

# An enchanted barcelona mirrored in fiction

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## ABSTRACT

The novel is a product of the bourgeoisie's interest in the empirical mastery of reality. From the start, writing on reality took a forking path. On one side, it became journalism; on the other, it took the form of the novel. But whereas journalism intervenes in the reality that it mediates, the novel focuses on the characters' subjectivity. Journalism seeks to capture facts in their evanescence, while the novel lingers on the details of the milieu and the psychological folds of the action. Such attention to the temporality of events privileges urban space. As is the case in other literatures, the convergence of novel, journalism, and city is amply represented in Catalan novels, where Barcelona is the ostensible subject and the action a pretext for the author's interest in minutizing the broad facts of urban life. A significant number of contemporary novels about Barcelona use places and scenes that were previously mythologized. Their authors show fondness for a narrow strip of history covering about a century and a half. Locked within these temporal limits, the Catalan novel evinces little capacity to generate new myths. Neither the chronotope of the mythologized Barcelona of the 1980s nor those of the *Rose of Fire* or of the city under the dictatorship are of any use for the Barcelona that is now recovering from the deep economic crisis of the 2010s and leading the greatest political crisis of the post-Franco state. Entangled in historicism and in the cult of modernity, the novel is still seeking the narrative paradigm of the present time.

**Keywords:** bourgeoisie, chronotope, journalism, Eixample, periphery, Francoism, defamiliarisation, mythification.

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If a novel is understood as prose of a certain length that deals with real life, one can immediately see the symbiosis between novels and cities. Not for extrinsic or contingent reasons, but because what most corresponds to urban environments is interest in everyday life. For historical reasons, the narrative space of this genre is no longer monopolised by palaces or remote fortresses, but by the streets and squares

of localities that can be found on a map. Even when the narrator follows characters into the rooms of the aristocracy, novels balance this memory of other genres, of the theatre or of the opera, with excursions to the mansards of bohemia and to the hovels of the proletarian class, in a gesture that encompasses the total experience of cities. In novels, a limited space, such as the pension Vauquer in *Le Père Goriot*, can

serve as a compendium or synopsis of the intricacies of social relations. Surely, it is the integrating gesture with which the author proclaims their intention to democratically explore the space that best explains that, despite its humble origins, this genre has become the dominant literary form.

Until the appearance of the novel, fiction literature had been a form of evasion related to myths: what in English is called ‘romance’ and in other European languages is specified with an adjective to distinguish it from novels without other attributes. In French, *roman sentimental* [sentimental novels], *roman épistolaire* [epistolary novels], *roman d’amour* [romance novels], are terms which quickly arose for variants of fiction that until then had simply been called ‘roman’. The medieval ‘romans’, some written in verse, describe something different from modern romans. The Germans talk about *Ritterroman* [Chivalric romances], *Liebesroman* [romance novels], or *Erzählung* [narrative stories]. The Spanish also use the term *novela* without adjectives, in contrast to the adjectival narrative forms: *novela sentimental* [sentimental novels], *novelas ejemplares* [exemplary novels] (derived from the medieval exemplum), *novela bizantina* [prosaic novels]; but—be careful—*libros de caballerías* [books of chivalry] and, also, *historia* [historical books], can designate texts such as *Quixote* and *Persiles*. Catalan follows the same pattern. “*Ací fineix lo llibre del valeros e estrenu cavaller Tirant lo Blanc*” [Here ends the book of the courageous and starts the one of the knight Tirant lo Blanc], writes Martí Joan de Galba at the end of his continuation of Joanot Martorell’s manuscript.

Although Hispanists usually consider *Don Quixote* as the first novel in the modern sense of the word, it is, in fact, a work of transition. The realism, which would become the hallmark of this new genre, appears in [Don Quixote] as an ironic counterweight to fabulation. The main characters remind the gentlemen who travelled—without a defined goal—non-existent paths covered by thickets in desert valleys and mountains, of adventure. That is why *Don Quixote* lets his horse choose the direction: adventure is chance. Because the book is not yet a novel in the full sense of the

word, most of the story takes place in rustic areas, albeit geographically identified ones—La Mancha or Sierra Morena—with real towns: El Toboso. It is noteworthy that, towards the end of the second part, when these two outlandish provincials pass through the streets of Barcelona, the work becomes less fantastical because of the psychological changes the urban setting produces in *Don Quixote*. His fantasy becomes helpless before the multiplicity of stimuli coming at him from everywhere. In the city, which already has an air of modernity despite its small size, reality is stronger than the ramshackle nobleman’s fantasies; before he had been compensating the monotony of the Castilian plateau by concentrating his imaginative capacities, but now he finds his chivalric ideologies outdated by the productive ethics and an accelerated temporal [urban] rhythm. The tension between the refining of his choices, which have become dogmatic because of the lack of perceptive data, and a more complex interpretative framework, creates the gentleman’s calling. This monomania caused by his lack of stimulation has a religious parallel in the intensification of the inner vision of the Castilian mystics of the time. For them, the voluntary suppression of the senses also produces visions of extraordinary things (“*estando ya mi casa asosegada*” [already being in my soothing home] in San Juan de la Cruz). The Manchegan gentleman even shares this mind-altering asceticism with contemporary mystics, in his case, ‘drying his brains’ [losing his wits], says Cervantes, because of reading a lot and resting little.

