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An Approach to the Influence of Joyce in *Devalar* by R. Otero Pedrayo

ANTONIO RAÚL DE TORO SANTOS
Universidade da Coruña

The writer Alvaro Cunqueiro in “Un otoño compostelano” (“Autumn in Compostela”) remembers the long rainy winter of 1930, having just arrived at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters in Santiago full of enthusiasm, and the disappointment he was to feel shortly afterwards. According to him, “certainly I, and many more like me, perhaps needed another type of university,” and he adds:

But there was a certain something in that autumn in Compostela, and in other autumns and winters, outside the university, something in the streets and in the conversations, that would not have existed if there had been no university. “Culture” was talked about, it was in the air, fetched and carried by the young lecturers, and, sometimes to our disadvantage, we read the books in vogue at that time, which we would devour: poets from Alberti to Cernuda, the French, with Valéry taking pride of place, and the novelists: Joyce, Faulkner, Huxley, Lawrence, and we shared the *Revista de Occidente* and, in the Seminar of Galician Studies, shared *Nós* and everything within reach which spoke of my own little Galicia, and I discovered Hölderlin and Paul Eluard in García-Sabell’s house. . . .¹

For his part, Alvaro de las Casas, in the article entitled “Compostela Old and New” (*El Pueblo Gallego* 14 February 1931), compares student life at the end of the nineteenth century, represented by *La casa de la Troya*, with that of the new Compostela forty years later:

A student’s study: Domingo García Sabell. Nearly a thousand books, a piano, a gramophone; reproductions of Holbein and Rembrandt hang on the walls; a figure by Bonome and two landscapes in oil. Some friends are holding a conversation: Castroviejo the poet, Eiroa the sculptor and the students Pepe Casal and Félix González. They talk of politics, of literature and of art (Genevan post-war politics; literature from *Nós*, from the *Revista de Occidente*, by Piscator and O’Flary, by Shaw and Dos Passos; the art of Picasso and Beltrán). The names flash out as if in lights: Dieste, Fernández Mazas, Maside. . . .

Álvaro de las Casas himself, in a short novel entitled *Xornadas de Bastián Albor*, in 1931, describes once more, through the character which gives the name to his book, the atmosphere breathed among the youth of the university and (here we translate from Gallego) “on Monday I was in García Sabell’s house. He is mad about *Ulysses*, which he received last week.”² This comment is totally realistic: the same García-Sabell is at the moment of writing President of the Royal Galician Academy and Delegate of the Spanish Government in Galicia. It is he who, with his interest in Joyce and *Ulysses*, organized in the fifties readings of this novel with some friends who were doctors (Álvarez Álvarez, Balboa among others), an initiative which, for various reasons, never got past the first few meetings.

This interest in the most outstanding events in European culture naturally did not appear out of the blue. It is simply a development of the process which had begun long before, in the second half of the nineteenth century, and which blossomed mainly at the start of the present century, above all thanks to a generation of intellectuals grouped around the Seminar of Galician Studies and the magazine *Nós*. Among these, Vicente Risco and Otero Pedrayo were the ideological fathers and the most creative figures, and both of them curiously enough felt drawn to Joyce: Risco published in the above-mentioned magazine several articles entitled "A moderna literatura irlandesa" ("Modern Irish Literature") (28 [1926]) in which he analyses the work of Joyce; later, and as a result of this influence, in issue 67 (1929) appears "Dedalus en Compostela" (which he himself calls a "pseudoparaphrase") and which is the only case in Spain where a character from Joyce is turned into the protagonist of a fictional work. It is also necessary to include another work which represents the influence of Joyce, *O porco de pe* published by the same author in 1928.

Otero Pedrayo published several articles, among which "Ana Livia Plurabela" in *El Pueblo Gallego* (12 May 1931) is the one which stands out most. In this article he brings out the inspiration obtained from the river in this chapter of *Finnegans Wake*, and, (again translating from Gallego), adds "[t]he English in Joyce's prose is not English, but has turned into a kind of sea-Celtic, infinite, a language of his own, with the inventiveness of a child, of the pedant, of the bohemian, of the ploughman, of the seaman." Later, in issue 32 (1926) of *Nós*, Otero (for the first time in any language of the Iberian peninsula) translates into Gallego fragments of *Ulysses*, part of the chapter called "Ithaca" and the end of "Cyclops" to be precise, a study carried out by ourselves elsewhere.³ We hear repeatedly about *Ulysses* and its trials and tribulations in the Notes section of the same magazine, and in 1942 Otero publishes "De Pamela a Ulysses" en *El Pueblo Gallego* (31 May 1942). But meanwhile Otero, within his own literary creation, had published a work which reflects significant parallels with some stylistic resources which best characterize Joycean narrative. We are referring to *Devalar*, and the following commentaries are rather an approach to this unusual novel, taking *Ulysses*, above all, as a reference.

