities in Aub's work: a city that smells of magnolias and orange blossom, streets crossed by a wind that comes from the sea.

On the other hand, in the Aub's fictions, València is a city remembered from exile, a lost space, the scene of childhood and youth, of personal and collective projects, the irretrievable ghost of desire. In that sense, his writing, the way he draws a map in his texts, his meticulous listing of [the city's] names with which he reconstructs urban itineraries, constructs buildings, and populates the streets and houses with the dead, vanquished, or displaced, is the only way they can be recovered after having crossed the strata of writing and memory. Live in the forgotten, as he writes in *La gallina ciega*: You live in what was. You live in the forgotten (Aub, 1995, p. 190). And that forgotten space has an urban structure, neighbourhoods, streets, squares, public buildings, and private homes. Therefore, the revisited city of 1969 would seem foreign to him, a different

one. However, it can be read as a palimpsest, it will persist and be read again and again as a palimpsest. More exactly, it was written as a palimpsest.

It remains this way in his work, as a key for accessing the overlapping texts. Nobody remembers Chuliá. But Aub can; and he not only remembers her, he also writes to her, to Chuliá and also [writes] her later oblivion. Thus, he reintegrates [these characters] into the urban genealogy; he makes places such as the School of Modernism in Plaza Pellicers part of the available urban genealogy of the textual city, which is also the city of here and now, so that they can converse. For those who can read the transparency, superimposing the city's plans and recovering the voices that inhabited it, in so making it possible for Vicente Dalmases to wait for Asunción Meliá again. The Plaza del Ayuntamiento—at least the sector that was once Plaza Emilio Castelar—can once again become the place where [these things] happened, where someone imagined that they happened, which is the same thing, and so a war and a lost society was narrated and made recoverable again.

Today we have forgotten a lot, soon everything will be forgotten, said the anonymous narrator who concludes the series. But now completing the quote: Of course, despite everything, there is always something in the air. In the air it stays. And in these texts, [it remains] in the narrated air: in fictions and narrations from memory, which for Max Aub are the only—albeit powerful—possibility for permanence.

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