But, if in the middle of a wasteland and in the absence of other attractions, a hallucination can convert a mill into the form of a threatening giant, and the dust raised by a herd of sheep can be mistaken for an approaching army, his visionary power decays in the city. The dispersion of attention, always demanded by the excess of activity, disciplines the imagination and suspends the laxity of the senses. In Barcelona, *Don Quixote* is overwhelmed by the activity that surrounds him and by the fact of discovering the material, mechanical basis of his existence: the printing press where his life multiplies “*por industria*” [by industry] and transforms him into a literary character. The

books, he realises, can deal with people as ‘authentic’ as himself in a daily context, where what matters are human relationships based on real actions (the example that all Cervantes scholars mention is the naval combat next to the port) which are no longer [based on] magic or miracles. That is why, precisely in Barcelona, his life became prosaic, a “*derrota*” [defeat] that Miguel de Unamuno correctly attributed, albeit malignantly, to the bourgeois character of the Catalan capital (Unamuno, 1971, p. 197).

This bourgeoisie is inseparable from the gentleman’s failure to the extent that his character was that of an obsolete genre. In vain, Sancho suggests that [Quixote] try another one, that of pastoral novels, just as fantastic, if not more, as those of chivalry. Don Quixote becomes rational again, he adapts to the rhythm of his time, and becomes a prosaic character who would die in his bed, as Cervantes tells us the knights in *Tirant lo Blanc* will do, and for this reason alone, it was already the best book in the world. Both *Tirant* and Don Quixote are precedents of realist novels, of novels, plain and simple. But this would be the product of a bourgeoisie experienced in empiricism and interested not in evading reality, but in dominating it. Novels would become an immersion in the representation of reality, a dense description of how things are and no longer of the ghosts with which human beings construct their destinies. Robinson Crusoe is the entrepreneur who, starting with very little capital [investment] in scrupulously inventoried tools and materials, expands his wealth based on work, prudence, and inventiveness (and from a certain point, with the addition of cheap labour: Friday!). Certainly, one might object that *Robinson Crusoe* is not an urban novel, given that the action takes place on an exotic island near the American continent, but it would be a mistake not to recognise the bourgeois, capitalist and, ultimately, metropolitan perspective that Defoe contributes to this classic shipwreck story. Now, the emphasis is no longer placed on the luxury of fortune or on malice of the gods, but on the facts, the accumulation of which, in Robinson’s diary, builds the autobiographical fiction, indiscernible from real autobiography, which is the first-person novel.

If anyone doubts the urban origin of this new sensitivity to the facts, they must only remember that *Moll Flanders*, Defoe’s other great novel about the acquisition of plantations in the New World, is largely set in London. Another detail: the title of the work suggests the story not of a mysterious character, but of someone already known to the reader: *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders*. The artifice of this fame allows the author to dispense with the distance that separates fantasy characters from real life ones, because Moll’s criminal career is inspired by the stories of Newgate prison, [which were] very popular at the time. *Robinson Crusoe* is also presented as based on a true story, that Defoe would have heard from a traveller who had been around the world. This yearning to write a narration explained by someone departs from the medieval convention of the ‘miraculously found book’ that Cervantes still retains, albeit with irony. The new vogue of testimonial story-telling connects with the world of professional journalists, which Defoe, like many other novelists, still had a lasting relationship with. It is a characteristic of nascent novels that their authors insist on the veracity of their stories and that they not only impose on the reader the suspension of disbelief, but that they also do not distinguish between the truthfulness of the narrated world and that of the real world. This homogenisation of two hitherto incompatible universes is produced not by the loss of the sense of reality, which makes Don Quixote confuse the [real] world with Master Peter’s Puppet Show, but, on the contrary, by reducing the desublimated world (or as Georg Lukács would say, the [one] abandoned by God) (Lukács, 1971, p. 77) to narratable matter. Spinoza’s review of the magical or superstitious reading of the Bible and its affirmation of the identity of the divine law with the natural one is also influential. This promotion of the natural order to the condition of Providence alters the metaphysical idea of the miracle that sustained medieval fantasies, restoring novelistic adventures in a world regulated by the rationally understandable order and causation of nature. To continue with the same example: the novel excludes the ontological debate between Sancho Panza and Don Quixote about what the gentleman

claims to have seen in the cave of Montesinos. The novel-worthy material is of the same order of reality as that of life taking place outside the book. In other words: the novel is the Aristotelian vengeance of poets, who make the shadows of the Platonic cave the only light of the narrative argument.

