TOWARDS A SOCIOCRITICAL THEORY OF THE TEXT

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Palabras clave: Sociocrítica, texto, Mateo Alemán, genotexto, fenotexto.
Resumen: En este artículo se trata de mostrar cómo el material histórico invertido en el texto toma parte en el proceso dinámico de la producción semiótica. Edmond Cros ejemplifica esta postura teórica con el análisis de un pasaje de la novela picaresca de Mateo Alemán, *Guzmán de Alfarache*, editado entre 1599 y 1604.

Mots-clés: Sociocritique, texte, Mateo Alemán, génotexte, phénotexte.
Résumé: Cet article vise à montrer comment le matériau historique investi dans le texte participe du processus dynamique de la production sémiotique. Edmond Cros illustre cette proposition théorique par l'analyse d'un passage du roman picaresque de Mateo Alemán, *Guzmán de Alfarache*, édité entre 1599 et 1604.

Keywords. Sociocriticism, text, Mateo Aleman, genotext, phenotext.
Abstract: This article aims to bring out how the historic material invested in the text takes an active part in the semiotic production's dynamic process. In order to illustrate this theoretical proposition, Edmond Cros analyzes an extract from Mateo Alemán's picaresque novel *Guzmán de Alfarache,* edited between 1599 and 1604

Going back to the 1960s we observe a radical reconfiguration of the idea of the text, resulting from the rapid expansion of general

linguistics and literary semiology. This idea was detached from the "philosophy of truth"; it defined a "new object" that was described as a "translinguistic device" and considered as a signifying practice that never ceases to work and that is irreducible to objective signification. While retaining the theoretical concepts implicit within this idea, sociocriticism is essentially concerned with that which the text transcribes, which is to say, the modalities of incorporation of history, not at the level of content but at the level of forms. For sociocriticism, the plurality is the product of the dynamic and dialectical process of history. It is because it incorporates history in a way that is specific to it, that the text presents itself as a translinguistic device. It is these paths of complex, heterogeneous and contradictory meaning that I seek to mark out and to identify both in their nature and in their effects.

Sociocriticism aims to bring out the relations existing between the structures of literary (or cultural) work and the structures of the society in which this work is deeply rooted. This theory claims that the encounter with ideological traces and with antagonistic tensions between social classes is central to any reading of texts.

Unlike most sociological approaches to literature which leave the structures of text untouched, it assumes that the social nature of the literary work must be located and investigated *within* the text and not outside. That is why we have to elaborate a patient and exact reconstruction of the semiotico-ideological elements in order to show how the historic process is deeply involved in the writing process. Indeed, we have to deal with the different ways of incorporating history in the text. On this point, a series of questions must be emphasized:

- Which kind of historic material we have to ask for?
- How is the text supposed to incorporate this historic material?

- Which theoretical and methodological approach does enable the critic to bring into view the process of the history's incorporation?

Before we answer these questions I shall recall that every theory is founded on two points:

1. a philosophical conception which implies a point of view toward history, questioning what is the process of history,
2. a poetic conception referring to the functioning of the text

So, what is the process of the history? What is the text? How does the text work? Regarding to the first point, I am referring to the Marxism, which links the discursive formation to the ideological and social formations. There is indeed a relation between the infrastructure and the superstructure but this relation is neither automatic nor direct. Between the two levels (and inside) we have to distinguish a series of various instances, belonging each one to various historic times. At any given moment of the history somebody look like advanced, in advance, instances and other ones like delayed, behind the time. Insofar as the delayed is always attracted by the advanced one, the gap existing between the two instances and the series of the gaps existing in the totality of the system produce the dynamism of the process. These historic gaps produce semiotico-ideological traces and various kinds of effects in the literary work, observables especially in the textual spaces of the contradictions. That's why in my critic reading I start from the intratextual microsemiotics organized by these contradictions, which enable us to reconstruct the social and ideological formations.

