

The Dog that didn't Bark: the Case of Juan Carlos Rodríguez¹

El perro que no ladró: el caso de Juan Carlos Rodríguez

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Abstract. The extensive body of research associated with the name of Juan Carlos Rodríguez has failed to receive the attention it deserves. The reasons commonly adduced, by way of explanation, focus upon factors external to the texts themselves. In this article I review two recently published books by Rodríguez and a celebratory volume with an eye to foregrounding other, internal barriers to Rodríguez's reception. These include a cyclical style of argumentation, of the kind associated with symptomatic reading; the absence of a clear exposition of the Althusserian problematic upon which Rodríguez's seminal texts are otherwise based; and a critique of Althusser's alleged historicism, which, while it scores some useful points, was less than attentive to the philosopher's complexities. More damagingly, this same critique also fuelled the scurrilous distortions of Althusser's work still circulating throughout the bourgeois academy and so threatens Rodríguez's own work with premature closure.

Key words: *Juan Carlos Rodríguez; literary criticism; literature theory; marxism; Althusser.*

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Resumen. El vasto número de trabajos de investigación asociados al nombre de Juan Carlos Rodríguez no ha recibido la atención que merece. Las razones que se citan habitualmente, a modo de explicación, se centran en factores externos a los propios textos. En este artículo, examino dos libros de Rodríguez publicados recientemente y un volumen en su honor con la mirada puesta en destacar otros obstáculos internos a la recepción de Rodríguez. Estos incluyen un estilo cíclico de argumentación, del tipo que se asocia a la lectura sintomática; la ausencia de una clara exhibición de la problemática althusseriana en la que en realidad se basan los textos fundamentales de Rodríguez, así como una crítica del supuesto historicismo de Althusser, que si bien acierta en algunos puntos, no llega a prestar la suficiente atención a las complejidades del filósofo. Sin embargo y más perjudicial si cabe, esta misma crítica impulsó las insidiosas tergiversaciones acerca del trabajo de Althusser que aún circulan por la academia burguesa y que, por tanto, continúa amenazando con una conclusión apresurada sobre el propio trabajo de Rodríguez.

Palabras clave: *Juan Carlos Rodríguez; crítica literaria; teoría de la literatura; marxismo; Althusser.*

It is a curious fact that the extensive body of research associated with the Spanish scholar, Juan Carlos Rodríguez, has failed to receive the attention it deserves, judged purely on the basis of its inherent merits. While the reasons commonly adduced to explain such neglect are valid enough in themselves, they have tended to focus solely upon external, circumstantial factors and in consequence to fall some way short of explanatory adequacy. The recent appearance of two retrospective volumes by Juan Carlos Rodríguez, together with a collection of essays published in his honour², suggest that the moment is ripe to reconsider the strange case of the dog that did not bark³.

Writing in the Margins

José Moreno Pestaña, one of the contributors to the above-mentioned celebratory volume, poses the issue of Rodríguez's non-reception with refreshing, albeit interrogative directness:

¿Qué impidió, qué sigue impidiendo, la recepción, la discusión, la conversación, la crítica fraterna o acerba de Juan Carlos Rodríguez entre, por ejemplo, los filósofos, más escandalosamente, entre los filósofos marxólogos o marxistas, que deberían haberle prestado otra atención, incluso simplemente atención? (García, 2015: 391)

Moreno Pestaña himself has some interesting thoughts on the subject. He points to the time lag between developments in Spain, relatively marginalized until recently, and the metropolis, which explains why Marxism continued to enjoy a certain popularity south of the Pyrenees when it was rapidly falling from favour elsewhere; also to the role of the metropolis in setting the agenda, which ensured the eventual eclipse of Althusserianism in Spain, with predictable consequences for the research programme opened up by Rodríguez. Nationally, the latter's fringe status, as a Marxist operating within a bourgeois

² The volumes to which I refer are *De qué hablamos cuando hablamos de marxismo* (2013), which reproduces, in part or in their entirety, some of Rodríguez's more important theoretical statements; *Para una teoría de la literatura (40 años de historia)* (2015), which makes available for the first time some of the relevant groundwork that preceded the author's seminal *Teoría de la historia de la producción ideológica* (1974); and the celebratory *La literatura no ha existido siempre: para Juan Carlos Rodríguez* (2015).

³ The image of the dog that didn't bark is taken from Rodríguez, who was in turn indebted to Sir Arthur Doyle: 'Como nos enseñó Holmes, en "El perro de Baskerville", a veces lo que resulta verdaderamente significativo en lo que ocurre es *que no ocurra nada*. El "silencio" del perro que debió haber ladrado es lo que llama la atención a Holmes' (Rodríguez, 1990: 27). In point of fact, the text in question is not *The Hound of the Baskervilles* but *Silver Blaze*, a detail I took the liberty of correcting in my translation of *Teoría e historia* (Rodríguez, 2002: 33).

academy, was further compounded by his disciplinary location within literary studies, as opposed to philosophy; by his reputation as an Althusserian – ‘La etiqueta le hizo un flaco favor a la obra e impidió conocerla’ (393) –; and, finally, by the arrival of a new generation of scholars that simply lacked familiarity with the relevant canon and, given the contemporary cultural climate, little enthusiasm for acquiring it (397).

Moreno Pestaña is by no means the first to explore Rodríguez’s failure to ‘take’ in the context of the wider academy. In my capacity as the translator of *Teoría e historia* (into English), I vividly recall doing the rounds of the university and left-wing presses, rather like some down-at-heel travelling salesman, in what was for a long time a vain attempt to place my manuscript with a publisher. While there was no gainsaying the excellence of *Teoría e historia*, ran the habitual editorial response, the bias towards Spanish literature was excessive, at least from the standpoint of an Anglophone audience; more importantly, the Althusserian moment had long since come and gone, to be replaced by a whole new generation of post-modernists and post-structuralists for whom Althusser (and by implication Rodríguez) was a ‘dead dog’. The same editorial rounds also brought home to me the downside of Rodríguez’s dependence upon a discipline as notoriously conservative and anti-Marxist as anglophone Hispanism, through which his work was necessarily mediated (Read, 2015a: 70).

Desperately, one sought for positives. Was not the non-reception of Rodríguez’s work itself proof of the validity of his seminal concept of the ‘*ideological unconscious*’? Had not the Freudian unconscious been subject to the same repression? Did not any kind of unconscious, whether ideological or libidinal, presuppose *the desire not to know*? In the same spirit of desperation, one even attempted to turn Rodríguez’s isolation to good account: his very isolation, under a fascist dictatorship, I speculated, must surely have constituted almost laboratory conditions under which to develop a theory of ideological production (Read, 2015a: 70-71).

Inevitably, an element of resentment crept into the argument. In his introduction to the English translation of *Teoría e historia*, Carlos Enríquez del Árbol spoke of the ‘secretion of rancor’ that attended the first appearance of *Teoría e historia* (Rodríguez, 2002:10). Had the work been discussed, found wanting, theoretically speaking, and discarded, then that at least would have accorded with the accepted norms of the academy. But the case of Rodríguez was different: ‘People just fell silent, turned their backs, without even shrugging their shoulders’ (11). Nor, unsurprisingly, has Enríquez del Árbol’s sense of outrage diminished with the passage of time: his personal contribution to *La literatura no ha existido siempre* finds him continuing to inveigh against the ‘ignorance’, not to mention ‘bad faith’, of an academy that refuses to accord Rodríguez his due (Enríquez del Árbol, 2015; 162n3).

An understandable reaction, perhaps, and yet and yet ... we are now some forty years after the publication of *Teoría e historia* and even fourteen years after the appearance of its English translation, and still Rodríguez’s work has failed to take! In the meantime, Althusserianism itself has been renewed through, among others, Kaplan and

Sprinker (1993) and Resch (1992), further energized, in the new century, by the appearance of such texts as Montag's *Louis Althusser* (Montag: 2003) and by unpublished material of Althusser (Althusser 2003, 2006, 2014). Nor is there any end in sight: more recently, discussions of Althusser continue to occupy whole issues of major journals (*Crisis and Critique*, 2015), even as Althusserianism undergoes major transformation through the debates surrounding Althusser's aleatory Marxism (Diefenbach et al 2013); and all of this against the backdrop of a global crisis of capitalism and, more significantly, of a crisis in the dominant ideology. If Rodríguez's theorization of the ideological unconscious cannot prove its relevance in such circumstances, then something more must be at issue than the institutional deafness of the First World academy. The time has surely come to revisit more critically the 'silence' that shrouds Rodríguez's work.