Journalism and novels are children of the same civilisation and the same era. They are also the product of the same class, which had the means and sufficient leisure time to consume them. These two forms of writing arose in the 18th century and at the time were considered disreputable, partly because they did not respond to aristocracy's tastes and customs, and partly because they targeted a predominantly female audience, especially in the case of novels. At any rate, the writers of one or the other format tended to be the same. The success of novels could be attributed, not to a difference in the principle of reality, as has already been said, but rather, to its emancipation from the pragmatic sphere. While the nature of journalism has always been to intervene in the conflicts of the time, novels became more reflective: they present the same world in more contemplative terms, oscillating through the feelings, motivations, passions, and values of the new class, which would soon be considered universal and permanent [ones].

Journalism reeks of the places where the scandals are set and the news skips. It is merciless with the raw facts, caught in the moment of their evanescence, without the luxury of the details that allow the more leisurely composition of novels. [Journalism] does not have the luxury of considering whether a story will garner interest a week, a month, a year, or a decade because the criterion with which the news must be selected is its immediate impact. The scenarios of novels are often the same as those of journalism but are elaborated with circumstance and thoroughness. Novels also feed on scandal and explore the underworld or uncover the dirt hidden beneath the carpets of the elites. *Moll Flanders* is an example, but the technique is almost always the same, except with variation of the landscapes and cases. Balzac, Dickens, Dostoyevsky, Zola, Conrad, and Joyce. With the two previously

mentioned novels, Defoe establishes the two routes subsequent novelists would use to travel through the genre: travel novels linked to the colonisation of nature and to other peoples; urban novels revealing the internal colonisation of the disadvantaged classes. As a fusion of the two possibilities, crime novels, would soon specialise into detective novels. Balzac wrote *Une ténébreuse affaire* [A Murky Business]; Dickens, *Bleak House*; Dostoyevsky, *Crime and punishment*.

Then it is not strange that the appearance of novels in Catalan equates with their setting in the city of Barcelona and that, from the beginning, they illustrated the tension between the classes that emerged from industrialisation. It is the theme of *La papallona* [The butterfly] (1882) by Narcís Oller and, more ambitiously, *La febre d'or* [The gold rush] (1890–1892), the great novel about the expansion of the city in the last decades of the 19th century, when the blocks of the Eixample were being filled and the first modernist houses were built. Modernist novels (*Els sots feréstecs* [Dark vales], 1901, *Solitud* [Solitude], 1909) took a rural detour to redirect novels towards urban settings, portrayed convincingly by Josep Maria de Sagarra in *Vida privada* [Private Life] (1932). In the second half of the 20th century, most novels published in Catalonia, in Catalan or Castilian Spanish, were set in Barcelona, with notable exceptions such as the Mequinensa series by Jesus Moncada (1988–1996) or *Pedra de tartera* [Loose stone] by Maria Barbal (1985), works with a rural scenery that proved the rule and would be continued in a worthy fashion in the trilogy by Francesc Serés, *De fens i de marbres* [Of waste and of marble] (2000–2002).

The connection between novels, journalism, and cities (including Barcelona) is well represented; but perhaps nowhere as systematically as in detective novels and, especially, those by the journalist Manuel Vázquez Montalbán. What makes the Carvalho series by this writer so interesting is not the quality of his prose or the frenetic pace of its publication, more typical of journalism than of literature; nor the incentive of the enigma or the lucid and rational resolution of the cases, which have been at the centre of police

narratives since *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, by Poe. Vázquez Montalbán wrote a late Marxist detective novel with an express will to denounce the bourgeoisie and raise awareness of the popular class, along the lines of that other writer of his same generation, Juan Marsé, who made his fortune in Spanish writing with *Últimas tardes con Teresa* [Last Evenings with Teresa] (1966), a denunciation of the Catalan upper class from the resentful gaze of a Spanish immigrant from the provinces. Both writers polarise the urban map into two socioeconomic zones ascribed to the Catalan and Spanish identity marks, as indicated by the characters' surnames and, eventually, by their language. The neighbourhoods of Carmel and Sant Gervasi in the novel by Marsé, and the Raval and the upper zone, broadly considered [the area] from the Diagonal to Collserola, in the Vázquez Montalbán series, generate the ideological axes of the moral geography of Barcelona. Interestingly, the horizontal axis (east-west) of Vázquez Montalbán corresponds to the vertical axis (north-south) of Marsé. Of course, in the novels of both writers the action passes through a series of points on both sides of these coordinates and even goes beyond the city's limits. But their projection on the plane of sociocultural differences, as moral and political categories, is unmistakable. Of the two writers, Marsé is the closest to fable and myths, in his case, essentially derived from Hollywood cinema, while Vázquez Montalbán, in addition to the possible inspiration by film *noir*, is always and without fail, a journalist: in the language, the weight it gives to sociological considerations, and above all, in the function and priority of scandal in the narrative plot. If the investigation never leads to a punitive outcome, as occurs in the work of their Anglo-Saxon models, and is not even comprehended with psychological empathy, as in those of Georges Simenon, it is because scandal is imposed as a criterion of journalistic revenge.

