

Between Nature and History: Landscape as Ethical Engagement in Llamazares's *Luna de lobos*

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A fascinated gaze absorbed in the contemplation of nature opens the two novels that will be the focus of our interest in these pages, Julio Llamazares's *Luna de lobos* (1985) (*Moon of the Wolves*) and *La lluvia amarilla* (1988) (*Yellow Rain*). The reader is, from the very beginning, positioned in the place of an onlooker paralyzed and frightened in front of the sublime.¹ In both cases, our gaze is confronted with the task (and the impossibility) of extricating the human out of a natural space that hides and assimilates it. The background has almost literally swallowed the foreground. The human figure can only be distinguished against nature, through an exercise of restoration, bringing it back to a historical time and memory that seems to have been lost in a sublime landscape the quality of which locates it out of time, out of history.

It is only the end of the storm that allows us (along with Angel, whose gaze we share) to see Ramiro in the second paragraph of *Luna de lobos*. He is, like us, absorbed in contemplation, but unlike us, that contemplation places him in the limits of the human and, one step further, in the threshold of death:

Contempla absorto la riada de piedras y de barro que el aguacero arrastra por la ladera de la montaña. Al contraluz lechoso y gris del cielo que atardece, su silueta se recorta en la abertura de la puerta como el perfil de un animal inmóvil, quizá muerto. (11)

(Absorbed, he contemplates the flood of mud and stones that the storm drags downhill. Against a grey and milky dusk, his silhouette appears against the opening of the door, like the figure of a motionless animal,

dead perhaps.)²

The fascinated contemplation of nature coincides with the process of becoming animal to the point of dissolution and death. That first image gives us a precise anticipation of the novel itself. Structured in four different parts, each named after the year of the narrated events—1937, 1939, 1943 and 1946—this is the story of a group of men that become animals and finally corpses, but it is also the attempt to bring back to history a group of characters placed out of it.

For almost ten years, a group of maquis resists the relentless pursuit of the Francoist repression in the mountains of Asturias. One after another, all of them but one are killed by their hunters. In the novel, political repression cannot be separated from slow dissolution into nature. The de-humanization at the hands of the police becomes literal in the mountains. The novel tells a story of progressive metamorphosis in which the characters abandon (along with their human characteristics) their place in history. A parallel can be established between that process of erasure and dissolution and the one deployed by Francoist institutional memory in which the maquis had simply no place.³

It is not hard to see many analogies with another tale of metamorphosis and animalization told in *La lluvia amarilla*. After the departure of all the people and the suicide of his wife, the last inhabitant of a small village in the mountains of Leon awaits his death in total isolation. There is no one left to tell him he is still alive, he only has his own memories.

In the first pages of the novel, we inhabit the prophetic view of the always dying protagonist—along with the people of the nearest village, we advance with fear, we become immersed in a terrifying display of the sublime (night, mountains, a village in ruins) on our way to discover the corpse of the last inhabitant of Ainielle, or rather, his body fused in nature.

Cuando lleguen al alto de sobre puerto, estará seguramente comenzando a anoecer. Sombras espesas avanzarán como olas por las montañas y el sol, turbio y deshecho, lleno de sangre, se arrastrará ante ellas agarrándose ya sin fuerzas a las aliagas y al montón de ruinas y escombros . . .

Un frío repentino e inexplicable se lo anticipará. Un ruido de alas negras batirá las paredes advirtiéndoselo. Por eso nadie gritará aterrado. Por eso nadie iniciará el gesto de la cruz o el de la repugnancia cuando, tras esa puerta, las linternas me descubran al fin encima de la cama, vestido todavía, mirándoles de frente, devorado por el musgo y por los pájaros. (*Lluvia amarilla* 9, 16)

(By the time they reach the top of Sobrepuerto, it will probably be

growing dark. Thick shadows will advance like waves across the mountains, and the fierce, turbid, bloody sun will humble itself before them, clinging, feebly now, to the gorse and the heap of ruins and rubble . . .