To Form or Not to Form a School

'[S]i hay una obra que ha producido un verdadero campo de cultivo, no quiero hablar de escuela, es la suya' (Enríquez del Árbol, 2015; 162n3) The gist of the claim is clear: Rodríguez's research programme has been productive in the extreme. But less clear is the parenthetical reference: 'no quiero hablar de escuela'. Exactly what is being implied? Presumably, something along the lines of: 'But, of course, Rodríguez would not be so tastelessly proselytizing as to form a school', etc. From which we are further to deduce that the absence of a school of followers is not so much regrettable as positively laudable. And Enríquez del Árbol is not the only one of the contributors to *La literatura no ha existido siempre* to adopt such a position. In his 'presentación' to the volume Miguel Ángel García writes: 'Naturalmente Juan Carlos Rodríguez nunca ha querido ser un *maestro de escuela* [...] Nunca se ha propuesto crear escuela; su pensamiento ha sido suyo en sí' (García, 2015a: XII). *Naturally!* The presumption here is unambiguous: being a master-thinker and forming a school are incompatible. Rodríguez, the argument runs, 'no tuvo afán de despertar, con su ruptura formal y estética, ningún proselitismo' (XII)⁴.

But this is surely very curious. If, as García has further indicated, Rodríguez has dedicated himself to constructing a complex research programme, 'ladrillo sobre ladrillo, palabra por palabra, libro sobre libro, idea sobre idea', etc. (XII), wherein precisely lies the virtue in not systematically promoting it as such, through the medium of a school? The same question can be put to Manuel del Pino, another contributor to *La literatura no ha existido siempre*, who similarly attempts to justify the absence of a 'juancarlismo' or un 'rodriguismo' (Pino Berenguel, 2015:456), in his case on the grounds that Rodríguez allegedly performs the same role in relation to Marx as did Galileo with respect to Copernicus, namely that of a 'mopper-upper' (in the Kuhnian sense). But, again, the argument is scarcely convincing; for if it fell to Rodríguez to foreground the crucial issue of ex-

⁴ Anecdotally, I can confirm that García is accurately presenting Rodríguez's personal position. When, some years ago, I ventured to speak of the 'Granada school', Rodríguez objected. There was, he insisted, no such thing.

ploitation (458), among Marx's other insights, why should such an achievement not have formed the basis of a school? After all, other Marxist schools had placed the emphasis elsewhere? And, indeed, does not the role of a 'mopper-upper' presuppose precisely the existence of such a school or at least of a shared problematic? Of course, every sensitive supervisor will accept the need to allow students the requisite space in which to develop their own ideas – Rodríguez, we are given to understand has been a model in this respect – but that, surely, is another matter altogether.

Not every contributor to *La literatura no ha existido siempre*, it needs to be said, shares the view outlined by Enríquez del Árbol, García and Pino Berenguel. Juan Carlos Abril not only takes for granted the existence of a school of followers, he also insists that the function it serves is now more vital than ever (Abril, 2015: 7). Whether or not this is true, the potential fertility of Rodríguez's problematic is beyond dispute, as is demonstrated by a number of essays, notably those by Juan García Única, Antonio Malpica Cuello, and Juan Varela-Portas de Orduña, who extend the Spaniard's thinking to a number of fresh fields. But they are the exceptions that prove the rule. Symptomatically, the majority of the papers included in *La literatura no ha existido siempre* consist of independent literary studies of the traditional kind, which have little or no direct relevance to Rodríguez's research and which occasionally (and unconsciously), as in the case of Pedro Cerezo Galán, promote theoretical positions diametrically opposed to it. The dominant impression is, emphatically, not of a school of scholars, bound together by shared interests, but of a group of professional academics, quietly intent upon implementing their own agenda.

Not that academic Marxists are any more able than others to escape the pressures of individualism – their behaviour is, after all, determined by the same set of productive relations. Indeed, theirs is an individualism compounded by the isolation to which they are condemned within the university, as within any bourgeois institution, and which they are bound to assume if only to survive professionally. Given which, these same Marxists should also be the first to recognize the elementary inequalities that obtain within this same institution, as throughout capitalist societies, to recognize that there is something slightly eerie about the animated discussions within the pages of *La literatura* as to the ideal nature of professor/student relations. How can distortion-free communication be at all feasible within such institutions?⁵ That said, it is hard to find any virtue in the attempt to raise to the status of a principle the refusal to impart a body of technical / conceptual skills to student-apprentices, as part of an on-going, open-ended research programme. Indeed, one might reasonably argue that the support of a group of followers, dedicated to expounding and critiquing the work of a master-thinker, such as Rodríguez, is a pre-condition for the work's dissemination.

⁵ Celebratory volumes, we concede, have their norms, but these norms aside, any discussion of academic freedom that lays claim to theoretical adequacy must seriously weigh the institutional nature of the professions (see Larson: 1977) and, more specifically, of the exploitative relations of production prevailing in the university (see Curtis: 2001). Wherein, exactly, lies the difference, in terms of financing, between public and private institutions? What is the nature of the academic commodity? How is surplus value produced and extracted? What is the nature of the academic labour process? Is it possible to distinguish between the technical and social divisions of labour?

On the matter of Althusser

Having qualified, if not disqualified, the external circumstances that may have contributed to Rodríguez's failure to 'take'⁶, let us begin to turn our attention to the possible internal reasons, for a consideration of which we can do no better than take as our point of departure the Spaniard's relation to Althusser.

While, to be sure, Althusser knew the solitude that all too often has afflicted Marx's followers, including, as we have seen, Rodríguez, his was the solitude not of a writer who was simply ignored but, on the contrary, of one who was the object of close attention, albeit often of a highly critical kind – the classic example is E. P. Thompson's *The Poverty of Theory*⁷. The ultimate put-down came in Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut's *La pensée 68*, which famously located Althusserianism, along with the Beatles' music or Godard's first film, within a recent but vanished past (Ferry and Renaut, 1985: 200). Some of Althusser's most prominent critics included former students and those who, while at one time deeply indebted to him, subsequently made every effort to distance themselves from him and, even, to deny their former allegiance. Rodríguez, we hasten to add, never fell into either category. On the contrary, he was the first to acknowledge the presence of his former teacher, who 'sigue hablando a través de su silencio' (Rodríguez, 1990: 28).

Teoría e historia, it bears recalling, appeared some years before Althusserianism had been seriously forced onto the defensive. Hence, when in a long footnote Rodríguez criticized Althusser for his alleged ahistoricism (Rodríguez 1990: 70-71n36), his comments were clearly intended to be seen as a perfectly normal part of stock-taking, integral to and contained within the boundaries of an Althusserian problematic. How could they be taken otherwise, given the fact that *Teoría e historia* was imbued with the presence of Althusser? At all events, as Rodríguez proceeded to explain, it was never a question, for those working within the Althusserian problematic, of tracing 'sources' and 'influences', an activity that in itself betrayed an unconscious allegiance to bourgeois notions of the privatized individual. And the same applies to *Althusser. Blow-up (las líneas maestras de un pensamiento distinto)* (2002, 2003), in which, while continuing to target the French philosopher for his ahistorical 'philosophism', Rodríguez insists upon the even greater relevance of Althusser's work to an understanding of a now all-pervasive capitalism (Rodríguez, 2013:206).

But if Rodríguez's allegiance to Althusser remained a constant, by the time *Blow-up* appeared the 'fall' of Althusserianism had become an accepted commonplace throughout the bourgeois academy and a whole generation of its students had moved on

⁶ I am clearly in no position to address the question of the personal relations that prevail within the Spanish academy and, more specifically, within the Granada academy, which, in any case, can only be of marginal significance to our present concerns.