Vázquez Montalbán is also the author of a book about the difficult-to-catalogue city: partly history, partly sociology, partly cultural promotion. *Barcelonas* (1987), written just after the award of the Olympic Games was announced and in full euphoria for the city's international projection, is a manifesto

on the impossibility of the reconciliation of the various moral and ideological geographies where the battles for identity of urban spaces are fought. The impossibility of unifying this space points to an identity that is never completely fixed, always in flux, disputed. This polyhedral vision turns Barcelona into the real protagonist of the Carvalho series of novels, stories without mystery or with perfunctory mysteries, where the crimes and the investigations which they give rise to are the pretext, or rather, the stage, for the ideological conflict and dispute over the identity of urban environments. That the detective is an immigrant with a Portuguese surname is not an unimportant detail. The autobiographical allusions are present in some facets of the detective and in some of his assessments. The Portuguese spelling of his surname is a transparent allusion to the Galician origin of the author's paternal family. The relative eccentricity of the character (in both senses of the word: social eccentricity as an immigrant of humble origins and psychological eccentricity: he uses books to light the fireplace) proposes a combative, rather than dialectical, vision of the city, where each neighbourhood is an ideological hieroglyph that must be deciphered, in line with Engels' denouncement of the urban layout of Manchester in the 19th century. The deep structure of the urban space is, in any case, the mystery to be clarified; a mystery of which the specific crime is only one symptom or secondary manifestation, among potential others, because the radical evil is always the same: the bourgeoisie with Catalan surnames that inevitably live in the upper part [of the city], even though the visible effects of their criminality appear in the underworld or in the city's outskirts.

In the *Los mares del Sur* [The southern seas] (1979), one of the first novels of the series, an unidentified man is found stabbed inside an empty plot in Sant Andreu. The detective's intuition leads him to look for the solution by consulting the urban map and dialectically searching for the opposite geographical point from where the police found the corpse. Appearances are always deceptive, and Carvalho goes from the periphery of the city to its centre and back again to discover the identity of the dead man and his

murderers. But, if the criminals in his novels are often accidental or accessory, the real crime is always that of the social class that lurks like a spider in the centre of the urban web and, from there, spins its silk out to peripheries. The original sin of the bourgeoisie is their real estate speculation, evident in the tower blocks that spring up in the outskirts to home the wave of migrants who arrived at the end of the 1960s, thus surpassing the capacity the city's periphery had to assimilate them. In this scenario it is easy to recognise the Bellvitge [neighbourhood] of the time, where local capitalism urbanised everything that could be developed without rigorous planning or demanding architectural criteria, often using deficient materials and almost always without considering the provision of essential services.

This was not a practice exclusive to Barcelona. In other Spanish and European cities, including Eastern socialist-bloc countries, that era left depersonalised neighbourhoods with banal architecture. But where is the mystery? The exploitation of urban space has been one of the characteristics of the Barcelonan economy since the creation of the Eixample, if not before the collapse of [the city's] walls. But Vázquez Montalbán's representation screams with the stubbornness with which he identifies capitalism with Catalan identity, within a historical context of enormous State intervention in both the political and economic affairs of the city. In fact, the most representative name in urban land speculation during the period framed by the novel is that of José Luis Núñez Clemente, now a 'Catalanised' name, but which at the time, along with Lara (the last name of another immigrant who built a commercial empire in the 1970s), was linked to Spanish immigration in Catalonia. In short, Vázquez Montalbán included and unfolded sociocultural categories in his novels.