First of all nonetheless, we might ask ourselves a possibly pertinent question: "Why has Joyce's book had so much impact in communities with their own regional languages, such as Galicia and Catalunya?" It is not easy to find an answer and we believe it to be different in each case. At any rate, Joaquim Mallafré,⁴ although he is referring to a work by Blai Bonet published in 1964, *Mister Evasió*, which he intended to call *Ulysses III*, states that "[Blai Bonet] considers that *Finnegans Wake* was a way to spit out the linguistic problem that both the Irish and Majorcans were undergoing. There lie the seeds of the interest that the Catalans have in Joyce, facing as they did linguistic substitution and the state of their own language, left out in the cold and in danger of literary extinction." In the case of the interest that Joyce aroused in Galicia, there are previous events which can explain it. Apart from the relationship and historical events linking Galicia with Ireland and the British Isles (marine trading and wartime links, pilgrimages, founding of an Irish school, etc.), there exists a very real involvement among the intellectuals at the end of the last century and the beginning of this, especially Alfredo Brañas, Manuel Murguía, Vicente Risco and Otero Pedrayo, in the search for the identity of their community and the creation of their own myths. They find the answer in the exaltation of Celtic Galicia and in the book *Lebor Gabala Erenn* or "Book of the Conquests of Ireland," in which the tale is told of an invasion proceeding from the North West of

the Iberian peninsular. The concept of "Atlantism," as opposed to a Mediterranean-centred vision, is basic if we are to understand the conception of culture held by these writers. In Risco's words "We have to put European culture into Gallego. *Europeanism* and *traditionalism* produce in turn "Atlantism." Europe is both a bridge and a path to follow." At the same time, Ireland is a sister nation belonging to the Celtic community, and its political, social and literary problems find a great echo in newspapers, magazines and books in Galicia, as the situations were believed to be parallel in both nations. From this point of view it is not hard to understand the importance given to Joyce and his work because, on the one hand, they exemplified the purest Celtic spirit and the subjection of one country by another, and on the other, the significance of Joyce's literary work had gone beyond the frontiers of Ireland and had given rise to a revolution in twentieth century literature. For these reasons, which would probably be mirrored nowhere else outside Galicia, Joyce and his work won themselves a special position, at least until the Spanish Civil War.

If Otero Pedrayo carried out the translation into Gallego of fragments of *Ulysses*, and was well informed of Joyce's literary output, it is hardly surprising that this sympathy should be reflected in his novel *Devalar*, published in 1935, which, due to its special characteristics, broke new ground within the panorama of contemporary Galician literature.

We find ourselves before a novel of complex structure, and which has not been studied in depth. Some critics refer to it as being rather disjointed and make general comments which fail to clarify it too much. The author himself, at the end of the novel, seems to suggest the guiding thread (translation from the original): "I myself, grasped by the illusion of having heard the path speak, wanted to ask him about the people who walked up and down the length of the pages of this novel. I dared not. I would not know how to ask and the path would not know how to answer. Each man, each woman, each child, will wander through the world, consciously or unconsciously thinking about some matter. The memory of a small picture by Castelao has arranged the plan of this book."⁵ According to the words of Ríos Panisse in the prologue of her edition of *Devalar*,⁶ what Otero wants to recreate in the novel is an instant in the life of Galicia looking at the processes and forms which make up her landscape. Reading the work reminds us that the parallels between literary and artistic impressionism are real enough. *A Sentimental Journey*, by Sterne, to quote just one case, is a forerunner of that literary impressionism but perhaps it would be more appropriate to say that most of *Devalar* is a set of "epiphanies" structured around the annual cycle of Galician country life (the narrative starts in autumn), "in which [in the words of Ríos Panisse] an infinite number of aspects of the history and geography of Galicia are horizontally structured," and in whose centre the roads to Santiago converge in a complex impressionist structure. The Joycean epiphany, represented in Otero's novel by the obsession with capturing the exact moment in time and raising its category, the situating of Santiago (here equivalent to Joyce's Dublin) as the axis at the centre of a concentration of forces, and the cyclical structure of the novel (in the sequence of autumn - winter - spring - summer), are some of the features shared by both writers.

There is also in *Devalar* a "Stephen Dedalus" in the person of Martiño Dumbría. We might be said to come across a *Bildungsroman* inserted in the book, which reminds us, even at such a long distance, of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*; it corresponds to chapter 6, the central chapter in this novel, and is entitled "Martiño Dumbría's Education." The hero's words could well be those of Stephen in *A Portrait*: "I want to submerge myself in

the flowing river of life," ". . . I shall know and I shall have to complete my knowledge" (165), or "The night fell, three paths of fate were born from the clock: confidence, humility, shelter" (169).

Just as Joyce put Dublin under the critical analysis of the microscope, the narrator in *Devalar* warns us of the fact that "Santiago is a deep city. You have to get to know it methodically, not hastily" (162). At the same time, we detect the echo of the well-known "Dear Dirty Dublin" in the equivalent "Filthy clerical town" (112) referring to Santiago.