⁷ In the opinion of Resch, even the more enlightened commentators allow Althusser's political affiliations to colour their assessment of his theoretical achievements (Resch, 1990: 4-5).

to other things. To this extent, irrespective of the validity or otherwise of its arguments, Rodríguez's late intervention was ill-timed. And the same criticism can be levelled against Enríquez del Árbol's own attempt to promote the author of *Teoría e historia* at Althusser's expense: '... y dejaba atrás a Althusser (que era para algunos en esa época un primer referente ideológico)' (Enríquez del Árbol, 2015: 163). As a member of the '68 generation, Enríquez should have known better, that *Teoría e historia*, along with Rodríguez's subsequent texts, were deeply informed by Althusserianism, and that any attempt to accord Rodríguez his due presupposed an in-depth understanding of the Althusserian canon. Like beached whales, left high and dry by a receding tide, such scholars seemed unable to grasp the reality of the current conjuncture and it was left to others to alert them to the new historical circumstances and to their consequences. Chief among the latter was the fact that a new younger generation of scholars found Rodríguez's work inaccessible if only for the reason that they were no longer equipped to interpret it: 'Quizá porque exigía competencias de las que pocos disponían desde hacía una generación, tanto en la filosofía en general como en el marxismo en particular, consagrados ambos a la lectura internalista de un canon' (Pestaña, 2015: 397).

The only problem was that, given the reality of what appeared to be a wholesale retreat from Althusser on the part of their elders, there was nothing to encourage the younger students in the Spanish academy to undertake the necessary reading programme and every reason to join as cheer-leaders those bourgeois critics who continued to inveigh against Althusserianism and to pronounce upon its demise. Some even went to the extent of attributing Rodríguez's failure to 'take' directly to the perception of him as an Althusserian: 'Verdad es, ciertamente, que [Rodríguez] se ubicaba dentro de la genealogía althusseriana y, en los mentideros intelectuales, seguramente, fue percibido como tal' (Moreno Pestaña, 2015: 393). The perception was one Moreno Pestaña did his best to rectify: Rodríguez was, in truth, 'muy poco althusseriano – si por tal se entiende el aplicador de una doctrina o el comentador de un héroe internacional' (394). The extensive footnote from *Teoría e historia*, in which Rodríguez marginally qualifies his support for Althusser, is conveniently elided with the later critique of Althusser's 'philosophism', the latter understood as the promotion of a transhistorical philosophical tradition: '... y semejante disparate tendrá consecuencias en las más celebradas de sus teorías' (394). With friends like these, what need does one have of enemies?

Unfortunately, the position assumed by Pestaña is not 'his', but that of a whole new generation, including one of the editors of *La literatura no ha existido siempre*, Miguel Angel García, who parades the opinions of a conservative, elitist member of the bourgeois academy, George Steiner, to promote a negative view of Althusser: '... es poco leído en la actualidad. Su glosa sobre Marx ha demostrado ser una excentricidad dogmática' (García, 2015^a: XIV). Of course, like Moreno Pestaña, García is constrained to concede the undeniable: 'El profesor Rodríguez no ha ocultado, en ningún momento, la admiración por la talla del maestro' (XV). But the emphasis, as his subsequent essay reveals, is to lie elsewhere, namely upon Rodríguez's targeting of Althusser's 'filosofismo' and

‘substantivización’ of philosophy, to which Althusser allegedly succumbed in his capacity as a professional philosopher (García 2015b, 230). The same charges will be repeated by others. Manuel del Pino, for example, celebrates Rodríguez’s ‘implacable’ critique of Althusser’s philosophism in much the same terms (Pino Berenguel, 2015: 459).

These charges will be contested below, where it will be argued that, among other things, their effect has been to deprive Rodríguez and his followers of the philosophical means necessary effectively to explain and defend their own problematic, with obvious consequences for the (non-)reception of Rodríguez’s work. But before then, I am going to elaborate on the lessons to be learned about this non-reception from the task of translating Rodríguez’s texts.

Towards a Symptomatic Reading

While translators are guaranteed no superior insight into a text, it is certainly true that they are driven by the nature of their enterprise to transcend the idea of reading which, in the words of Althusser, ‘makes a written discourse the immediate transparency of the true and the real the discourse of a voice’ (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 16), in favour of a scientific or ‘symptomatic’ reading of the text. The latter notion presupposes the existence of a dialectic between, on the one hand, the problematic whose structural principles govern the reading and, on the other, the structural principles that constitute the unconscious structure of the text. I was to confront the practical ramifications of such a dialectic on undertaking a translation of *Teoría e historia*.

One problem that immediately arose was the absence of a ‘Contents’ page in the Spanish original, of the kind that habitually accompanied such texts in English. Was I simply to leave a blank, at the risk of frustrating my reader’s expectations, or, alternatively, to transfer to the beginning of my translation the ‘índice’ that appeared at the end of the Spanish text? Common sense suggested the latter option. But hardly had one problem been solved than another reared its ugly head. What the Spanish original categorized as an ‘índice’ turned out, on closer inspection, to fall into an intermediate category: too abbreviated to serve the purpose of an ‘Index’, too elaborate to qualify as a ‘Contents’.

In this way the problems continued to multiply: if one subsection of Part I was entitled ‘Animismo y sustantialismo’, wherein lay its difference from subsection I of Part II entitled ‘Sustantialismo y animismo como matrices ideológicas’? Similarly, if the first subsection of Part I bore the title ‘La relación Privado-Público’, how did it differ from subsection 5 of Part II, carrying the sub-title ‘La dialéctica privado-público’? And, of course, as invariably happens when cultural considerations come into play, so too do value judgements. Did Spaniards not understand the importance of rigorous categorization? And while we were on the subject of rigour, how had the mistake over *Silver Blaze* and such erratas as ‘adición’ (for ‘edición’) escaped the attentions of a professional editor? Except that the obvious turned out to be less than obvious insofar as the very term ‘edición’, in

the limited sense of ‘printing’, seemingly had a somewhat different meaning from its English cognate.

And so on and so forth. Perhaps Spanish printing presses did not have ‘editors’, as I understood them, or could not afford them, which would explain why no attempt had been made to correct blatant imperfections in the first ‘edition’ of *Teoría e historia*. Some of these were of an entirely technical kind, involving, for example, the printing of 47 and 48 in the wrong order. But others posed more serious problems. What, for example, was one to make of the statement: ‘En una palabra: mayor dependencia del exterior, en la “literatura moderna”’ (Rodríguez, 1990:9), which seemed to contradict the entire drift of Rodríguez’s argument concerning the *interiority* of modern literature, in contrast to the *exteriority* of feudal ‘books’? Only when the same passage was reproduced in *De qué hablamos* was the puzzle solved. Thus: ‘En una palabra: mayor dependencia del exterior en el “feudalismo, mayor interiorización en la “literature moderna”’ (Rodríguez, 2013:75).

As the task of translating blended into that of editing, there was no end to the changes I found myself introducing. Fairly soon, Rodríguez’s rambling paragraphs, that sometimes covered entire pages, were being broken down into smaller, more manageable units; material in the body of the text was being removed and inserted into footnotes; and subsections were being numbered, to impose a degree of order. All these steps were taken with the aim of facilitating the comprehension of a text that, in its seeming disorderliness, always courted dismissal by an Anglophone reading public accustomed to a more structured presentation. And all the time this was going on, I myself was struggling, at the hermeneutic level, to capture the meaning (in English) of a text, *Teoría e historia*, in which a whole conceptual field was being radically reconfigured in ways that I felt were important but which were difficult to decipher. By way of example, let us consider the word ‘segregar’, as this presented itself, on the third page of the Introduction.

... la imagen de un individuo ‘libre’, ‘autónomo’, origen y fin de sí mismo, poseyendo un ‘interior’ – una *mente*, una *razón*, etc. – única fuente – y único responsable – de todas sus ideas, sus juicios, sus sensaciones – y únicamente – *segregada* desde la matriz ideológica burguesa. (Rodríguez 1990, 7, italics added to ‘segregada’)

The cognate term for ‘segregada’, of course, is ‘segregated’, which was initially what I took the Spanish to mean, except that, as I quickly began to suspect and was confirmed as I read on, this could not possibly be the meaning intended in the present context, which appeared to connote the notion of *fusing*, in other words, the exact opposition of ‘segregation’ or ‘separation’. Hence my translation: ‘... derives directly – and uniquely – from the bourgeois ideological matrix’ (Rodríguez, 2002: 18). What escaped my attention at the time was the notion of ‘secrete’, as an alternative meaning of ‘segregar’, at which I would eventually arrive after completing a long detour through the totality of Rodríguez’s text and others that lay beyond it, specifically those of Althusser, from whom

Rodríguez had, presumably, derived the term. Thus: ‘Human societies *secrete* ideology as the very element and atmosphere indispensable to their historical respiration and life’ (Althusser, 1990: 232, italics added). Which explains the gravitation, during the course of my translation, from ‘derives directly (and exclusively from)’ towards ‘mere secretions’ (Rodríguez, 1990: 23) and ‘secreted’ (31)⁸.