Like all dogmatic denouncements (in the sense that the system appears to be seamless), the Carvalho series is blind to its own ideology, which was more or less that represented, in doctrinal terms, in the book by Jordi Solé-Tura, *Catalanismo y revolución burguesa* [Catalanism and the bourgeois revolution] (1967);

this book has now been discredited but was very popular a few years before the start of the Vázquez Montalbán series, in 1972. Following criticism of this type by me in *El cadáver en la cocina* [The body in the kitchen] Vázquez Montalbán introduced an emendation in the novel *El hombre de mi vida* [The Man of my life] (2000). In this new episode, a girl confronts Carvalho and reminds him that the Civil War had not been won by the Catalans; at least, not by all Catalans. She tells him verbatim: "*Franco estuvo en todas partes, pero aquí estuvo dos veces, contra los rojos y contra nosotros, y además mi familia era roja por si faltara algo. ¿Lo vas entendiendo?*" [Franco was everywhere, but he was here twice, against the reds and against us, and in case you missed something, my family was red. Are you getting it?] The detective replies: "*No soy independentista. No creo en las independencias, pero detesto las dependencias*" [I'm not an independentist. I don't believe in independencies, but I detest dependencies] (Vázquez Montalbán, 2000, p. 124), with the author's very characteristic way of proclaiming 'neither this nor that, but rather, quite the opposite'.

It was a gesture, at least. In any case, the author had used his right to criticise the critic in *La literatura en la construcción de la ciudad democrática* [Literature on the construction of democratic cities] (1998), arguing that, in the dialectical framework of the Carvalho series, those who possess money and power usually have all the cards for being the bad ones. Which simply describes the ideological formula of this series. Vázquez then adds: be they Catalan or Thai, and from an objectivising perspective, there is no more perverse class, in Catalonia or in the universe, than that which supports the establishment in accordance with its exclusive interests (Vázquez Montalbán, 1998, p. 156). My criticism had touched a nerve: for a quarter of a century, the bad guys in the Barcelona novels of this series had been unfailingly identified as Catalans. That is, the evil was the *establishment* as a Catalan, and the detective, armed with the moral superiority of his doctrinaire gaze, set accounts in the name of history, both Spanish and universal, as a vengeful divinity that always knew the heritage of the guilty. Therefore, the investigation was superfluous and the signs that

Auguste Dupin or Sherlock Holmes interpreted with the virtuosity of the empirical observer, in Carvalho, became pure ideological deduction.

But the disagreement about the deeper meaning of the series did not prevent the author and his critic from becoming friends. The last time we spoke was in Rome, on 24 March 2003. Knowing that I was there, he called me at the hotel and suggested we meet. But both of us had conferences scheduled in different places at almost exactly the same time and the meeting was impossible. Vázquez Montalbán died in October that year, victim of his hyperactivity and an exhausted heart. I have given in to the temptation recounting this personal anecdote for a reason. Two weeks before that telephone conversation, he and I had travelled by train through southern Germany, invited by the Cervantes Institute in Munich to participate in a round table on historical memory. Now, memory is Detective Carvalho's main weapon, and on that occasion, minutes after I had defended—before the Spanish consul and a packed audience—Catalonia's right to self-determination, Vázquez Montalbán had his turn to talk, in which he defended my position.

Having read most of the extraordinarily prolific work of this writer, I had never encountered a clear statement about Catalonia's right to decide its independence. Therefore, the unexpected reaffirmation of my words seemed to me the *ex libris* resolution of the conflict that had befallen his detective. It was also the augury of the possible reunification of all the Barcelonas under a Catalan identity that no longer implied any mystery, just as the French identity of Simenon's Paris is not a mystery and nor is the Californian nature of Chandler's Los Angeles, where crime and law do not identify sociocultural categories but only moral and psychological ones.

There is no record of that round table, because the leaders at Cervantes—who knows if pressured by the Spanish consulate or not—destroyed the recording. But, even if there is no material memory of those interventions in historical memory, the way in which Vázquez Montalbán sentenced the issue in the preamble

to his presentation was a kind of legacy. He, who had criticised the Barcelona bourgeoisie from a perspective that confused class with nationality, categorically adopted a national premise over circumstantial or accessory differences. Thus, he reconstituted the division symbolised by the political abyss between the mountain side [that of the Palace of the Generalitat of Catalonia] and the side of the sea [that of the City Hall] found in Plaça de Sant Jaume in Barcelona; an approach that, except for the Francoist city and town halls and councils, had not taken place since the Spanish Civil War and, in the strictly political sense, would not happen again until 2011.

Francoism is the chronotope of Vázquez Montalbán's novels. I adopt this neologism from the Russian critic, Mikhail Bakhtin because Vázquez Montalbán himself used the concept without mentioning the term or the person who coined it. In an essay published in 2003, he wrote: The literary excitement of Barcelona comes from a special space-time relationship, a diachronic and synchronic relationship (Vázquez Montalbán, 2003, p. 209). This time and this space, delimits them, he goes on, to about one hundred and fifty years of history and a few square kilometres of territory (Vázquez Montalbán, 2003, p. 209). For him, everything begins, literarily speaking, with the *Pla Cerdà* [Cerdà plan] and does not go much beyond the Barcelona of the *Pla d'Enllaços* [Plan of d'Enllaços], that is, the result of the incorporation of satellite populations, completion of intermediate spaces, and urbanisation of the little that remained to be developed during mayor Josep Maria de Porcioles' 'development' plan. On the contrary, the great interventionist campaign of the city's mayors Maragall and Clos at the end of the [20th] century predicted the end of the 'literaturisable' Barcelona. In the words of Vázquez Montalbán, despite such rich precedents, everything seems to indicate that the Barcelona that is being destroyed is guided by an unconfessed desire to eliminate almost everything that made it literary (Vázquez Montalbán, 2003, p. 209). Especially, the class struggle, because, as he explains, the literary city was a natural result of the dialectical relationship between the good, the bad, and the inevitable (Vázquez Montalbán, 2003, p.