Now, how does the text function? When it begins to start up, the text begins to set its rules of repetition: it repeats a short series of messages but it does not repeat them in a monotonous way (or exactly similar way), it repeats its messages through the different levels or categories

of the texts (I mean: time, space, discursive material, myth, topics and so on... Every text can present specific categories...). These messages are born from an abstract intratextual space that I name *Genotext*.

GENOTEXT AND PHENOTEXT

The genotext is a semiotic field that appears to be ordered but at the same time is torn and ruptured by " ideological junctures ". It is made up by a combinatory system of genetic elements, responsible for the global production of meaning and vehicles of conflict. All these genetic elements are functioning in a pluri-accentuated form and I assume that these contradictions reproduce the contradictions of the social and ideological formations.

But the genotext does not exist in the text: in the text we only deal with the phenotexts. Realizing the genotext, the phenotexts appear in all the categories of the text and every category tears and deconstructs the genotext according to the specific rules of its own functioning. The expression of the time, for example, give a result, an actualisation very different from the realization operated by the expression of the space.

These terms do not refer to the Julia Kristeva notions (Kristeva, 1969, pp. 280-283), but I am borrowing them from the human geography. In order to understand what I mean, we have to recall the notions o *Phenotype* and *Genotype*. The Mediterranean woman is a genotype but she does not exist, all that exists are various women who live on the different shores of the Mediterranean Sea with similar characteristics. From (and by the means of) these characteristics we have elaborated an abstract figure.

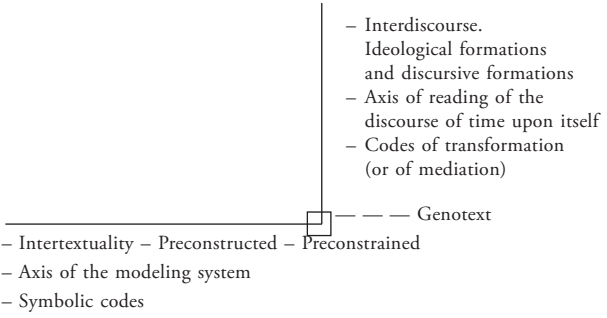
The genotext is not exactly a structure but it is to become a structure by structuring itself within the different phenotextual realizations of the same text. In the phenotext, the ungrammaticalized enunciation

of the genotext and the characteristics appropriate to a given level are both operating in the framework of a signifying process to actualise in an apparently incoherent and fragmented way the semantic latencies of the same utterance: the genotext. This genotext exists only in these multiple and concrete realization -Phenotextual- and it corresponds to an abstraction reconstituted by the analyst.

GENOTEXT AND HISTORY

In so far as the genotext is the way through which the text incorporates the history we can understand that the elements incorporated, in the form of strong contradictions, are the fundamental ones, which carry out the future of a given society and constitute its more important stakes.

How does the Genotext operate? Where does it come from? Using a spatial metaphor, we may imagine the point of intersection of two axes, a vertical and a horizontal. On the first axis is the *interdiscourse*, which materializes both mental structures and ideological formations produced by a social formation. The discourse of time upon itself is read on this axis, in other words, interdiscourse translates into semiotic operations the socio-historical conditions in which a speaker is immersed.



On the horizontal axis we find the intertext, (pre-asserted, pre-constructed, pre-constrained), i.e. all the linguistic material destined to give shape to meaning.

WHAT DO I MEAN BY INTERDISCOURSE?

To explain what the term genotext means to me, I would like to recall two notions of Lucien Goldmann: the transindividual (collective) subject and the level of the no-conscious (Goldman 1966). Each of us belongs at any moment of our life to a series of collective subjects (generation, family, geographic origin, profession...). We pass through many of them in the course of our existence. These different collective subjects, when we pass through them, offer us their social values and world vision by the means of their specific discourses. Every transindividual subject inscribes in its discourse the indexes of its spatial, social and historical insertion and consequently generates specific microsemiotics.