The semantic intricacies of ‘secrete’, while vital to an understanding of the ideological function, as theorized by Rodríguez, are less important in the present context than the curiously circular process by which I arrived at an understanding of them. This process, to elaborate, begins with a hermeneutic moment at which one reads the text as if it were written by oneself (‘segregar’ equals ‘segregate’), then moves onto a more sophisticated level, at which one begins to learn the language of the original (‘segregar’ equals ‘to derive directly from’), before finally arriving at the indigenous structure of the text’s meanings, which presupposes the ‘secretion’ of meaning, at the level of an ideological unconscious, throughout the totality of a social formation, always on the understanding that a grasp of the final stages of the process are a prerequisite for a grasp of what precedes. Those at all familiar with Althusser’s texts will immediately recognize in this circular dialectics the dynamics of a ‘symptomatic reading’, as applied specifically to Marx’s texts, a precondition for the understanding of which, Althusser was adamant, is Marxist theory (Althusser, 1990a: 38). Althusser, it is true, prefers to talk in terms of a Freudian, as opposed to ideological unconscious (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 16), but this, surely, is beside the point, which is that the ‘latent’ structure of a text is to be identified not with its ‘manifest’ or visible content, understood as the intentions of its author, but with the structural mechanisms that make the text possible.

What possible bearing could such considerations have upon the question of the non-reception of Rodríguez’s texts? At first glance, it may seem, very little. True, the dialectic cycle may pose something of a paradox, but the latter is resolved once one takes into account the notion of repeated readings, whereby, with regard to our specific example, the true meaning of ‘segregar’ can be accessed only on a second or even third reading. But that surely is to miss the pervasive nature of the ideological unconscious, which, as we saw above, extended far beyond the meanings of individual lexical items to encompass matters as seemingly banal as the editorial layout of texts. If Anglophone texts begin with a Contents page, it is for reasons determined by a prevailing ideological unconscious, of empiricist extraction.

A certain kind of text, we are suggesting, requires a certain kind of reader, who is accustomed to a certain kind of narrative, one that, within the empiricist context, unfolds in a linear pattern; and if the same text ends with a detailed index, it is ‘taken for granted’ (ideologically) that the narrative consists, as a totality, of discrete elements, which lend

⁸ Rodríguez will increasingly refer to the ‘humus que nos sustenta’ (cf. Rodríguez, 2001: 31) through which to capture the notion of an all-pervasive ideological unconscious, and this will be the term favoured, for example, throughout *Para una teoría de la literatura*.

themselves to being broken down and serially arranged in alphabetical order. Conversely, readers accustomed to the cyclical dialectics described by Althusser will not only expect and tolerate, but also favour a narrative that doubles back upon itself, by way of working its way towards a grasp of a textual whole. This whole, while certainly made up of relatively autonomous sections, constitutes precisely that, a *whole*, which needs finally to be grasped as such.

The point I am trying to make should by now be clear: any reader who approaches *Teoría e historia* from an empiricist standpoint, as I unconsciously did in my capacity as translator, is destined to feel frustrated at every turn by a text that perversely appears to resist interpretation, a text that, furthermore, only becomes accessible to this same reader on condition that they break with their unconsciously held ideological norms.

Negotiating the ‘Break’

In the postdata to the second edition of *Teoría e historia*, Rodríguez foregrounds the significance in his development of the ‘break’ negotiated vis-à-vis the theoretical premises on which his earlier work was based: ‘literalmente los arrojé a la calle’ (Rodríguez, 1990: 27). And it will be his business, in the Introduction to his book, to spell out more broadly the humanistic perspective on literature from which it is necessary to break in order to develop a distinctively materialist view of literary production. Dispensed with are the notions of ‘author’, ‘critic’, and ‘reader’, and – superordinate to these – the notion of the (‘free’, ‘autonomous’) ‘subject’, a list soon to be extended to include ‘Reason’, ‘unreason’, ‘mind’, and ‘internal psychology’, all of which are now placed under erasure. And that was only the beginning: also to be ‘picked up with pincers’ (to use Rodríguez’s own turn of phrase) are the period concepts of the ‘Middle Ages’ and ‘Renaissance’, together with those of ‘form’ and ‘content’, and ‘text’ and ‘context’, in short, everything associated with the transhistorical notions of ‘Man’ and ‘Literature’.

The notion of a ‘break’, to remind ourselves, was originally theorised by Althusser, with reference to the break that separates the early, ‘humanistic’ Marx, who prioritised the notion of ‘species being’, from the late Marx, who introduced a whole new battery of concepts (mode of production, relations of production, surplus value, etc.) to facilitate the theorization of a ‘social formation’. To disengage oneself from an ideology in this way is never an easy task, Althusser warns, and it is only the illusions of the idealist that could lead us to believe otherwise. The principal temptation, to be resisted, is to project Marx’s later consciousness onto his youthful intelligence: ‘*The contingency of Marx’s beginnings was this enormous layer of ideology beneath which he was born, this crushing layer which he succeeded in breaking through*’ (Althusser, 1990a: 74). ‘Succeeded’, but at what personal cost! A cost to be borne by anyone who would emulate his achievement, as Althusser makes perfectly clear in a later text: ‘To become “ideologists of the working class” (Lenin), “organic intellectuals” of the proletariat (Gramsci), intellectuals have to

carry out a radical revolution in their ideas: a long, painful and difficult re-education. An endless external and *internal* struggle' (Althusser, 1971:12).

Now I think that, in the light of such comments and of his own traumatic experience, one might have expected Rodríguez to have been particularly sensitive to the situation of his average reader, who, it might be supposed, was unconsciously attached to the traditional position he had so meticulously mapped out. It is somewhat surprising, therefore, to find him, even in his introduction, dismissing the controversy surrounding the Althusserian break as unworthy of consideration: 'Por supuesto no voy a recordar la polémica – pro o antialthusseriana – sobre el "humanismo", tan ruidosa pocos años atrás y tan aburrida a fuerza de ser "ciega"' (Rodríguez, 1990: 10). Even in the context of the mid-1970s, when the major humanistic assaults upon Althusser were still to be mounted, the dismissal of a problem that was likely to determine the (non)reception of *Teoría* was, to say the very least, ill-considered. Specifically, the claim to be stating the obvious ('por supuesto') could only appear condescending to the humanist reader. Subsequent attempts to bully the same reader into silence and submission ('Esto no es abstruso más que para quien quiera ignorarlo' (157)) could only have the same effect⁹.

The situation might have been saved had Rodríguez clarified what he wanted to put in the place of the humanistic apparatus. Yet, curiously, his own concepts are introduced *obliquely*, beginning with the opening remarks in which 'literary discourses' are traced to their historical origins, '... a partir de una serie de condiciones – asimismo históricas – muy estrictas: las condiciones derivadas del nivel ideológico característico de las formaciones sociales "modernas" o "burguesas" en sentido general' (5). The emphasis upon history, even the radicalness of history, is not in itself likely to trouble the reader unduly – there is, after all, little about it that is particularly Marxist, and much that would be shared by critics of many different stripes. Nor is there anything particularly scary about the quote-marks that decorate 'modern' and 'bourgeois'. But the unmarked categories of 'social formation' and 'ideological instance' are drawn from the heartland of Althusserian theory and these do pose a problem of assimilation.