210). This idea of a scenario privileged by literature indicates the existence of a mythical city. As is well known, myths are an imaginary elaboration of real events (*mythos* means narration) and it is easier to take advantage of them than to create new ones. That is why an important part of the contemporary novels about Barcelona exploit those previously mythicised scenarios with the pretext of historicising them. Without going any further, Pilar Rahola won the Ramon Llull Prize in February last year with a novel, *Rosa de Cendra* [Rose of ash], which recycles the myth of the *Rosa de Foc* [Fire Rose] with the infallible ingredients of class struggle, Catalanism, and Lerrouxism, all seasoned with the burning of convents and urban changes. It is difficult to imagine a French novel permanently installed in the events of the *Belle Époque* [Beautiful time], an English one in the London fogs of the 19th century, an Austrian one fixed in the Vienna between the wars, or a German one in the Berlin of National Socialism. A city is not a matter of a century or a century and a half, nor can the literature of a city like Barcelona be so.

The literary Barcelona of Vázquez Montalbán is not a Euclidean space, but a political space and the time frame in which Carvalho contemplates it extended to the novelist's present, as befits work inspired by investigative journalism. It is a framework of the present that has ceased to be present, but which retains all the emotional charge and indignation of the things that have marked us forever. It is also the phenomenon of a conjuncture, because it is part of the Barcelonan novels that filled the 1980s, when the grey, mediocre, and provincial city returned to the international scene with force. From the 1980s, Barcelona became the more or less explicit theme of many novels. Eduardo Mendoza, who had already premiered with *La verdad sobre el caso Savolta* [The truth about the Savolta case] (1975), published *La ciudad de los prodigios* [The city of prodigies] (1986), which would end up being the best of his novels; Marsé returned with *Ronda del Guinardó* [Guinardó avenue] (1984) and *El amante bilingüe* [The bilingual lover] (1990). All these and others that should perhaps be mentioned are contemporary works [which fed off]

of the expectation generated by the announcement of the Olympic Games hosting, or that exploit the reputation of post-Olympic Barcelona which became a successes on the back of the promotion of the city. Carlos Ruiz Zafón with *La sombra del viento* [The wind's shadow] (2001) and Ildefonso Falcones with *La catedral del mar* [The cathedral of the sea] (2006) excavate, in the past, arguments that they knew how to sell wrapped up with Barcelona's new prestige. In this same context, but intersecting the interest in historical memory, in 2002 Alfred Bosch published the trilogy 1714, a topic which Albert Sánchez-Piñol would return to 12 years later with *Victus* [Defeated], on the tercentenary of the taking of Barcelona by the Bourbon army. However, these are not properly novels about Barcelona, but rather, fictions with a desire for historical remembrance, a history, of course, that incorporates the city's tragic destiny. In *Victus*, the Barcelona of the 17th century is indicated by the names of some of its neighbourhoods, the city gates, the Born square, the Fossar de les Moreres [cemetery], the port, and geographical features such as the Besós river. But in the different Barcelonan morals of Vázquez Montalbán, the city took on a collective character, expressing its feelings and emotions in an impossible way: "*En los últimos días de junio de 1713 Barcelona hervía de indignación*" [On the last days of June 1713 Barcelona boiled with indignation] (Sánchez-Piñol, 2014, p. 310). The protagonist, although mediated by a crude narrator that we must assume was invented or reinvented by the author, is this historical subject, decomposed according to the narrative needs in a crowd of real or fictional characters who fulfil the roles they had to play in the Catalan drama of 1714.