A sudden, inexplicable chill will tell them. The noise of black wings brushing the walls will warn them. That is why no-one will begin to make the sign of the cross or a grimace of disgust when, behind that door, the torches finally discover me here on the bed, still dressed, staring straight at them, devoured by the moss and by the birds.) (*Yellow Rain* 1, 8)

Both novels focus on the same threshold between humanity and nature, history and myth, time and eternity. Both are also centered on characters who are subjected to a process of extreme isolation and finally to a life without human referents other than themselves. But that set of analogies opens an interesting problem in a comparative reading. A common destiny for the protagonists of both novels seems to relegate the role of specific history in the first one. It is as if the Civil War were described and conceived in terms very close to the mechanisms of nature reoccupying a rural space abandoned by its human inhabitants. Apart from those dates that name the different chapters of the novel, as many different critics have pointed out, *Luna de lobos* obstinately de-historicizes its characters.⁴ They become mythical figures. Llamazares is not interested in writing in the register of history but rather that of the legend: “Todos [los maquis] sin excepción, dejaron en el empeño los mejores años de sus vidas y una estela imborrable y legendaria en la memoria popular” (*Luna de lobos* 7) (All the maquis without exception, left in their effort, the best years of their lives and a legendary and lasting trace in popular memory).

Critics of the novel seem to deploy a paradoxical reading of the text. If, on the one hand, it is conceived as a mythical story, it is no less often linked to an ethical recovery of historical memory after years of institutional oblivion:

Luna de lobos surge . . . como contestación a las falsificaciones de una historiografía mitologizadora al servicio del poder, mediante un relato que denuncia cómo la brutalidad de la acción represora de la guardia civil goza de una impunidad judicial mientras que los delitos cometidos por los huidos son siempre su única opción para poder sobrevivir. (Moreno Nuño 275)

(*Luna de lobos* comes as a reaction to the falsifications of a mythologizing historiography at the service of power, by means of a story that denounces the ways in which the brutality of the repression at

the hands of the police finds judicial impunity while those crimes committed by the run-aways are their only option of survival.)

Interestingly, in Moreno Nuño's analysis the opposition is not between myth and history but rather between institutional and popular myths, those that come from the propagandistic and Manichean undertones of Francoist historiography versus those transmitted by the elders in the mountain villages where the maquis were a fantasmatic and legendary presence.

The purpose of these pages is to establish a possible bridge between those two readings by means of an exploration of the use of the sublime in both novels and its possible, if ambiguous, compatibility with an ethics of history. But, before that, it is necessary to place Llamazares's apparently paradoxical recovery of history through legend in the context of 1980s Spain, few years after the Socialist victory in the general elections which, for many historians, was the moment of symbolic closure of the transition to democracy and, it could be said, also the moment in which, after the process of political re-institutionalization had been completed, new paradigms of memory and history were not only possible but also required.

As it has been repeated again and again, the political processes of the transition were founded on a willful marginalization of memory, the most visible face of which would be the Amnesty Law in 1977. No political group was really interested in integrating "memory" as a relevant issue in the re-institutionalization processes of the period (Juliá 44). That would only happen much later, at the end of the 1990s and especially after 2000; it would be associated with the apparition of a new generation not involved in the Transition and with totally different demands regarding processes of memory.

It is no less true that the extraordinary journalistic, historical and cultural production in that period regarding the Civil War and (less prominently) the Francoist years, failed to "activate" a public response regarding questions of memory: all the information about the period was processed in a passive way by the public. Any "ethical" response remained private without really taking form in the public arena. That would only happen much later, paradigmatically with the creation of the *Asociación para la recuperación de la memoria histórica* (Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory) in 2000.

Pablo Sánchez León and Jesús Izquierdo have analyzed the way in which the dominant historiography of the period privileged a "neutral" and scientific discipline in which

La memoria quedaba convenientemente subordinada a la historia como fuente de conocimiento . . . entre la mayoría de los historiadores profesionales se extendería el convencimiento de que la calidad de su trabajo como intérpretes del pasado histórico depende de que se

mantengan al margen de los debates de actualidad entre sus conciudadanos y traten de buscar tan sólo la verdad del pasado . . . en todo este proceso, la imparcialidad del observador experto estaba siendo elevada a la categoría de norma. (59–60)

(Memory was conveniently subordinated to history as source of knowledge . . . most professional historians of the period would be convinced that the quality of their work as interpreters of the past depended on keeping their distance from the current debates among citizens and maintaining an exclusive dedication to their task of looking for the truth of the past . . . in all that process, the impartiality of the expert observer was being elevated to the category of norm.)

The radical opposition between fact and myth (Sánchez León and Izquierdo 58), the identification of Francoist historiography with the latter and new “democratic” historiography with the former made any flexibility impossible and permeability in the dialogue between popular memory and professional historiography, with the result of an “isolation” of the experts from any kind of “engagement” in the public arena. The truth was conceived as necessarily neutral.

In a parallel way, it could be said that the cultural production of the period regarding the historical memory of the Civil War and the Francoist years could be characterized as different variations on a narrative of “disengagement” and distantiation. Paloma Aguilar has meticulously documented how the cinematic production of the period was divided between ironic and comic approaches of extraordinary popular success on the one hand and brilliant analytical documentaries that would reach a reduced audience on the other. In both cases, what characterized the relationship between the public and the historical object was not emotional engagement but rather ironic or analytical distance.