At this early stage, the obstacles to comprehension are not overwhelming, and a reader possessed of a sufficient measure of goodwill might be expected to press on regardless, but their impact will prove to be cumulative, beginning with 'la lógica productiva del texto' (6), a concept that remains at this stage unexplained. Likewise, the notion of an 'ideological matrix' (8), which only makes sense in the context of an Althusserian 'problematic', itself a notion that makes its appearance unannounced and unexplained (10). But all these instances pale into insignificance alongside the emphatically *oblique* introduction of Rodríguez's seminal concept of the ideological unconscious. 'La noción de sujeto (y toda la problemática ahí inscrita) es radicalmente histórica, decíamos, porque se segrega directamente (y exclusivamente) desde la matriz misma del inconsciente ide-

⁹ Do we surprise here one more reason to account for Rodríguez's failure to form a school; for, assuredly, who would dare question a 'catedrático' so theoretically well-armed?

ológico burgués: el “siervo” no puede ser jamás “sujeto”, etc.’ (10). To have a key notion – that of the ‘subject’ – snatched from view, precisely as a series of unfamiliar concepts press for consideration, is likely to prove a step too far. And if the bourgeois reader has yet to grasp the fact that s/he is an unwelcome visitor, then the arrival of the notion of ‘Aparato Estatal’ (23) is guaranteed to persuade them otherwise.

Rodríguez, it is true, will address the relevant social mechanisms and their *modus operandi*, within the framework of a social formation, but in a manner so confusing as to trouble even a card-carrying Althusserian. Thus, we are assured, the ideological function is an ‘effective reality’, although invisible in its operations, whereas the ideological ‘notions’ themselves are visible but not real, a paradox that clearly called for some serious philosophical underlabouring; instead of which we are treated to long passage which is so convoluted and mystifying that when Rodríguez came to reproduce the Introduction in *De qué hablamos*, he judiciously chose to omit it in its entirety (see Read, 2015b: 473-74).

Our objection, let us make clear, is not to the nub of Rodríguez’s argument, difficult though it is to extract. A whole social reality, ontologically real but empirically invisible, does indeed slip from view, as Rodríguez argues, to leave behind a series of ideological notions, of the subject, serf, etc; moreover, these same notions are indeed ‘lived’ by individuals, who misrecognize in them the reality of their real social relations (of exploitation); and finally the relevant ideological notions do indeed serve unobtrusively to grease exploitative social relations. That said, the only readers in a position to disentangle Rodríguez’s syntax are those already familiar with the relevant Althusserian canon and, hence, with the intricacies and complexities of a social formation, defined as a ‘totality of instances articulated on the basis of a determinate mode of production’ (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 207n5).

Why did Rodríguez choose not to familiarize his reader with the Althusserian problematic? There are several possible reasons. To begin with, the reader he had in mind – his ‘ideal reader’ – may have been one of his Althusserian colleagues. These, it could reasonably be assumed, would already be acquainted with the pertinent concepts and the practice of ‘symptomatic reading’. Only the empiricist reader, it will be recalled, demands that things be explained ‘in plain language’, in a linear fashion, etc. The assumption that he is speaking to the converted would certainly explain why Rodríguez only refers directly to Althusser in two footnotes, in one of which, we have seen, he elucidates the finer detail of Althusser’s views on the history of science, whereas in the other, significantly, he rejects the whole concept of authorial ‘indebtedness’ in favour of the workings of an *impersonal* problematic.

Now while an impersonal procedure of this kind may be normal practice in the hard sciences, things are somewhat different for the human sciences. These, by their very nature, must overcome a number of epistemological handicaps: they concern themselves with irreducible, emergent strata of reality, and therefore require concepts and laws other than those of the natural sciences; they are unable to test their hypotheses through experimentation; they must take into account the fact that human agents transform as well as

reproduce social structures; crucially, they generate the kind of knowledge that can, and does, impact the social structures that constitute its object, not least of all in the case of historical materialism, which perforce finds itself embroiled in a struggle over the status of science (see Bhaskar, 1978: 1979). In such circumstances, Rodríguez's claim to speak *'objectively'*, which he never ceases to reiterate, counts for little.

Circumstantial factors further compounded the Spaniard's difficulties from the mid-1970s: Althusserianism was poised to enter into decline even as he was writing, and its 'birth and death' would shortly be pronounced by influential scholars on all sides, Marxist included. This meant that the number of scholars on whom Rodríguez could count, whose familiarity with the relevant canon he could assume, was about to shrink alarmingly, and would continue to shrink over the ensuing decades. A new generation of students, even in Granada, gradually lost contact with the Althusserian legacy, without a knowledge of which, objectively speaking, Rodríguez's work made little sense. And, what made matters worse, their grand master would, through the critique he mounted against Althusser, contribute to his own marginalization.

Blow-up

One of the key texts to be reproduced (in its entirety) in *De qué hablamos*, namely *Blow-up*, contains Rodríguez's mature reflections on Althusser. The latter's continuing presence, to recapitulate, had been dutifully acknowledged in *Teoría e historia* and understandably so: the Spaniard's work, we have established, was literally unthinkable outside the Althusserian problematic. Althusser's work, we also saw, only received close attention of any kind in several lengthy footnotes to the said volume, one of which dealt with the Frenchman's views on the subject of science. While these confessedly lent support to Rodríguez's emphasis upon radical historicity, through their rejection of the transhistorical notion of Science in favour of a plurality of sciences (71n36), the Spaniard was also insistent that 'Althusser no lleva hasta el fondo esta problemática' (71). The qualification has been eagerly seized upon by Rodríguez's younger followers, in changed circumstances, and used to justify their allegiance to the stock-in-trade anti-Althusserianism of the bourgeois academy. It is an allegiance Rodríguez has done little to counteract: while he continues in *Blow-up* to pay due homage to his erstwhile teacher, his earlier footnote is now inflated into a wholesale critique of Althusser's alleged *philosophism* and *ahistoricism*. To begin to disentangle these threads, let us briefly return to the texts of Althusser.

For Althusser, the concepts introduced by Marx in his mature texts must be seen as inaugurating a decisive break, leading to the creation of a new science, historical materialism. Every science, the argument runs, constitutes itself historically by breaking with ideology, and continuing to break with it: 'we know that a "pure" science only exists on condition that it continually frees itself from the ideology which occupies it, haunts it, or lies in wait for it' (Althusser, 1990a: 170). Althusser never wavered from this position,

which he introduced in *For Marx* and reaffirms in his *Essays in Self-Criticism*. In rejecting its ideological past as ‘erroneous’, a science unavoidably draws an axiological distinction, the latter legitimated on the basis that it is indispensable to an understanding of the historical development of science.

The notion of ideology as error, the Althusserian argument runs, is to be distinguished from that of ideology understood as the expression of ‘interests’, beyond the necessity of knowledge, in the context of the historical struggle with science. ‘Without embarking on the problem of the relations between science and its (ideological) past, we can say that ideology, as a system of representations, is distinguished from science in that in it the practico-social function is more important than the theoretical function (function as knowledge)’ (Althusser, 1990a: 231). The distinction, to be sure, is not one consistently maintained by Althusser (see Resch, 1992:165-66) but is crucial, for all that, insofar as neither the concept of ideology as subject-centred nor of science as concept-based depend on categories of truth and adequacy. The point cannot be emphasized enough: over certain issues, science can be wrong and ideology can be right. This position is also one that will be maintained throughout the entire course of Althusser’s work.

Up to this point, everything is straightforward. Problems only arose when Althusser tried to guarantee philosophically the axiological claims of science by transforming the substantive concepts of science into the philosophical-epistemological (and equally substantive) categories of truth and falsity. ‘I shall call Theory (with a capital T), general theory, that is, the Theory of practice in general, itself elaborated on the basis of the Theory of existing theoretical practices (of the sciences), which transforms into “knowledges” (scientific truths) the ideological product of existing ‘empirical’ practices (the concrete activity of men)’ (Althusser, 1990a: 168). By this unfortunate move, Althusser subordinated the historical development of science and the historical struggle between science and ideology ‘to the ahistorical Neverland of philosophy, pure reason, and epistemological absolutism’ (Resch, 1990: 166).

Such was the position assumed in *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, but it was clearly unsustainable: among other things, it conflicted with Althusser’s conventionalist position regarding the plurality of sciences. Hence, in *Essays in Self-Criticism* the philosopher undertook to correct as ‘erroneous’ the ‘theoreticism’ or ‘speculative rationalism’ to which he had succumbed in his earlier work: ‘... it was *speculation* to want to conceive the contrast between established truths and acknowledged errors within a General Theory of Science and Ideology and the distinction between them’ (Althusser, 1976: 124n19). Crucially, as he now confessed, the class struggle had been absent from such speculation.