The totality of the discursive material we use along the live is made up with this mosaic of discourses. That's why the text does not select its signs within language but within the totality of semiotic expressions acquired/proposed by the collective subjects. This transindividual subject invests the individual consciousness of each individual participating in it by means of specific microsemiotics. These microsemiotics transcribes in signs the totality of aspirations, frustrations and vital problems of the group. They provide a kind of decoding of the ways each group is immersed. By reconstructing the microsemiotic level of the text we enable ourselves to reconstruct the social formation in which is immersed the writer.

Goldmann's notion of the transindividual subject called for further precision insofar as it seems to operate for him only at the level of the implicit values of a literary work. That's why I sought

to describe its effects in a more precise way. I tried to describe the levels where these indexes may be found. It seems to me that the most obvious traces are located on the paradigmatic axes, on the ready-made expressions and the "lexies". The way they become lexicalized transcribes social values systems. The changes that modify them transcribe modes of living and of socioeconomic insertions, the evolution of mental structures of the milieus producing them.

Now, how does the discourse of the transindividual subject function or operate? Goldmann distinguishes between three different levels of consciousness; to the first two (unconscious and alert consciousness) he adds the no-conscious. The no-conscious is a creation of the collective subject. It is different from the Freudian unconscious by the fact that is not repressed, and that it does not need overcome any resistance in order to become conscious, but can only be brought to light through scientific analysis. Indeed, reproducing social and discursive practices of the collective subjects we are saying much more than we know or whish, and so we are reproducing usually the social values of different collective subjects. That is the space and the level of the genetic process that is of interest to sociocriticism. From this point of view we can better deal with the basic and following question: while the social and personal visibility of the writer is very short, we do assume that the literary work's visibility is some times very large. How does the critic explain this difference? This difference is, to me, the result of the functioning of the no-conscious. As a matter of fact, beyond the field of social visibility properly speaking, extends another one interiorized but not consciously responsible of the intratextual microsemiotics. These microsemiotic reproduce the social values of the different collective subjects to which the writer belongs. Relations with the world are neither perceived nor perceivable at the level of immediate experience. The different discourses and different ways of behaviour that

belong to the subject always hold more meaning than the subject might know or wish to know. This supplement of meaning is stocked in the intratextual microsemiotics made up by and around the semiotic material of the no-conscious of the collective subject implied in the writing process. By making the semiotic system work in writing, the writer always says more than he or she understands and more than he or she apparently grasps.

In order to make this presentation more clear, I suggest a cursory glance over a text of the Spanish Golden Century, Mateo Alemán's picaresque novel *Guzmán de Alfarache,* edited between 1599 and 1604.

> *Conforme a lo cual*, siempre se tuvo por dificultoso hallarse un *fiel amigo y verdadero*. *Son contados*, *por escrito están* y lo más en fábulas, los que se dice haberlo sido. Uno solo hallé de nuestra misma naturaleza, el mejor, el más liberal, verdadero y cierto de todos, que nunca falta y permanece, siempre sin cansarse de darnos; y es la tierra.
> Esta nos da las *piedras de precio*, el oro, la plata y más metales, de que tanta necesidad y sed tenemos. Produce la yerba, con que no sólo se sustentan los ganados y animales de que nos valemos para cosas de nuestro servicio; mas juntamente aquellas medicinales, que nos conservan la salud y aligeran la enfermedad, preservándonos della. Cría nuestros frutos, *dándonos telas* con que *cubrirnos y adornarnos*. Rompe sus venas, brotando de sus pechos dulcísimas y misteriosas aguas que bebemos, arroyos y ríos que fertilizan los campos y facilitan los comercios, comunicándose por ellos las partes más extrañas y remotas. Todo nos lo consiente y sufre, bueno y mal tratamiento. A todo calla; es como la oveja, que nunca le oirán otra cosa que bien: si la llevan a comer, si a beber, si la en-