The most successful film regarding the Civil War, Berlanga’s *La vaquilla*, would be released precisely the same year in which *Luna de lobos* was published, 1985. In the film, comedy frames a message that, according to Aguilar, privileges “el mensaje de culpabilidad colectiva por las brutalidades cometidas durante la contienda, que es precisamente el acuerdo sobre el que se asienta la transición” (289) (The message of collective guilt for the brutalities committed during the war, precisely the agreement that sustained the transition). The comedic release acts in complicity with a dynamic of distantiation in which the implicit spectator coincides with the ideal implicit citizen of the transition, characterized by a prudent disengagement that allows the possibility of national conciliation. Nevertheless, it could be said that Berlanga’s masterpiece is a late example of a paradigm that was beginning to be perceived as insufficient. Its chronological coincidence with the new paradigm, exemplified by

Llamazares's novel, talks about the demand for a change in the way the public related with the issue of memory. Three years after the Socialist victory, the process of institutional transition was not only complete but also was starting to be perceived as such by a public that increasingly demanded new ways to represent the Francoist past and, along with them, new models of memory.

In that context, *Luna de lobos* can be read as establishing a bridge between the dominant literary narratives about the war in the 1980s and the later dominant visions from the turn of the century. If we consider the most relevant titles dealing with the Civil War and Francoism in the 1980s, we can trace a very similar trend to the one we observed in the movie theatres. Distantiation now took the form of meta-literary mediation (Muñoz Molina's *Beatus Ille*, Marsé's *Un día volveré*), dissemination of guilt and historical determinism (Cela's *Mazurca para dos muertos*) or even mythical narratives combined with extreme formal density (Benet's *Herrumbrosas lanzas*). Despite being written in that context, the emotional engagement that *Luna de lobos* requires from its reader has much more to do (despite obvious aesthetic differences) with perhaps the two most influential titles about the Civil War published after 2000: Cercas's *Soldados de Salamina* and Mendez's *Los girasoles ciegos*.⁵ These late novels appear in a radically different social context in which popular (and political) engagement has displaced the prudent passivity of the 1980s.

It is then in that particular context of the 1980s that Llamazares's novel breaks with the prevalent rhetoric of disengagement through a lyrical and emotional narrative, the theoretical implications of which are the real focus of this study: What is the new relationship between Myth and History that Llamazares traces in his novels? How does he build an alternative narrative of simultaneous aesthetic and ethical re-engagement in a context where the cult for objective historical truth or safe emotional distance act in mutual complicity? What is the role of the "sublime" and the perception of nature in that alternative approach to the recovery of a historical reality and the relationship that the implicit reader may establish with it?

Our analysis of Llamazares's texts will proceed by means of a theoretical detour through the work of Giorgio Agamben, whose preoccupations, as we will see, present interesting analogies with those of Llamazares. It is not only a catalog of common subjects in both authors that interests us here but also, and perhaps mainly, the extent to which certain "shortcomings" in Agamben's theoretical edifice, perceived by his critics, illuminate some essential traits in Llamazares's "ethical" storytelling.

It could be said that the failure to historicize is the most ubiquitous charge in the many criticisms addressed to Agamben's analyses.⁶ Authors coming from very different backgrounds seem to agree in the denunciation of a philosophical system that ignores historical particularities in order to develop a political paradigm of modernity that seems to flatten every

geographical and chronological difference in a hyperbolic generalization of the “concentration camp” paradigm and its correspondent model of political “subjection,” be it called “bare life,” “Homo Sacer” or “Muselmann”: the one that can be killed and yet not sacrificed, in other words, the one always already placed beyond the law and its interpellation, the one whose killing does not count because it is not still a “subject.” It is not still a human, but rather somewhat placed in an unstable and paradoxical threshold between human and animal.

In Agamben’s vertiginous paradoxical style of argumentation, that “beyond the law” of the “Homo Sacer” is simultaneously the “pure form of law.” The foundational statement of his theory, Benjamin’s famous “The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the ‘state of the exception’ in which we live is the rule” is glossed by Agamben by means of Foucauldian bio-politics:

We have seen the sense in which law begins to coincide with life once it has become the pure form of law, law’s mere being in force without significance. But in so far as law is maintained as pure form in a state of virtual exception, it lets bare life . . . subsist before it. Law that becomes indistinguishable from life in a real state of exception is confronted by life that, in a symmetrical but inverse gesture, is entirely transformed into law. (*Homo Sacer* 55)

If the subject of law is now “bare life,” the Hobessian chronological opposition between city and state of nature is neutralized. In his reading of Hobbes, Agamben conceives the ‘state of nature’ as simultaneous to the city. The “pure form of law” is made possible precisely thanks to the synchronic con-fusion of city and state of nature (105).