Now while this was fine as far as it went, it left hanging the crucial *philosophical* question of a non-rationalist, non-speculative defence of the distinction between science and ideology. Hence, the significance of two key developments in Althusser’s work: firstly, an increasing readiness to acknowledge the capacity of ideology to impact the production (and reception) of knowledge effects (Althusser, 1990(b): 110-17); and secondly, philosophy’s emergence as a theoretical and ideological battleground where, among oth-

er things, the category of science itself is at stake. ‘We therefore have the right, and duty, to speak (as all the classics have done) of Marxist theory, and within Marxist theory, of a *science* and a philosophy: provided that we do not thereby fall into theoreticism, speculation or positivism’ (Althusser, 1976:116). The philosophical category, it followed, was something to be fought for, and the place where it was fought for was philosophy.

We are now in a position to take on board Rodríguez’s charge of philosophism, levelled against Althusser and obediently adopted by his followers. In essence this charge involves interpreting Althusser’s initial theoreticism as the defining feature of his work and down-grading, if not ignoring, the subsequent self-criticism and redefinitions. Thus: ‘... ese deslizamiento autocrítico, realmente lo único que hacía era llevar el problema hasta su extremo más inaudito: la filosofía sería la *última instancia* de poder en el nivel “superestructural”, de modo similar a como la economía era la *última instancia* de poder en el nivel “infraestructural”’ (Rodríguez, 2013; 167). Far from rectifying his theoreticist stance, Althusser’s self-criticism simply reaffirmed it: ‘Y ésta es, insisto, una línea maestra que Althusser no abandonó jamás’ (167). Althusser’s rejection of epistemological absolutism and his defence of a limited rationalism, based on the *adequacy* of scientific concepts, as opposed to their *truth*, are simply dismissed as ‘un curioso juego de manos’ (173). In the process, Rodríguez collapses the distinction between philosophy as the Science of sciences and philosophy as the underlabourer of the sciences. ‘[L]a filosofía habría nacido (desde Platón) a partir del modelo lógico de las ciencias’, he writes, paraphrasing Althusser, ‘pero a la vez la filosofía se convertía en guardiana, en vigilante de las ciencias, que – incapaces de pensarse a sí mismas – solían someterse a la ideología inconsciente de “sus” sabios ...’ (173).

Rodríguez’s presentation, it has to be said, is far from clear: thus, on the one hand, he seeks to tie Althusser to his early rationalism: ‘... la filosofía se convierte en ciencia de las ciencias (que no saben de lo que hablan; esto venía de atrás ...), al modo como en *Leer el Capital* la filosofía se convertía en una teoría de las teorías’ (199); whereas, on the other, he concedes that Althusser ‘se está deslizando irremisiblemente hacia un auténtico planteamiento’ (200), which consists of exposing the rear of bourgeois philosophy, which is to say, of exposing its role in the defence and maintenance of exploitative social relations. In the ensuing confusion, the Spaniard fails to see, or refuses to recognize, that Althusser has indeed substantially revised his earlier formulations, such that, even as he denies it the role of arbiter of the sciences, philosophy continues to perform a crucial role in the ideological battles over the status of science. For once, we are forced to conclude, Rodríguez is ill served by the cyclical dialectics characteristic of ‘symptomatic reading’, whose progressive/regressive strategy commits its practitioner to the composition of formless paragraphs.

Philosophical debates are generally of marginal interest to practical scientists, at least among the hard sciences, who tend to take their theoretical object and the formal criteria of their science for granted, once this has crossed a certain threshold of scientificity. That said, the theorist dedicated to prosecuting the theory and history of ideo-

logical production, from the standpoint of a science as precariously poised as historical materialism, is hardly in the position of the average practitioner. Philosophical debates within this particular sphere often figure prominently and can be of crucial importance. And that is abstruse only for somebody who does not wish to believe it. In undercutting the role of philosophy, Rodríguez has, in effect, disqualified himself (and his students) from undertaking the defence of science, from which, among other things, the non-reception of his work necessarily follows.

On Althusser's Ahistoricism

Althusser, it will be recalled, draws a crucial distinction in his famous essay, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', between 'ideology in general' and particular ideologies, which 'always express *class positions*'; further to which, he argued that that while 'ideologies have a history of their own', 'ideology *in general* has no history' (Althusser, 1971:160-01); ideology itself, the argument runs, exists in an ideological apparatus, the materiality of which leads Althusser to discard the notion of ideas while preserving the key concept of the subject. From this point on, everything turns on the mechanism of interpellation, illustrated along the following lines: 'And the Lord cried to Moses "Moses!" And Moses replied "It is (really) I! I am Moses thy servant, speak and I shall listen!"' And it is through this exchange that Moses comes to recognize himself as a subject (179). Further to which, Althusser extracts the following theses: all practice exists in the form of ideology; all ideology exists through and for subjects.

Perforce, given the importance he attaches to historicity, Rodríguez takes exception both to the illustrative example and to the theses. Moses, he insists, could never have said 'I am a subject', nor could he have conceived of himself as such, insofar as subjects are only secreted by capitalist relations. But most questionable of all, from the Spaniard's standpoint, is the implication that the subject exists prior to being interpellated: 'Como si de algún modo Moisés existiera ya antes de ser interpelado por su Señor' (Rodríguez, 2013: 178). At the root of such thinking is the conviction that there can be no human nature prior to the process of interpellation, except in the form of a 'manejo de deseos y pulsiones' (177). In effect, Rodríguez will allow only one level of discourse, namely that of concrete, historical individuality: '... el hecho de decir "yo soy", es una cuestión radicalmente histórica' (178)¹⁰.

The obvious response to these claims is that Althusser's concept of interpellation is pitched at the level of *ideology in general*, at which 'ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects, which amounts to making it clear that individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects' (Althusser, 1971: 175-76); 'always-al-

¹⁰ Rodríguez's students, such as Miguel Ángel García, will similarly target Althusser's 'crass' error in claiming that ideology has no history (García, 2013b: 230).

ready' on the basis that 'individuals are always "abstract" with respect to the subjects they always-already are' (176). The category of the 'subject', it would follow, is here being deployed as a sort of 'holding category', to be filled by its appropriate historical concretization. By implication, concepts pitched at the level of specificity posit the existence of a 'higher', more encompassing level of conceptualization, whereas, by the same token, more abstract elements posit the existence of 'lower' or regional levels of analysis (cf. Resch, 1992: 79-82). To elaborate, let us return to the question of the relation between science and ideology.

We drew attention earlier to the importance of understanding the Althusserian distinction between science and ideology in two ways: firstly, one in which the concept-centred interests of science are opposed to the subject-centred interests of ideology; and secondly, one in which science is envisaged as 'breaking' with the representations of ideology, which it rejects as 'erroneous'. Rodríguez is insistent, with respect to second formulation, that 'Althusser se está refiriendo aquí en concreto a la historia de las ciencias' (Rodríguez, 2013n29: 193). No epistemological absolutism is implied in the concept of ideology/error, whose distinction vis-à-vis science is essential for any knowledge of the development of the sciences. At the same time, the first formulation stands condemned for its ahistoricism, notwithstanding (or because of) Althusser's attempt to frame it in terms of an 'age-old struggle' between two tendencies: idealism and materialism. Let us consider Althusser's own words:

What is a history which is no more than the repetition of the clash between two fundamental tendencies? The forms and arguments of the fight may vary, but if the whole history of philosophy is merely the history of these forms, they only have to be reduced to the immutable tendencies that they represent for the transformation of these forms to become a kind of *game for nothing*. Ultimately, philosophy has no history; philosophy is that strange theoretical site where nothing really happens, nothing but this *repetition* of nothing. To say that nothing happens in philosophy is to say that philosophy *leads nowhere because it is going nowhere*: the paths it opens really are, as Dietzgen said, long before Heidegger, 'Holzwege', paths that lead nowhere. (Althusser, 1971: 55)

From the standpoint of Rodríguez, namely that of a 'radical historicity', the result is 'un tradicionalismo ridículo', a 'manualismo puro' that borders on the 'grotesque' (Rodríguez, 2013:199). Althusser's reading of Rousseau, the Spaniard points out, had little to do with traditional readings, just as his own reading of Garcilaso had little to do with that of the famous North-American hispanist, Elias Rivers or, for that matter, his reading of Heidegger anything to do with that carried out by Derrida. My objection to this line of argument is the same one as I levelled some years ago against a passage in *Teoría e historia* in which Rodríguez argued the absurdity of comparing the 'poetry' of Homer with that of Mallarmé. Why, I asked, if the two authors are incommensurable, are they even mentioned in the same breath (see Read, 2010: 22-23)? The logic is inexorable: when such

comparisons are drawn, the assumption is that both authors are to be included under the same superordinate category, namely ‘literature in general’¹¹.

