

Evocation without the evoked: the reader and the construction of intrigue in José Bianco's *Las ratas*.


La evocación sin lo evocado: el lector y la construcción de la intriga en *Las ratas* de José Bianco.

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Summary:

This paper proposes a review of the novel *Las ratas* (*The Rats*) by the Argentine writer José Bianco, in order to trace the stylistic and structural innovations he proposes in the treatment of the detective genre. This "new way of novelizing" allows us to see the renewal of prose in the framework of a national literature struggling to free itself from the representative model of nineteenth-century narrative. We take the concept of "evocation" proposed by Tamara Kamenszain as a proposal for a regime of meaning that goes beyond the pact of realistic verisimilitude, both in theme and form.

Key words: Crime novel. Intrigue. Evocation. Reader.

Resumen:

El presente trabajo propone un recorrido de la novela *Las ratas* del escritor argentino José Bianco, a fin de rastrear las innovaciones estilísticas y estructurales que propone en el tratamiento del género policial. Esta "nueva forma de novelar" permite ver la renovación de la prosa en el marco de una literatura nacional en pugna por librarse del modelo representativo de la narrativa decimonónica. Tomamos el concepto de "evocación" propuesto por Tamara Kamenszain como propuesta de un régimen de sentido superador del pacto de verosimilitud realista, tanto en tema como en forma.

Palabras clave: Novela policial. Intriga. Evocación. Lector.

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"The evocation without the evoked is the voice that calls and makes interrupt, in the very interior of the real, its imaginary character."

"For a literature of imagination", Judith Podlubne.

In 1943, the Argentine editor, translator and writer José Bianco (1908-1986) published *Las ratas* (Sur publishing house), a novel that, together with *La invención de Morel* (Bioy Casares, 1940), allowed Jorge Luis Borges to draw a sort of renovating picture of the Argentine novel (Podlubne, 2008, p. 1). The famous author of *The Aleph* stops to consecrate the compositional merits of the work, giving account of an assessment placed in the work on the literary procedure that displaces from its place "the humanist realist interpretations of the art of novel writing" (p. 1) of writers once central in the Argentine cultural field, such as Manuel Gálvez or Eduardo Mallea.

José Bianco declares that he seeks a literature that tries to "evoke reality and is not content with describing it, that goes beyond mere verisimilitude without invention" (Kamenszain, n/d). A regime of meaning is proposed that goes beyond the realist verisimilitude pact based on description, as a discursive requirement of the genre (Barthes, "The reality effect"), proposing the procedure of inquiry. This is the nuclear element in the work, in the theme and in the form.

Las ratas, says Borges, "narrates the prehistory of a crime" (p. 5), or, even more, the indefinable ambiguous zone surrounding a death, and, at the same time, allows the reader to witness the story of the Heredia family, a patrician family in decline, rescued by the marriage -and consequent widowhood- of aunt Isabel to a Buenos Aires merchant. Death, mystery and veiled confession define the tone of the novel and, at the same time, constitute the core of the family story as a sort of "crack". The motive behind the character's writing is made explicit in the following quotation:

My name is Delfín Heredia. In me, as in all men, inherited tendencies accumulate. That is why, in this chapter, in giving a succinct history of my family, I will speak of other Heredia's who were born or died before me, but who still subsist in me, it may be said, in their most negative form.

negative form. I shall speak of their faults, of my faults. It will be a way of condemning the race in order to save the individual, of ridding myself of one and others at the same time, to make them die -irrevocably (Bianco, p. 9).

But "what is hereditary is not what passes through the crack, but the crack itself [...] the crack is not a passing place for a morbid inheritance; it is, by itself, the whole inheritance and everything morbid (Deleuze, p. 227), and it is through it that one "seeks the object that corresponds to him in the historical and social circumstances of his kind of life" (p. 228). Delfín Heredia writes the history of his family not to atone for his faults, but to find the object of his vice, his genealogical evil, which could well be art -all the characters are frustrated artists- but, deep down, it is the secret.