The generalization of the state of exception is then also that of the state of nature, or rather the ubiquity of the threshold between city and nature, human and animal, man and wolf:

This lupinization of man and humanization of the wolf is at every moment possible in the dissolution *civitas* inaugurated by the state of exception. This threshold alone, which is neither simple natural life but rather bare life or sacred life, is the always present and always operative presupposition of sovereignty. (106)

That is why the mechanisms of power should not be interrogated at the level of the law but rather that of life itself. It will be this point of departure that allows us to consider the role of “nature” and the category of the “sublime” in the analyses of mechanisms of power and (de)subjection in Llamazares. But, just as in Agamben, what interests us in the former’s writings is the attempt to avoid a clear opposition between history

(associated to *civitas*) and the pre-history of the state of nature linked to the legendary and the mythical. It is precisely the representation of that process of “lupinization” mentioned by Agamben that allows Llamazares to recover the memory of the maquis. The legendary (and its use of imagination alongside history) allows for an alternative writing of history in which the role of “bare life” in the mechanisms of power and repression can be accounted for. One step further, Llamazares’s project is not about “historizing” the figure of the maquis but about ethically recovering it as “bare life,” a “sublime” object of contemplation that makes impossible any attempt of distancing on the part of the reader. Following the traditional Kantian analysis of the sublime, this would work as a threshold for a re-constitution of the self: the contemplation of the sublime solicits a particular state of mind that ends up turning into an ethical call. As opposed to the “restful contemplation” of the “beautiful” (linked by Kant to the “distance” of reason), “the mind feels itself moved in the representation of the Sublime in nature” (Kant *Critique* 120) (Sublime being linked to the imagination and not the reason of the subject). The sublime is then the moment in which Aesthetics necessarily becomes Ethics. It is precisely that movement which will be the axis of our reading of Llamazares.

Among Agamben’s critics, it is perhaps Dominick La Capra who has developed, to a larger extent, the analysis of the role that the category, or rather, the effect that the sublime has in the former’s writings. La Capra’s critique can be read as not only centered in the substance of Agamben’s philosophy, but also, necessarily, in his “style” of thinking and writing. The generalization of a post-apocalyptic “Auschwitz now every-where” hyperbole, of a historical stage in which the State of exception/State of nature permeates the present political habitat (indeed the political habitat of the modernity as a whole) and has the effect of a “breathlessly ecstatic discourse of the sublime” (139) achieved by means of a “rhetoric of banalyzing hyperbole in which almost every sentence seems to be followed by a virtual exclamation point” (157). Agamben’s is a discourse of excess in which the limits of “witnessing,” the distance needed for the testimony to be read beyond pure identification, are erased by the ecstatic contemplation of the sublime suffering of the “Muselmann.” And without those limits, according to La Capra, the possibility of an ethics of daily life becomes vertiginous theology, blindness in front of the subtle and not so subtle changes of history, unable now to be considered “in context” or analyzed in any “rational” way.

But perhaps it would be interesting to take the role of the sublime in Agamben’s writings a step farther. Not so much as the effect of a style that blinds, an implicit negation of the subtleties of historical change, but rather as, precisely, the point of departure for an alternative conception of history that, again following Kant, can only be conceived as ethical destination but also, simultaneously, requires the dialogue and not the exclusion between

reason and imagination. To be able to determine the particular use of the sublime both in Agamben and Llamazares, it is necessary first to go back to Kant's use of the term.

There is a paradoxical dimension of the sublime in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. It comes, in principle, from an exterior object that blinds through its formlessness, its lack of bounds (*Critique* 108) but, at the same time, its perception is something that cannot be shared, it happens only in the self. It is necessarily related to a state of extreme solitude.⁷ It is as if the boundlessness, the "formless object" of the sublime, corresponds to a closure of the self, only able to respond helplessly to its shock. If the sublime is "like itself alone" (109) denying any possible comparison, it is no less true that the subject that contemplates it is also reduced to "himself alone." That mirror-like structure produces an almost predictable outcome in Kant's argumentation—the sublime becomes a category to describe a "state of mind" and not any more the "formless object" of the outside which was just the spark that started the true fire, the one that happens in the mind: "The true sublimity must be sought only in the mind of the [subject] judging, not in the natural object, the judgment upon which occasions this state" (117).