Rodríguez, however, is not persuaded, at least regarding the historical struggle between materialism and idealism: ‘El historicismo de Althusser vuelve a ser brutal porque hablándonos de filosofía como elemento hegemónico de la ideología burguesa, sin embargo nos hace retornar hacia los supuestos orígenes de la filosofía’ (2014). Allegedly, the philosopher is driven, in his capacity as philosopher, to invent a tradition of subterranean materialism that stretches from the Greeks down to the moderns, and Rodríguez will have none of it. Nobody among the Greeks, he points out, stepped forward to defend the existence of ‘souls’ in slaves, not even Epicurus or Democritus; under feudalism, the activity of the nominalists notwithstanding, only lords, as opposed to serfs, were deemed to have ‘reason’; and while certainly Machiavelli talked in terms of class, his focus was upon the new dynamics of political power.

Undoubtedly, Rodríguez has a point but still doubts remain. Is not the employment of general concepts seemingly being conflated with idealism? Even confining ourselves to the ambit of Hispanic culture, is Juan Huarte de San Juan to be excluded from the tradition of materialism? And what of Sánchez the Sceptic? Or for that matter Benedict de Spinoza? One appreciates the need to avoid the theoreticism that marred Althusser’s early work, also the virtues in holding in focus the specificities of class exploitation, at a historically determinate level. But that said, Rodríguez is surely missing a key consideration: Althusser’s texts hold in productive tension, on the one hand, the detail indispensable to historical accounts of determinate modes of production and, on the other, the generality to which these same modes may be reduced, in the form of a restricted number of categories. The omission proves fatal, leading, as it does, in the case of Rodríguez, to a species of actualism, of the kind that refuses to recognize the existence of real mechanisms, beyond the level of the empirical (see Read, 2015); and, in the case of Althusser, to an aleatory materialism that, arguably, flew in the face of his classic formulations (see Katja Diefenbach et al, 2013).

Para una teoría de la literatura

In large measure, Rodríguez’s new book consists of material extracted from his doctoral thesis, expanded and brought up to date through the insertion and addition of later material, so as to embrace the most recent literary theory. The substance of

¹¹ In his contribution to *La literatura no ha existido siempre*, Juan Carlos Abril raises an interesting consideration concerning the radical historicity of literature, as expounded in *Teoría e historia* and registered in the very title of the current volume. Are we to conclude that literature is a capitalist invention? Rodríguez’s response (in a text quoted by Abril) appears to back-track upon his initial contention: he was, it transpires, referring to literature understood as the expression of a new free subjectivity, not of ‘la literatura en general’ (Abril, 2015: 5). The same issues may arise, as Abril implies, in connection with the debates surrounding the existence or otherwise of a ‘human nature’. The key question here turns on the extent to which the ‘ensemble of social relations’, prioritized in the mature Marx, continues to presuppose a notion of the general make-up of human beings (see Geras, 1983: 106-07).

Rodríguez's original research remains intact, unsurprisingly so: in his postdata to the reprint of *Teoría e historia*, it will be recalled, he defended the book's re-appearance in an unrevised form on the grounds that hardly anything of any consequence had been raised against it (Rodríguez, 1090:27). In contrast to his contemporaries, such as Terry Eagleton and Fred Jameson, both of whom, after their early 'Althusserian' sorties, proceeded eagerly to surf the waves of post-structuralism and postmodernism, Rodríguez has kept faith with his original formulations. True, the seminal concept of the ideological unconscious now takes the form of the 'inconsciente ideológico-libidinal', doubtless thereby registering the widespread circulation of Lacanian ideas since the late 1960s and early '70s, but to very little effect.

In essence, then, little has changed over the course of four decades. Rodríguez continues to work within the framework of the same Althusserian problematic, knowledge of which is taken for granted, extended so as to encompass his own seminal concepts of the ideological unconscious and the 'radical historicity of literature'. And his principal target remains the same: the bourgeois notion of the 'free subject'. The result, it needs to be stated at the outset, is a breath-taking deconstruction of the whole of Western literary theory, embracing the Kantian, Hegelian and Empiricist traditions that, it is argued, constitute the unconscious basis of contemporary criticism. Let us briefly review the work's contents.

Its fundamental thesis is that the above-mentioned traditions displace the focus of attention from where it should lie, namely on the real conditions in which literature is produced, onto internal, phenomenological issues, relating to literature 'in itself'. Once this framework has been established, Rodríguez turns to the analysis of literary criticism *per se*, as this emerged in the 19th century, against the backdrop of the rise of literary nationalisms. The key to this criticism, whether in its positivist or phenomenological guises, is the subject/object relation, the ultimate goal being to obliterate the distinction between thought and reality, through either the collapsing of the subject into the object (positivism) or the object into the subject (phenomenology). The work traces subsequent developments, embracing Heidegger, Husserl, Jakobson, Todorov, Propp, Della Volpe, Levi-Strauss, and Umberto Eco, set against the backdrop of Russian Formalism and French Structuralism. It concludes with a discussion of semiotics and semiology.

Clearly, we do not have the space to consider any of this in detail. I propose, therefore, to give a better idea of the analytical procedures adopted in *Para una teoría* by focusing upon a limited section of it. The part that I have chosen deals with the work of Roland Barthes.

Barthes' brand of structuralism starts from the opposition to be drawn between, on the one hand, the scientific discipline of history, defined by its capacity to extract the intelligible from the otherwise meaningless flow of the real, and, on the other, chronology, which refuses to relinquish, and remains resolutely attached to, the same serial flow of events. Rodríguez summarizes the distinction thus:

... la materia en que lo inteligible se encarna no significa nada, es 'lo práctico inerte' por decirlo en terminología sartreana que Barthes emplea. Es el discurso histórico el que extrae de esa material la inteligibilidad, es por tanto el historiador el que *añade significación* a los hechos históricos. Cuando la historia se ha dado cuenta de esto, ha dejado de ser narración para ser ciencia. (Rodríguez, 2015: 355)

The process of extraction consists of the displacement of focus from the relation between the *signifier* and *referent* to that between the *signifier* and *signified*. In effect, the referent is drawn into the realm of discourse, which expands enormously, to the relative impoverishment of the real. Sustaining the whole of this structural edifice, Rodríguez explains, is an ideological unconscious deeply rooted in Kantianism, according to which it is the forms of thought, contained within the limits of intelligibility, that are responsible for putting things in order. And to put things in order is to *add* to them the meaning that they manifestly lack, with a proviso: to 'add' is, in actual fact, to *show what was already present*, as a kind of superstructural halo surrounding things.

Rodríguez concludes his review with a warning:

En tanto que la semiología no es 'ciencia', sino mero proyecto ideológico, es por lo que se puede aplicar a su aparición ciertos criterios que nos permiten señalar lo que la 'solicitud efectiva' de Barthes deja sin pensar (en tanto que no es 'ciencia', porque la producción efectiva [...] de un conocimiento científico jamás depende [...] de ningún tipo de solicitud 'social', sea lo que sea, de nuevo, lo que se entienda por esto. (366).

The reference, one presumes, is to the Althusserian notion that a science is characterized by the primacy of concept-centred or theoretical interests, as opposed to ideology, the latter understood as subject-centred and governed by interests beyond the necessity of knowledge. Now Rodríguez's work, we have seen, has always been characterized by a fear of 'philosophism'; at no point, we saw, was he prepared to undertake a philosophical defence of his science or of any other; indeed, he mocked as resolutely ahistorical Althusser's own attempts at the same. And even as, in the present instance, he gestures towards the status of science, as defined by Althusser, he once more evades any systematic discussion of it: 'cosa que no vamos a discutir ahora' (Rodríguez, 2015:365).