> cierran, si lo quitan el hijo, la lana y la vida, siempre a todo dice bien.
>
> Y todo el bien que tenemos en la tierra, la tierra lo da. Últimamente, ya después de fallecidos y hediondos, cuando no hay mujer, padre, hijo, pariente ni amigo que quiera sufrirnos y todos nos despiden, huyendo de nosotros, entonces nos ampara, recogiéndonos dentro de su propio vientre, *donde nos guarda* en *fiel depósito*, para volvernos a dar en vida nueva y eterna. Y la mayor excelencia, la más digna de Gloria y alabanza, es que, hacienda por nosotros tanto, tan a la continua, siendo tan generosa y franca, que ni cesa ni se cansa, nunca repite lo que da ni lo zahiere dando con ello en los ojos, como lo hacen los hombres. (Alemán , P.II, L.II, cap.1, edición de F. Rico, *La novela picaresca*, Barcelona, 1967).

Insofar as mi approach implies the necessity of taking into account the exact verbal materiality of the signs invested in the text, I would like to use the English translation of James Mabbe (1622-1623) to emphasise the linguistic differences.

> And therefore (these things considered) it hath ever beene held one of the hardest and dificultest things in the world, to finde out a *true and faithfull friend*.
> Of which sort, many are spoken of in ancient stories, and we finde a great number of them recorded of olde, and painted forth unto us in your feigned fables; but that there either now are, or have beene such heterofore as are there deciphered unto us, I doubt very much, at least I am fully perswaded, they were very *rare and few*. One only friend have I found to be true, and is of the same nature and

condition, as we are. And this friend of ours, is the best, the bountifullest, the truest, and the faithfullest of all other; for this is never wanting to its friend, but continues firme and constant for ever, nor is at any time weary of giving: And this good friend of ours (that I may not hold you any longer in suspence) is the Earth.

This affords us *pretious stones*, gold, silver, and divers other metals, whereof we stand in need, and so earnestly thirst after. It bringeth forth grasse, and all sorts of herbes, wherewith are not only fed our flocks of sheepe, our cattell, and other beasts for the use and servise of man, but those medicinable simples, which conserve our health, free us from diseases, and if we fall into sicknesse, set us upright againe, preserving this life of ours, in a sound and perfect state of health. It yeeldeth us all sorts of fruits, that are either savourie to the taste, or nourishable to the bodie. *It gives us wooll, and flax, and by consequence, all kinde of woven stuffes, wherewith we cloath, and adorne*, this naked flesh of ours. It opens its owne veines of its owne accord, whilest from its full brests, sprout forth those sweet and delicate waters, which we drinke; those brookes and rivers, which get the fields with childe, and make them friutfull, and not only that, but doth facilitate commerce, and make an easie way for trafficke, bringing the strangest and remotest parts of the world to shake hands, and to live in a league of love and friendship together. Nay more, it is so good, and so sweet a friend, that it suffereth, and willingly consenteth to all that we will our selves. Be shee well or ill used by us, all is one to her, so as we be pleased. Shee is like a sheepe, from whom you shall heare no other language, but *Omnia*

> *bene*: All is well. Leade her forth to feed, or bring her to the waters to drink; shut, and penne her up, or let her loose; take her lambkin from her, her milke, her wooll, nay her very life, to all shee always answers *bien*: all is well. And all that *bien*, or good that we have on earth, the Earth gives it us. And for an upshot of all, when we are now dead, and lye stinking above ground, when there is neither wife, father, sonne, kinsman, nor friend, that will abide and endure our companie any longer, but does all of them utterly forsake us, and flie from us; then, even then, doth not shee refuse us, but huggs us, and makes much of us, and opening her owne wombe, *takes us in unto her, where we quietly lye, as it were in deposito, till shee render afterwards a faithfull account of what shee hath received*, and delivers us up to a new and eternall life. And amongst many her other excellencies, one of the worthiest things in her, and deserving most commendation, is; That shee doing so much for us, as shee doth, and that so continually and without ceasing, being so generous, and so franke-hearted, that shee is never tyred out, never growes weary, yet doth shee not looke for any requital, shee neither askes, nor expects any returne of kindeness, nor doth shee talke and tell of it, not twit thee in the teeth with it; which some kinde of friends, more usually, then commendably, doe. (Mabbe Part II, Book II, chapter 1, 1623, vol..3, pp. 182-183)