From there, the sublime is not any more the conflict between an inside and an outside, between a boundless object and the impossibility to judge it, but rather a conflict within: "The feeling of the sublime is therefore a feeling of pain, arising from the want of accordance between the aesthetical estimation of magnitude formed by the imagination and the estimation of the same formed by reason" (119).

It is not anymore about the astonishment caused by an exterior object above judgment, but rather, about the interior pain caused by the fissure between reason and imagination, the possible and the desired. From there, the "event" of the sublime turns into a call to action, into the self-recognition of the subject as "a man who shrinks from nothing, who fears nothing, and therefore does not yield to danger, but rather goes to face it vigorously with the fullest deliberation" (127).⁸ The sublime produces a man governed by imagination beyond reason: nature is here called sublime merely because it elevates the imagination to a presentation of those cases in which the mind can make felt the proper sublimity of its destination, in comparison with nature itself (126).

The sublime is then not so much a form of blindness but perhaps quite the opposite, a window and a prediction of the "sublimity" of a destination. The sublime is, thus, a form of unavoidable engagement.⁹ The romantic tradition of the "Objective Correlative," the mirror-like relationship between landscape and hero, turns here into a reciprocal mimesis. The landscape is not just a mere reflection of the psychological depths of the character, but rather his very motivation, his ethical call.

But what kind of dialogue can we develop between this repertoire of

ideas and Llamazares's uses of the sublime? And, from there, how do we read the use of a "sublime" representation of historical events in the context of 1980s Spain?

An emblem-like image in the first pages of *La lluvia amarilla* gives us an important clue that allows us to establish a connection between the theoretical frame that we have developed and Llamazares's ethical aesthetics—as we saw, the last inhabitant of Ainielle imagines at the beginning of the book a frightened group of men about to discover his own dead body. Getting closer and closer to it, their eyes bump into yet another frightening and sublime vision:

Y, entonces, sobrecogidos, casi sin ánimo para acercarse a ella, contemplarán de lejos el pórtico invadido de zarzales, las maderas podridas, el tejado vencido y el sólido bastión de la espadaña que todavía se yergue sobre la destrucción y la ruina de la iglesia como un árbol de piedra, como un cíclope ciego cuya única razón de pervivencia fuese mostrarle al cielo la sinrazón de un ojo ya vacío. Pero que, a ellos, les servirá esta noche para orientarse definitiva y finalmente en su peregrinaje atormentado por Ainielle. (*Lluvia amarilla* 13)

(And then, frightened, almost too afraid to approach, they will stare from afar at the bramble infested portico, at the rotten wood, the sunken roof and the solid bastion of the belfry that still rises up from the devastation and ruin of the church like a stone tree, like a blind Cyclops whose sole reason for surviving is to display to the heavens the outrage of its now empty eye. However, that night it will help them finally to orient themselves on their tortuous pilgrimage through Ainielle.) (*Yellow Rain* 5)

Blindness and guidance coincide in the same vision. It is paradoxically a blinded and mutilated "eye" that finally allows them to "see." The scene works as an emblem of the whole book: the last inhabitant of Ainielle has to rely less and less on his vision. Without other witnesses who can share the perceptions of his own eyes, solitude forces him to progressively rely on his imagination and his memories. Along with vision, words don't make sense anymore (24). Reality becomes blurred into imagination and memory

¿No lo habré quizá soñado o imaginado todo para llenar con sueños y recuerdos inventados un tiempo abandonado y ya vacío? ¿No habré estado, en realidad, durante todo este tiempo, mintiéndome a mí mismo? . . . De pronto el tiempo y la memoria se habían confundido y todo lo demás . . . había dejado de existir, salvo como recuerdo muy lejano de sí mismo (*Lluvia amarilla* 39, 41)

(Perhaps I dreamed or imagined it all in order to fill up the abandoned, empty time with dreams and invented memories. Have I simply been lying to myself all this time? . . . Suddenly, time and memory had fused together, and everything else . . . had ceased to exist, except as a distant memory of itself.) (*Yellow Rain* 30, 32)

What the intruders see in the “empty eye” of the church is then only an anticipation of the traumatic encounter with the emptiness of other eyes: “Y, si yo ya estoy muerto, cuando los hombres de Berbusa al fin me encuentren y me cierren los ojos para siempre, ¿En qué mirada seguirán viviendo?” (*Lluvia amarilla* 43) (And if I am already dead when the men of Berbusa find me at last and close my eyes forever, in whose eyes will they continue to live) (*Yellow Rain* 34).