Otero, like Joyce, reflects a special fascination for music, as can be observed during a surface reading of *Devalar*, and it is thus that we find terms related to sound: "the sound of the sailor air" (158), "the musical wave of the church bells" (159), "the cascades from the country sounded like those of Tivoli" (163), "Compostela possesses music, sound, the smell of the countryside" (167), "music of the mire . . . echo of a thousand water hymns" (168), "the theme of this symphony of decadence" (176), "the heroic andantes of Beethoven" (193), "German sonatas" (197), "the scratches on the stones by the coast reminded one of a pentagram" (202), "one needed to hear another requiem" (204), "hymn, chime, Ave Maria, ballad" (212), and many other examples throughout the whole novel. This is not the only way in which Otero's interest in music is displayed. As in Joyce, his prose is characterized by a cadence and baroque rhythm which evoke very successfully the essence of his poetry, and it is in keeping with this (though unusually in our literature), that Otero incorporates alliteration, a very widespread device in English literature and in popular poetry, into the narrative so as to impregnate it with greater force of expression and sonorosity. Again, it is hard not to mention this device used so much by Joyce. A few instances will make this clear: "coas arcas, as arquetas, os arcaces" (100), "Os confesores, algún sabio coengo, formarían quizais un concepto cativo do crego . . ." (107), "Na librería lucían os lombos de moitos libros" (109), "morror a miña morte" (212), etc. This is only a sample of a widely used poetic resource in this novel, above all from pages 107 to 110, and from 146 to 151.

Lastly, we wish to underline the use of the stream of consciousness in the novel, a phenomenon which, as far as we know, is produced here for the first time in modern Galician literature and, probably, in Spanish literature. It is usually accepted that *Tiempo de Silencio* by Luis Martín Santos incorporates this technique for the first time in Spanish literature. Bearing in mind that *Devalar* was published in January 1935, it is evident that it is the first appearance in Spain of this stylistic device popularized by Virginia Woolf and Joyce. Otero Pedrayo knew both authors' works, a fact we can prove by observing the shelves of his library, where Spanish, French and English versions of several of their novels are still preserved. Furthermore, in *Devalar* there is a character, Lady Woolf, who is both English and a writer, so that it would not be too much to relate her with the author of the same name.

There are two monologues we find in the course of the book, one in the second chapter, another in the fifth. We will reproduce here only the latter, corresponding to the chapter entitled "Mixed train," which portrays a human gathering in a microcosm, the train, reflecting different social levels and where there is a lack of action, which facilitates the internal reflections of the passengers on a journey by night. In fact, the monologue of the character opens the chapter:

I was dying to rest ... it seemed as if I was cooped up in the chairs of the casino of my village ... Wait: conscience or whatever your name is! Let me rest awhile

on the cushions of the Company. I now you'll soon be back. You'll have the undoubted pleasure of rifling through/messing up all the compartments of my soul, like someone who looks through a faded old wallet, autumn leaf coloured, with notes and bills and old love-letters ... like that old wallet of my father's in the drawer of his office. I gave the porter two pesetas for carrying the luggage. What have I got in my bag? I spent so much in the town ... My mother was always a thrifty one, always scrimping and saving ... Dammit, I still have plenty of cash left ... Let's smoke this last English cigarette ... I'm right as rain now ... What a fool I was to buy first class tickets ... At least I can go further at night and of the splendid stillness of the river entering through the windows of second and third class as pale as a drowned man. Oh, those pure hopes! I don't deserve them any more. Now my life travels foolishly ... My life's a rubbish tip ... What else could it be? ... If my mother scolds me ... I'll know how to answer her back next time" (144)

It is for all the reasons we have listed above that we may conclude that Joyce has left an unmistakable impression on Otero Pedrayo's *Devalar*, even though other influences, such as that of Virginia Woolf, cannot be ruled out, influences which were floating in the European literary atmosphere at the time when Otero was writing.

Notes

1. Álvaro Cunqueiro, "Un otoño compostelano," *La Universidad de Santiago* (Santiago de Compostela: Publicacións da Universidade de Santiago, 1980) 167.
2. Álvaro de las Casas, *Xornadas de Bastián Albor* (Santiago de Compostela: Alánda, 1931) 57.
3. See Antonio R. de Toro Santos, "Otero Pedrayo: *Ulysses* y Stephen Dedalus en Compostela," *Essays on Translation/Ensayos sobre traducción I*, ed. Ramón López Ortega and José Luis Oncins Martínez (Cáceres: Seminario Permanente de Filología Inglesa y Didáctica del Inglés de la UNEX, 1993) 61-65.
4. See Joaquim Mallafre, "Joyce en Catalán," *Joyce en España (I)*, ed. Francisco García Tortosa and Antonio R. de Toro Santos (La Coruña: Servicio de Publicacións da Universidade da Coruña, 1994) 39-43.
5. Ramón Otero Pedrayo, *Devalar*, ed. Carmen Ríos Panisse (Vigo: Galaxia, 1994) 246-47.
6. Otero Pedrayo 10.