First of all, let us evoke briefly the social formation in the Spanish Golden Century. If we try to give a panorama of the various social interests, we have to note the prosperous position of the commerce and of the brotherhood of the great cattle breeders re-

grouped in La Mesta, happening at the expenses of the cloth makers and the agricultural producers. The government of Charles The Fifth encourages the exportation of the best wool to the North of Europe and imports the clothes that Spain afterwards exports to *las Indias*. So, for example, the cattle have the privilege of passing through the cultivated fields of the country, destroying the cultivated fields. Aleman's text is written at the very moment when the flood of silver coming from America reached its maximum, generating a strong polemic opposing two systems of thoughts that have coexisted and fought with one other concerning the role of gold and precious metals in a State's prosperity: is the gold the "only sign of individual prosperity or of the greatness of a state? Or, quite to the contrary, is it the beginning of the dissolution of true wealth that consists only in the production of the good necessary for life?" (Vilar, 1974, p. 192). From this point of view we can better realize the new contradiction opposing the production of agricultural and industrial goods to the accumulation of money (by the means of the commerce or of the importation of precious metals) as the best way to create economic prosperity. As a matter of fact the interests of the cattle breeders are linked to the trade and bankers' activities.

The text examined is supposed to praise the faithful and true friend who gives you all he possesses without asking anything back. It develops a commonplace, a topos, the praise of the Earth's fecundity, the myth of the Golden Age, the early man's life in a natural world when Nature gave its wealth in a spontaneous way (Lucretius, *De natura rerum*). The man only has to extend his hands and he can collect the fruits. He does not need to work. This theme is loaded with the condemnation of adventure, by land or by sea, for a commercial gain and of individual property. From it are banished things like effort, work and private wealth. Later, with Virgil's *Georgics*

appears another formulation of the myth developing the idea that the Earth is fecund, if it is well cultivated. This new formulation is linked to the notion of progress in agriculture, owing to the beneficent intervention of the gods. I recall that the *Georgics* were written as a request of Maecenas who thus gave support to the Octavian's plan to restore in the Roman people the ancient virtues of the races, especially the taste for agriculture. This theme creates at the heart of the first one a space of conflict insofar as it translates the same notions (happiness and virtue) into contradictory figurative languages (effort vs. idleness- private property vs. collectivism). From the *De natura rerum* to the *Georgics*, the commonplace of the praise of the Earth changes from an atheistic discourse to an ethico-religious one in the service of a political project.

Aleman's text operates in the hollow of this commonplace. The honey and the wild fruits of the Latin descriptions have been left out; only remains the much more general form of "fruit". Four products are added: metals, grass, clothes, water. From *grass* to *cloth* and to *sheep* is constructed a panegyric movement glorifying breeding. Let us observe what occurs with the water, traditionally linked to the life ("without water no man no other animal can sustain life"). Here, on the contrary, its chief merit is to permit trade and communication among the most distant people of the world. This perspective on overseas adventures stressing on the importance of the international trade and the animal breeding unveils the point of view deconstructing the topos. The interdiction of commerce observable in all the Latin texts is being transgressed and occupies the entire textual space. *The commonplace is being completely inverted.*

That's why the concision of "dándonos telas" (*giving us clothes*) is remarkable: it erases all the process of material transformation. As a matter of fact neither the agriculture's field nor the industrial's one are invested in the text. This absence, this gap, reproduces ob-

viously the lacks existing in the social formation between distinct historic times.