The radical solitude of the protagonist throughout the pages of the book turns into the necessary locus of “sight” and life for the community: it is only the possibility of this reciprocity that allows the members of the community to keep on seeing and living. What those empty eyes announce is the abyss of a sharp discontinuity and the ethical call for an exercise of restoration. Those whose gaze is now not reciprocated anymore are forced to consider the future of their vision and their identity. As in Kant, the sublime is linked, not only to the astonishment of the present, but more interestingly to the “destiny” of the subject. The exterior vision of the “sublime” causes a reaction, a state of mind, which can only be conceived as an anticipation of the “sublimity of destiny.” But it is not anymore a human, the one (not) looking at us, but rather a human absorbed into landscape, into the sublime. According to Llamazares, landscape does not frame memory but rather *is* memory, it is what sustains the traces of the past:

El paisaje es memoria. Más allá de sus límites, el paisaje sostiene las huellas del pasado, reconstruye recuerdos, proyecta en la mirada las sombras de otro tiempo que sólo existe ya como reflejo de sí mismo en la memoria del viajero o del que, simplemente, sigue fiel a ese paisaje. (*El río del olvido* 7)

(Landscape is memory. Beyond its limits, landscape sustains the traces of the past, reconstructs memories, projects in the gaze the shadows of another time that keeps on existing only as a reflection of itself in the traveler’s memory or, simply, in the memory of everyone still faithful to that landscape.)

But just shortly after, Llamazares’s words become more problematic, even paradoxical. If the landscape has the ability to restore memories, it is no less true that, following the romantic topos, it becomes the source of melancholy, “ese escenario último en el que la desposesión y el vértigo y el

miedo al infinito destruyen poco a poco la memoria del viajero” (7) (That last stage in which dispossession and vertigo and fear of infinity, little by little destroy the traveler’s memory).¹⁰

What exactly then is the content of a “fidelity” to a landscape that threatens to destruct our memories? The paradox is, nevertheless, suspended if we consider it through the eyes of the Kantian sublime and the basic role that imagination has within his theoretical construct.

The spectator of the sublime is basically faithful to his own imagination, an imagination necessary to supplement an insufficient “reason.” It is, then, in landscape, in the ‘sublime as opening to imagination’ where the process of memory restoration should start, and along with it an ethical re-constitution of the community, the first step of which consists of the “respect” that Kant finds as one of the first reactions in front of the sublime.

But what if we are not dealing anymore (or at least not exclusively) with a romantic and impressionistic conception of personal memory, but rather with a very specific historical context and the essential role that both personal and collective memory have in their positioning as a basic element of the ethical constitution of the community? What if the dialogue established between memory and the sublime integrates a third crucial element: history? Those are the kind of questions that a reading of *Luna de lobos* and its representation of the maquis can help us to answer.

Just as in *Lluvia amarilla*, *Luna de lobos* traces the “becoming animal” of the protagonists as a parallel process to their distantiation from a scopic relationship with their environment. As Susan Martín-Márquez has pointed out in her reading of the novel, a “privileged” and omniscient gaze is associated in the first part of the novel both with the characters and the narrator. The position of the maquis in the mountains gives them, in principle, the advantage of vigilance: “Nosotros somos como dios. Lo vemos todo desde ahí arriba” (93) (We are like God. We see everything from up there). By the end of the novel, though, Angel hides underground in his family’s house (the maquis becoming a “mole”) completely deprived of the gaze and identifying himself with a prophetic vision in the first pages of the novel:

En la mina de Ferreras . . . había mulas para tirar de las vagonetas. Nacían y morían allí dentro. Tenían las cuadras en la primera rampa de la mina y jamás salían a la superficie. Por una parte era mejor. Así nunca llegaban a saber que estaban ciegas y no podían resistir la luz del sol. (28)

(In the Ferreras mine . . . there were mules to drag the dump cars. They were born and they died in there. The stables were in the first ramp of the mine and they never came up to the surface. In a certain way, it was better like that. They never realized that they were blind and could not

stand the sunlight.)

The animalization of the protagonist, centered in the first part of the novel in the referent of the wolf, the vermin, is transferred now to the blindness of the mules in the mine or the mole underground. Ever closer to the earth itself, the animal becomes fused with the landscape, literally swallowed by it. But that process is developed throughout the pages of the novel by means of continuous references to the night and darkness as the natural environment for the protagonists, always/already dead: “La luz no es buena para los muertos” (14) (Light is not good for the dead); the night becomes a time of complicity, of transitory restfulness and harmony for “invisible” men, but also, of course, a dead threat, a warning of its proximity.