Such has been Rodríguez's tactic throughout the present text. Thus, even as, in the opening pages, we are referred to the struggle 'por encontrar un diccionario otro' (27), we are left none the wiser as to the nature of this dictionary. Similarly, we are assured, Rodríguez theorizes from a radically different standpoint – 'cambiamos, también radicalmente, de terreno' (35) – although from what standpoint is never made clear. Any exposition of the Althusserian problematic 'se escapa ya a nuestros límites', which conveniently leaves uncharted the terrain of Althusserianism itself (121). The injunction to let matters rest – 'Pero dejémoslo estar' (125) – effectively avoids any (un)necessary philosophical debate; except that, even as traditional criticism is subjected to a severe critique, Rodríguez resolutely refuses to elaborate upon his own theoretical premises.

And what makes matters worse, he will continue to do so, notwithstanding the on-going deployment of his own familiar Althusserian concepts, such as the social formation, the Ideological Apparatus, problematic, matrix, and so on.

Not everything, it is true, remains the same. If, once upon a time, Rodríguez showed little patience with those who failed to accept his argument, the task of carrying through the essential ‘break’ with the dominant ideological unconscious, it is now conceded, is difficult in the extreme: ‘... lo difícil es poder hacer añicos todo ese mecanismo increíble y extender, por el contrario, un nuevo inconsciente, un nuevo *sentido común* (Gramsci) a nivel masivo’ (Rodríguez, 2015: 58). But that is small comfort when, in his new work, Rodríguez continues to indulge his earlier habits, notably the ‘spontaneous’ process of composition and the spiralling dialectic through which the arguments unfold. The adverse consequences of the latter are compounded, in the present instance, by the insertion into the text of extracts from a variety of sources and the corresponding fragmentation of the narrative flow.

Objects of Thought and Real Objects

The question remains: how would Rodríguez’s problematic fare, were it to be exposed to the kind of merciless critique to which he subjects its bourgeois equivalents? The full answer must wait until it receives the measure of *critical* attention commensurate with its intellectual aspirations. But in the meantime, to give a foretaste of the form such attention would take, let us focus upon a specific test case, namely the problems surrounding the difference between the *real object* and the *object* of thought.

Althusser, to remind ourselves, asserted two key theses: the materialist thesis of the primacy of the real over thought about the real and the materialist thesis of the specificity of thought and the thought process, with respect to the real (Althusser 1976, 193). That said, even as he allows that ‘knowledge is concerned with the real world through its specific mode of appropriation of the real world’ (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 54), he is yet insistent, allegedly after Marx, that the production process of knowledge takes place in knowledge, in other words, that it ‘takes place *entirely in thought*’ (41-42). While he may never address such claims directly, Rodríguez assumes them as part of his unquestioned problematic, in the process drawing the real into the realm of thought. Hence, his assertion in *Teoría e historia* that the contrasting schools of literary criticism, like their counterparts in economics, do not address the same ‘real object’ but two ‘real objects’ (Rodríguez 1990, 161). Similarly, in *Blow-up*, we are assured, along the same Althusserian lines, that ‘el proceso de conocimiento ocurre siempre en la mente’ (Rodríguez, 2013: 193), while in *Para una teoría* Rodríguez will again insist that each ideological problematic ‘posee no sólo su propio *método*, sino incluso su propio objeto’ (Rodríguez, 2015: 34). Now while it is important to insist that the Althusserian premises relate not to epistemology (and the theory of knowledge) but to methodology, its critics are possibly correct

to chastise Althusser for his neglect of the intransitive domain of the real (see Sprinker, 1992: 129). And chastise him they have, from all points of the critical compass.

Rodríguez, it has to be said, is alert to the danger, to the extent that, in *Blow-up*, he hastens to qualify the Althusserian emphasis upon the ‘object of thought’: ‘Claro que el objeto real (digamos una *formación social*, digamos un texto de Kant o de Góngora) permanece siempre ahí afuera, en tanto que realidad objetiva y material’ (Rodríguez, 2013: 193), just as in *Para una teoría*, he qualifies his insistence on the internality of the literary object to its ideological problematic: ‘Dejando claro desde el principio que para nosotros el “mundo real” sí que existe (¡horror!) ahí fuera, como realidad socio-vital, como realidad socio-individual y como realidad literaria’ (Rodríguez, 2015: 34nr). That said, one does not salvage the real simply by one’s insistence upon its reality, as became apparent from the fate of Althusserianism in the hands of a whole series of post-Althusserians. Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst, to name but two, pressed the thesis of the specificity of thought to its extreme in the form of a nominalism stripped down to basics: ‘There is no question here of whether *objects of discourse* exist independently of the discourses which specify them. Objects of discourse do not exist at all in that sense’ (Cutler et al, 1978: 216–17). Althusser himself, we suggested above, was to teeter on the brink of the same nominalism when he came to develop his aleatory Marxism, whereas Rodríguez himself does not escape the charge of actualism.

The root of the problem can be traced back to the Althusserian notion of the ‘absent cause’, according to which the structure of the whole is ‘immanent in its effects in the Spinozist sense of the term, that *the whole existence of the structure consists of its effects*, in short, [...] is nothing outside its effects’ (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 188–89). Such claims could be read as implying the absence of a real beyond the real, in the sense of the absence of real generative mechanisms beyond actual events, which would involve reducing the things which our knowledge is about to the process that produces knowledge, in short, reducing ontology to epistemology. Hume, Kant and Hegel succumb to this subjectivist error in their different ways: Hume dissolves ontology altogether, Kant places the structures of the knowable world in the mind, whereas in Hegel the objectivity of the things is *disconnected* from experience and located in a transcendental Spirit. And to the extent that in Althusser the real functions merely as a mere reference point for thought, ‘[it] easily degenerates into an idealism, shedding the intransitive dimension completely, as e.g. in “discourse theory”’ (Bhaskar, 1991: 181).

Rodríguez would presumably argue that in emphasizing the existence of a ‘real world’, he has in effect avoided the subjectivist error. Yet he must accept that once the ‘real object’ is drawn into the ambit of the literary or scientific problematic, the world ‘out there’ becomes flat and unidimensional, which is to say *deontologised*. The way out of this subjectivist trap, from the Marxist standpoint, is to free the objects of sense perception from their dependence on the processes of human knowledge acquisition. This is achieved by dissolving the transcendental subject and, at the same time, by making *a priori* structures material components of the thing-in-itself; the effect is to reconstitute

the thing-in-itself as a knowable object-in-itself. In this way a transcendental *idealism* is transformed into transcendental *realism*. True, methodological similarities remain between the two, but so too does enough of a difference ‘to ensure that we could never stretch the analogy far enough to risk classifying Marx as a Kantian’ (Agar, 2004: 177). The question to be posed to the Althusserian research programme is whether it has done enough to maintain that difference.

Conclusion

At the risk of slanting my assessment of Rodríguez’s work excessively towards the negative, I have chosen to take for granted its seminal quality, evinced in numerous volumes and articles, published at regular intervals over the last four decades, in order to focus upon the relative ‘silence’ with which it has been received within the academy at large, including those circles within which Leftist criticism is accustomed to find a welcome. Rodríguez himself, it is true, has chosen to interpret this silence positively, as an indication of his work’s capacity to resist sustained critique; he also argues that the same silence has proved fruitful insofar as it enabled the unencumbered elaboration of his original formulations and their extension to other areas. These are doubtless comforting illusions, but illusions nevertheless, as are the claims of his followers to the effect that Rodríguez has been the victim of unalloyed rancour. During a period when the work of equivalent theoreticians – the names of Terry Eagleton and Fred Jameson immediately come to mind – has been subjected to numerous critical commentaries and exegeses, Rodríguez’s has been graced by the appearance of only one monograph, and that from a graduate student in the North American academy (see Caamaño, 2008). To attempt to account for such non-reception purely in terms of external obstacles is to turn a blind eye to the very real *internal* barriers, varying from editorial inadequacies to the incommensurabilities vis-à-vis traditional paradigms. It has been my concern to foreground these barriers, in an attempt to explain them, without necessarily explaining them *away*, in the hope, ultimately, of facilitating the on-going development of a profoundly insightful research programme that, following the recent demise of its progenitor, may otherwise be threatened with closure.

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