However, Borges points out that "this novel with its ingenious plot runs the risk of seeming to be just another example of those police fictions," but it "exceeds the limits of that uniform genre; it has not been elaborated by the author to obtain a modest surprise at the end" (p. 4). to obtain a modest final surprise" (p. 4). In *Las ratas* there is an annihilation of the traditional concept of intrigue that the detective story entails; from the very first page we read that "Julio had committed suicide" (p. 7). The scheme of the classic detective story, of Chesterton's type, for example, brings implicit in the figure of the detective, as a reorganizing actor of an ideal social scheme, an institutionalization of language; what we could think of from Roland Barthes' concept of "monosemy" (2007, p. 49).

The regime of meaning of the police is neurotic, insofar as it admits only one interpretation: the recognition of the guilty party and the reestablishment of 'order'. It is closed to symbol and fantasy. Bianco writes from a "polysemic" (p. 50) conception of intrigue, inasmuch as he cannot close it to a single meaning -this is the work on the zone of ambiguity recognized by a large part of the specialized critics-. This is why writing, for Delfín Heredia, implies entering into conflict with the very structure of textuality: he, as the author "as the principle of grouping discourse, as the unity and origin of its meanings, as the focus of its coherence" (Foucault, p. 16) collides with the figure of Isabel, a sort of patron. She is the one who holds the economic capital and organizes family life; the bourgeois category of 'author' confronts the role in the novel of the character who embodies the idiosyncrasy of this class. He says that "in this family drama, I

imagined myself as a secondary character who has been entrusted with the functions of stage director" (Bianco, p. 8), and therefore tries to construct himself as an instance of enunciation external to a story that, in the end, has him at the center. But this does not imply an annulment of the 'police' story, but a reconfiguration of its scheme.

Judith Podlubne (1994) approaches the concept of "literature of imagination" to think of a conception of literature that operates in an in-between, in the "indistinction between the real and reality" (p. 551). This '*between*' may well define the writing of *Las ratas* because it is not only that which Borges points out that "it is one of the few books in Argentine literature that remembers that there is a reader" (Borges: 4), but it is a novel that is structurally dependent on its reader. Delfín writes: "These pages will always be unpublished. However, in order to write them I need to think of a reader, a hypothetical reader, who is interested in the events I am going to relate" (Bianco, p. 9), and it could be thought that the very fact of writing, of lying in the word, implies operating in the intersubjective space of language that implies the presence of an other. But Delfín's confession, and Bianco's novel, goes beyond that, it needs a reader who goes through the intrigue, who "is interested", who "is interested", who investigates, imagines and, mainly, evokes, because "evocation [alludes] to that 'capacity' that language has to allow us to dispose of what is not there" (Podlubne, 1994, p. 552). It invites, then, to fill in the blanks and replenish that secret that survives, hidden, in the configuration of the narrator's voice. The 'detective' feature, thus, is not in the immanence of the text, but in the relationship it builds with the reader, who will have to act as a detective.

In this way, we can observe that the conception of writing that unfolds in the novel is that of a textual collaboration procedure: it demands an active reader in whom it seeks to produce the "**startle of the imagination**" (p. 550; bold in the original), as a reading effect. And the effect of imaginative literature does not lie in a sort of "will to unreality" but in the affirmation of a "will to realization". That is why 'imaginative literature' is that which unfolds "a previously established plan"; "it organizes and develops forms while evolving characters and characters, according to expected results" because there is an *a priori* construction of the reading effect that makes "the value of this literature [be] the result of the tension between the force of unreality that runs through it and its inevitable will to fulfillment" (pp. 550-1).

Thus, José Bianco's *Las ratas* proposes a renewal of the police genre and of the Argentine literary language from the work on procedure. We can even return to Roland Barthes to think that Bianco writes

"in order to undo the idea, the fetish of the Unique Determination, of the cause, and thus accredit the superior value of a pluralistic activity, without causality, finality or generality, which is the text itself" (2007, p. 42). The writer deploys a novelar of 'ambiguity' that "not only offers the reader the opportunity to exercise his freedom, but also creates the obligation to make a choice, to resolve a contradiction" (Prieto, 1983, p. 717); he demands a reader who accepts this diffuse pact of verisimilitude with the text, who does not accept the sentences of the writer, but who can carry out his own inferential path, build his own conclusions. A reader who does not believe the writer.

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