From the very beginning, the systematic use of the senses by the narrator to “absorb” the implicit reader distances the latter from reliance on his gaze. Smells and sounds become more important and even the gaze often focuses on details, “extreme close ups” that correspond to its limitations at nighttime:

No ha salido hoy tampoco la luna. La noche es solo una mancha negra y fría sobre el perfil de los hayedos que trepan monte arriba, entre la niebla, como fantasmagóricos ejércitos de hielo. Huele a romero y helechos machacados. Las botas chapotean sobre el barro buscando a cada paso la superficie indescifrable de la tierra. Las metralletas brillan, como lunas de hierro en la oscuridad. (12)

(There has not been any moon today either. Night is just a black and cold stain over the silhouette of the beeches climbing uphill in the mist, like phantasmagoric armies of ice. It smells like rosemary and smashed ferns. Boots squelch in the mud, looking for the undecipherable surface of the earth at every step. The machine guns shine, like iron moons in the dark.)

The progressive disappearance of the protagonists, then, is parallel to a process of sensual absorption of the reader in which the reliance on the visual is also progressively reduced. But that “isolation” from the realm of the visual opens the space of “imagination.” Along with becoming (invisible) animals, the maquis also become legend, their story and presence little by little dissolved into the immateriality of imagination. But it is precisely in “becoming” imaginary and legendary that they find their only possibility of survival. When, towards the end of the novel, Angel comes down from the mountain to pay a last visit to his agonizing father, he is conscious of not being “real” any more in the gaze of the people in the village. He has become part of their imagination, “internalized” by every

single one of them. He is now not a distant presence in the mountains, but an immaterial legend that haunts personal dreams:

Brota la lluvia con fuerza repentina mientras el carro con el féretro se pone en movimiento delante de mi casa arrastrando tras de sí un reguero de paraguas y la leyenda de ese hombre indómito e invisible que anoche, una vez más, volvió a burlar la vigilancia de los guardias y que, sin duda, ahora les estará observando desde alguna parte. Ese hombre imaginado tantas noches, al calor de las cuadras y cocinas, inmortal como su sombra, lejano como el viento, valiente, astuto, inteligente, invencible. (136)

(The rain appears with sudden strength. Meanwhile, the carriage starts moving in front of my house dragging behind a trail of umbrellas and the legend of that man, untamed and invisible that last night, once again, avoided the guards's vigilance and will be now looking from somewhere. That man, imagined night after night by the heat of the stables and the kitchens, immortal like his shadow, distant like the wind, brave, astute, intelligent, invincible.)

Survival consists now of the ability of the maquis to become part of the popular imagination. In a way, he is already beyond death, a myth. The passage from history to legend coincides with the dissolution of that history into landscape and nature, into the space of the sublime, not any more the object of reason but rather that of imagination. The “reciprocal gaze” (“En qué mirada seguirán viviendo” [In what gaze will they keep on living]) referred to by the last inhabitant of Ainielle is found now in the “fidelity” to that landscape-as-memory postulated by Llamazares in his introduction to *El río del olvido*.

In the same way as the characters entering Ainielle in search of its last inhabitant's corpse, the reader is constituted in *Luna de lobos* as an ethical (and aesthetic) subjectivity compelled to memory. The contemplation of that “bare life” of the maquis reduced to the condition of mole after a process of progressive animalization is inextricable from a certain relationship between the onlooker/reader and the landscape. The sensual immersion of the reader in the text, progressively distanced from the gaze along with the protagonist, takes him in a kind of journey towards an imaginary dimension within, that of the legend. But following Kant's conception of the sublime, imagination turns into the first step of engagement, a reconstitution of the self beyond the limitations of “reason” associated with the analytical distance of the gaze. The sublime becomes a motivation, the “opening” of a destiny (Kant *Critique* 126).

Even considering the very different genre, Llamazares's novel could be the object of a criticism similar to the one addressed to Agamben's

philosophy by La Capra: “[Agamben eliminates or downplays] a view of the human being as compromise formation . . . between body . . . and signifying practices that are social, political, and ethical in various ways” (161). The further consequence is the unavailability of immanent critique with respect to the past or the present. Rather, one is in a position of *Stunde Null* (point zero) requiring creation ex nihilo.

The only true “ethics”—in contrast to a derided “morality” of responsibility, guilt, repentance, and perhaps normativity and normative limits in general— is an ethics of pure potentiality, openness and exposure.