Let us now investigate the writing itself. I observe, on a first reading, some phenomena of semantic and semiotic diffractions or deconstructions of set phrases:

1. The first one concerns "piedras *de precio*" (*costly* stones in Mabbe's translation, and not the *precious* stones corresponding to the ready-made expression, piedras *preciosas*). On the original formulation has thus been superimposed the concept of monetary exchange of valuable stones at the expenses of the metaphorical sense of objects that would be estimable in relation with other criteria emotional or aesthetic for example.
2. The ready-made expression "cubrir y *abrigar*"(to clothe and to *shelter*) is, in Mabbe's translation, changed int "cubrir y *adornar*" (to clothe and to *adorn*). From a product of the first necessity, *cloth* becomes adornment, an index of social position, an object of covetousness as much as silver or god.
3. Another similar deconstruction appears in "*fiel* amigo y verdadero" (faithfull and true friend). The usual formulation is: "*buen* y verdadero amigo" (good and true friend) The spanish term used in this text is very interesting, insofar as the term *fiel* indicates for example the servant who *does not rob* his master and is, too, the name of the people *who checks officially the weights and the prices of the goods in the markets*.
4. "Son *contados*" (litterally in english: *counted*). In the paradigmatic axis the more broadly used adjectives are *raros, pocos, escasos* (*rare, few...*). In this paradigmatic axis the text selects as a matter of fact a term obviously connoted in a similar way just as the other examples we are mentioning.

5. But the most surprising deconstruction is offered with the expression: *donde nos guarda en fiel depósito*" (litteraly in english: *where we are in a safe bank deposit*). The English translator understands the sentence very well and he develops it, and explains that the Spanish expression belongs to the vocabulary of the bank world.
6. We could add a series of set expressions belonging to the commercial law's vocabulary (in dotted lines in the text published here) like: "*conforme a lo cual*" *(acording to)* , "*por escrito están*" *(set down in writing)*

The semiotic material of the discourse is thus seen as a representation of the world of transaction seen with its activities, its values, its rules of behaviors and juridicial organization. Tracing in this manner the textual markers of a dominant discourse it reveals the ideological system responsible for the deconstruction of the topos.

CONCLUSION

The discourse invested in the text and operating as producer of the deconstruction is thus clearly brought into view: is a discourse of a given collective subject, the merchant and the merchant capitalism that implies a determined historic time. This discourse generates the microsemiotic level that we have pointed out and constituted by the deconstructions of the analysed ready-made expressions. This discourse does imply a fundamental value, the *exchange*, i.e. the contrary of the *gift*. While the writer claims that he is giving us the model of the perfect friend who is giving all that he possesses without asking anything back, he is obviously unveiling a very contradictory world's vision. That's why I can define the major element of the genotext as a contradiction between *to give* and *to exchange*. This functioning

is brought into view, at least in my analysis, in three levels or three phenotexts: the explicit theme (the total generosity of the faithful friend vs**.** the range of the verbal material used for describing it), the myth and the discursive material in itself. A more detailed analysis brings into view more textual categories functioning in the same way: the religious problematic, for example, questioning the relations between the human merit (an exchange between the human acts and the salvation) and the God's Holy Goodness who grant us the salvation without checking if we merit it. Last but not least, I have to mention the confessed social commitment of Mateo Aleman who supports the reform of begging in Spain, pleading that we have to give alms only to the poor who can't work. This new conception introduces the notion of merit and consequently that of exchange in a contradictory way, because the traditional catholic conception does not permit any limit to the charity. If we rely on a letter he wrote to a friend, Aleman composed his book in order to give his support to this social reform born in the protestant countries of Europe, reform that brought about strong polemics in Spain.

So, now we can better understand that the historic material invested in the genotext corresponds to the major stakes of a society at a given moment of its history and observe that this historic material is the vector of the textual production's dynamic process.

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