I have not mentioned many other titles and authors, because it is not my intention to inventory Barcelona-themed novels, but rather, to try to describe the narrative chronotope of the Franco regime. This chronotope begins in the post-war period with novels such as *Mariona Rebull* (1943) and *El viudo Rius* [The widower Rius] by Ignacio Agustí (1945), or *Nada* [Nothing] (1944) by Carmen Laforet. In these works, we find a paradigm shift marked by linguistic substitution. If sudden conversion of the verbal landscape had made



the Barcelona of the 1940s extraterritorial with respect to itself, the change of register makes it even stranger in the literary context, where everything exists by virtue of language. If in the real Barcelona, 'Catalanness' manifested itself in the tension between official prohibition and particular uses of language, in novels, that tension does not exist, because writing is the subject not only of dialogues, but also of the characters' inner consciousness and the law that governs their universe. The apparent normality with which they speak in a foreign language gives the works of that time a certain element of insincerity, like a carnival mask superimposed on a person's genuine features. These works make the city appear unfamiliar, in the Brechtian sense of the word: we recognise it, but with surprise. The left-wing environment of the Eixample described by Laforet bears no relationship to the one described by the pre-war writers, nor with any later work such as *El temps de les cireres* [The time of cherries] (1977) by Montserrat Roig. In fact, it is very difficult to relate it to the history of that neighbourhood. Just as unfamiliar, if not more so, appears the district of Gracia in *Un día volveré* [One day I will return] (1982) by Marsé, a work that has very little to do with *La plaça del Diamant* [Diamond Square] (1962) by Mercè Rodoreda published 20 years before. Similarly, *El carrer de les Camèlies* [Camellia street] (1966) by Mercè describes the same street but it is distinct from the one in *El embrujo de Shanghai* [The enchantment of Shanghai] (1993) by Marsé. If the novel is a genre dedicated to daily life captured in the details, and if the main details in the presentation of the characters are linguistic turns of phrase and their way of saying things, the castilianisation of those from [Villa de] Gracia, by the work and grace of linguistic imposition, gives the result an ideological patina that distances and makes everyday life unfamiliar.

This defamiliarisation has an unmistakable period air because, despite the late date of these works, they are still governed by the chronotope of official life in Barcelona under the Franco regime. Let us remember that, when returning from exile, Rodoreda found Barcelona so linguistically altered that she felt strange and looked for the sound landscape lost in a new kind

of exile, in Romanyà de la Selva. That chronotope not only had a tonality but also some temporal referents and a location. In *Una comedia ligera* [A light comedy] (1996), by Eduardo Mendoza, the blackouts, common in the post-war period, have an emotional value: the luminous Barcelona of the years of the First World War, that of the shows in the Paral·lel [neighbourhood] and the sinful attractions in Chinatown, all become dark, and the sinister characters: Lorenzo Verdugones, a brutal leader, corresponds to the ill-fated governor, Antonio Correa Veglison, of the early 1940s.<sup>1</sup> The same thing happens with other novels of this chronotope: the impotent Falangist and voyeur in *Si te dicen que caí* [If they tell you that I fell] (1973); superintendent Polo from *Un día volveré* and *Ronda del Guinardó*, is an effigy of the special services commissioner, Pedro Polo Borreguero; or curator *Creix* in *Los mares del Sur*, is a literary reflection of Vicente Creix, Pedro Polo's successor in the *Brigada de Investigación Social de Barcelona* [Social Research Brigade of Barcelona—the secret police during the Franco regime]. The operational base of these torturers was the Police Headquarters in Laietana street. This building had been a hotel during the 1929 Barcelona International Exposition and, subsequently, a Public Order Police Station during the Second Spanish Republic, before becoming one of the spaces that guided the Francoist chronotope in the Carvalho series.

When the shadows of the dictatorship begin to withdraw, Barcelona is, like every plant exposed to light, something that grows, fills with colour, that begins to look towards the places where life is renewed. Carvalho leaves the narrow streets of Raval to go to live in Vallvidrera, from where he can embrace the city as a whole. But every up has a down, and this descent leads to a fall into darkness and evil, the centre of which is the basement of the Police Headquarters where the writer was questioned by the sinister commissioner Creix. The detective's descent

1 The image of the first post-war governor in Barcelona is nuanced by the historian Javier Tébar Hurtado. Mendoza also echoes opposite versions of the character in *Una comedia ligera* (Mendoza, 1996, p. 139).

into the old Barcelona entails the redemptive action of poorly-disguised sentimentality. His condescending relationship with the prostitute Charo, a 20th century Magdalene, and his assistant-cum-cook, Biscuter, is the popular version of class charity. The prostitute's highest desire was to spend a weekend in Carvalho's house in Vallvidrera, in special spatial ecstasy that would take her to the top of the city, the promised land of the immigrant population. At the beginning of *Los mares del Sur*, the crook, Bocanegra, satisfied to have stolen a luxury car, tells his friend Loli: "*Vamos a follar a Vallvidrera*" [let's fuck Vallvidrera] (Vázquez Montalbán, 1979, p. 9). The ethno-classist solidarity of the detective undresses the false solidarity of national-Catholicism, contrasting it with the vital content that popular figures (and Spanish speakers) contribute to the underworld, the lost paradise of Carvalho's childhood. Even when one of its inhabitants have committed a crime, they are usually exempt from the guilt, in the theological-political sense, of original class sin. This intimacy of origin paves the way for the condemnation of the Pharisees, the bourgeois class and even the petty bourgeoisie (according to chronic Marxist vocabulary) that, behind a façade of respectability, devour the victims of the inequality distributed between natives and newcomers. The upper echelons of this exploitative class are the *Catalans of Burgos*, the Falangists who fought alongside Franco's troops and for decades reaped the rewards of victory in shady deals under the regime's protection.