The only true “politics” is a form of blank, utopian, messianic (post) apocalypticism . . . (161)

Llamazares also proceeds by means of a de-historization of the subject. A particular context becomes mythical, the “rational” analysis of a set of circumstances turns into a generic ethical fascination with a trans-historical entity. The same paradigm of “bare life” is shared by narratives within and without “history” (*Luna de lobos* and *Lluvia amarilla*). Analytical “reason” is compromised by “imagination” and, what is more, “reasonable” action turns into some kind of romantic ethical and fascinated blindness in front of the legend: the reader’s aesthetic experience, his sensual immersion in Llamazares hyperlyricism becomes inextricable from his potential ethical/political engagement dealing with the memory of the maquis. But that ethical engagement follows the logic of the sublime and its pure “openness, potentiality and exposure” that marginalizes historical specificities.

At this point, it is necessary to remember the place that Llamazares’s works occupied within the very particular context that we described in the first part of this work and the different models and narratives of memory with which *Luna de lobos* was establishing a dialogue. In that particular context (Spain in the 1980s), Llamazares’s use of the sublime was not incompatible with an “immanent critique” of the past, but precisely the gesture, the “opening” that made it possible and compatible with a position of moral engagement and, one step farther, even with a new model of “normativity” of memory, the one entering Spanish society in the new century.

The ‘implicit reader’ required by Llamazares’s novel, “absorbed” into the “sublime” picture of its characters’s dissolution into nature and “bare life” was positioned in a privileged spot to question those conceptions of history (built around the fetishism of the fact and “objective truth”) and modes of its representation (dominated by a rhetoric of distance) dominant in the 1980s and that were both characterized by a common effect of

“knowledgeable” disengagement. In that particular context, it was precisely the recovery of the legendary dimension of the maquis and the “imaginary” subjective space that made possible what served as a convenient tool of ethical engagement. Simultaneously, it opened the possibility for the recovery of a certain conception of history whose relationship with memory (and along with it the subjective and the emotional) did not have to be of mere exclusion anymore, anticipating what would be the dominant, perhaps no less problematic, paradigm in which we are still immersed.

Notes

1. Possibly the most influential conception of the sublime in the modern tradition is Burke's, where Kant found his strongest inspiration: “The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those cause operate most powerfully, is Astonishment; and Astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case, the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. Hence arises the great power of the sublime, that far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings and hurries us on by irresistible force. Astonishment, as I have said, is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree; the inferior effects are admiration, reverence and respect” (Burke 58).
2. All the translations are mine except Llamazares's *Yellow rain*. As specified in the bibliography, the published English translation is used.
3. For an analysis of that process of silencing, see (Moreno-Nuño 233–43). Luengo talks about *Luna de lobos* as “amparo de esa memoria tanto tiempo silenciada” (132) (protection of that memory silenced for so long); Beisel places the novel in “una tradición que trata de hacer presentes experiencias colectivas del pasado, que por motivos impuestos por el poder no han podido abrirse paso en la historia oficial” (196–7) (A tradition that attempts to make present those collective memories from the past, that for reasons imposed by power have not been allowed into official history).
4. See for example Riele 210–11; Miñambres 26; Moreno-Nuño 272.
5. If Llamazares's “hyperlyricism” can also be found in Mendez, the stylistic differences with Cercas are much more pronounced. Nevertheless, despite Cercas's metaliterary tools, his text involves the reader in a melodramatic atmosphere that favors a process of identification and closeness to the characters. It is symptomatic that Llamazares's, Cercas's and Mendez's novels have been adapted with some success to the screen as opposed to Cela's, Benet's or Molina's.
6. See La Capra 135; Laclau 11–12; Negri 123.
7. That connection between the sublime and “complete loneliness” already appears in the *Observations* (48).
8. The idea can be traced back to Burke: “[The sublime] anticipates our reasoning, and hurries us on by irresistible force” (58).
9. It is not difficult to hear in this formulation the reverberations of the chore of Kantian ethics; the categorical imperative is a not very distant presence in the analysis of the sublime: “[the sublime is linked] to the tendency to the feeling for (practical) ideas, i.e. to the moral feeling. Hereon is based the necessity of that

agreement of the judgment of others about the sublime with our own which we include in the latter” (“*Critique*” 131). Already in *Observations*: “Among moral attributes, true virtue alone is sublime . . . [it] can be grafted only upon principles such that the more general they are, the more sublime and noble it becomes. These principles are not speculative rules, but the consciousness of a feeling that lives in every human breast and extends itself much further than over the particular grounds of compassion and complaisance” (“*Observations*” 57, 60).

10. The connection between the sublime and melancholy appears for example in Kant’s *Observations* (64).

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