In this Barcelona, the streets are paved with the signs of Spain's recent history. It is, in a way, a decentralised Barcelona, almost transferable to any other Spanish city, because, despite being crowded with place names, its traditional signs of identity have disappeared. Nothing reminds us of the Republican Barcelona, the one of rising Catalan nationalism of the first half of the 20th century and, much less, of the Barcelona of 1714, or its brief moment of international expansion in the 13th and 14th centuries. All this has disappeared or, more surprisingly still, has condensed into a differential fact based on denomination, but assimilated into the evil of capitalism. That is to say, that the city's long commercial and industrial history was passed through

the sieve of the Cold War and Francoism. However, the indistinction—with respect to any other Spanish city—that it supposes, and the moral and political division between Francoists and anti-Francoists is refuted by the sociohistorical heterogeneity of the Catalan chronotope. The national homogenisation that arises from the blind spot of reading Barcelona exclusively in terms of class coincides with the Franco regime's aspiration of establishing a chronotope [there] identical to that of the rest of the [Spanish] state. The result was the fusion, by negation and displacement, of the different transitory [spaces] and the convergence of the different historical spaces.

This chronotope is now different. Novels, however, trapped in the historicism and cult of the city, have not yet been able to encode the meaning of the time. The marks of the time are made in general crude references to the most trivial aspects of consumption or in the daily banality of small places: the bars or the tiny ramshackle flats where most Barcelonans live, within the retrospective temporality of a time that still has not passed. It is not that things do not happen in novels, but rather, what does happen is inconsequential, disconnected—in the strongest sense of the word—from any events and from originating a new cycle in the city's life. Perhaps it is time stopped at the threshold of a new era that best defines the novels of the deconstruction of Barcelona that Vázquez Montalbán spoke about; the Barcelona bogged down, literarily speaking, in that kind of vague terrain that Jordi Puntí describes in *Maletes perdudes* [Lost luggage] (2010)—a novel about genetic reiteration, in other words, repetition by horizontal displacement, of a life lacking direction in time. This novel speaks of that Barcelona forgotten in the cracks of history, made of pure duration and inertia, the best symbol of which is the flat abandoned by the father in the building in Almogàvares street. "*A mitjan anys vuitanta, aquella part de la ciutat s'esllanguia enmig d'una atmosfera solitària i desolada, com de polígon industrial. S'havia convertit en una terra de ningú*" [In the mid-1980s, that part of the city faded amid a solitary and desolate atmosphere, as an industrial estate. It had become a no man's land] (Puntí, 2010, p. 29). Or the Camp de la Bota, where

the faint memory of firing squad executions dissolved into “*el so de les onades, [que] en aquella hora de la tarda, es repetia amb una cadència tan sinuosa i embafadora que li va fer venir arcades*” [the sound of the waves, that at that hour of the afternoon, repeated with a cadence so winding and cloying that it made him retch] (Puntí, 2010, p. 89). Or, the flats on Favència street, wet and nibbled by concrete corrosion, with the roof propped up with iron pillars, which are the best metaphor for a city that dissolves into its own history (Puntí, 2010, p. 340). A city identified with a literature that is inseparable from its self-identification as a space of an anxious and self-conscious modernity, the cradle of a revolution always truncated and always ready to be reborn, suitable for all the romanticisms of every allegiance.

Today, already collapsing that classic paradigm, literary Barcelona is being recreated in the chronotope of the crisis, as if recapitulating all its myths, big or small, all the cathexis of the growth, puberty, and maturity of a city with a consolidated personality

and reasonably developed conscience, including its own shames and complexes, often seen with irony, occasionally, with self-hate, and sometimes, with self-pity. This awareness has been, is, and probably will continue to be mainly literary, waiting for a rupture that brings with it a new figure and a new precision. But this rupture will also have to be literary, given that, if literature generated the city's conscience, the renovation must also come from literature, under penalty of leaving Barcelona's self-image trapped in the most cramped and empty of anachronism. Text is produced and consumed in a specific space, for a specific audience, and in a real historical time. Each public, each society segregates its literature according to its talent and its dispositions. The literary Barcelona of the future, like that of the past, will comprise linguistic signs of one or another language, with some or another connotation, and immaterial or material reflections in its readers. This Barcelona already exists, but it does not yet know itself, given that it still has not crossed the invisible line that separates the world from its representation.

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