A Narrative Biography of Horacio Quiroga, the Lone Anarchist

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1.

THE OLD ANARCHIST REVISITED

It was at the end of February 1937, and the Uruguayan communist writer Elias Castelnuovo, who had been living in Buenos Aires for years, received a commission: to write the cover story for *Claridad* magazine in honor of the recently deceased Uruguayan short-story writer Horacio Quiroga.

Castelnuovo didn't have much to say about the dead man's work. He was never his admirer, he was never his reader, they were never friends, he was never a literary critic, and their relations were few and circumstantial. In the five months that Horacio was hospitalized at Hospital de Clínicas, he was not there once.

Of course, he remembered when, seven years earlier, as a communist militant, he had tried to convince Quiroga that he had to visit the Soviet Union. Times were hard: the military coup had taken place in Argentina and General Uriburu had seized power, closing *Crítica* newspaper. Uruguay was also going from bad to worse. It was time for popular writers like Quiroga to systematically return to society something that they had always received from it. Knowing the Soviet reality and coming back to spread its principles was the least he had to do. That time, naively, he thought: Quiroga had a social conscience, he was not going to refuse the invitation.

What he got in response: a click of the tongue, at most. He said he would not go, he could not go, he would not fake a feeling that was not his. If Buenos Aires was already suffocating him, it would not be in Eastern Europe where he would be able to breathe the air he needed. Castelnuovo never forgot that insolence.

Neither did Horacio Quiroga. For him, it was time to leave Buenos Aires, return to the jungle that had so often welcomed him, to the village of San Ignacio, in the poor and inhospitable north of Argentina, where Guarani was heard on the dirt streets, indigenous *peones* were exploited as if the State did not exist, and Horacio would let himself be in his stone house, built on top of a plateau overlooking the Paraná River, planting a little cane and mate. It was his jungle, where he felt free. As long as he had love, paper to write, soil to sow plants that common sense said could not thrive on that

basalt-filled plateau, with a harsh sun, above 40 degrees Celsius in summer, and with temperatures close to zero and frosts in the harsher winters. Still, he planted the most improbable things: Brazilian pineapples, orchids, ginkgo biloba. To make anything grow in the barren soil was his profession of faith. He did not at all expect Castelnuovo to understand his refusal. Years later, he wrote in a letter to his friend Estrada: "*a solitary and courageous anarchist cannot write for the account of Stalin & Co*", concluding right away, "*Castelnuovo is a good kid, but a blunderer.*"[1]

Fool or wise, Castelnuovo had, it is true, some respect for Horacio. A work like his was not built every day, but... Anyway, it would not be difficult to write a beautiful obituary about him, even more so now that he was a little out of fashion, forgotten, after having turned his back on the capital and stuck among the snakes, on the banks of the Paraná River. It was his chance to reveal new facets of the writer, fulfill his historical duty, and begin to promote the judgment that every man must go through: personal, political, moral.

As he walked down the street, on that sunny afternoon, he thought about how he was going to write the article. A personal, political, and ideological profile. The reflection that readers need. The refusal six years ago – yes! –, it was from there that he would build the text. After all, how could a writer who knew firsthand the exploitation of the loggers by capitalists on the banks of the Paraná River be so resistant to the cause of socialism?

He could not find the answer. The only thing he knew about Quiroga were family stories, told by a relative from the other side of the La Plata River who now lived in Buenos Aires. Chilling stories. But he had never heard anything from Horacio's mouth. And he used to speak so little! How many times has he tried to get close and was just blown off? Quiroga was his failure. The writer with the greatest revolutionary potential; however, limited himself to a kind of tormented genius. Such a pity.

Surrounded by the wandering thoughts that plagued him, he sat down to finally write the article. The first posthumous portrait of the writer, to be published in the largest left-wing magazine in the country, was going to come from his typewriter. The profile was like this: "*Horacio Quiroga was a surly, acerbic, retiring man. By his side, one always had the impression of being before a wild, tangly, thorny plant that needed to be looked at*

[1] "*Castelnuovo es un buen muchacho, pero torpísimo*." (Quiroga, Quiroga Íntimo, 578).

without getting too near to avoid getting hurt."[2] He was satisfied and continued:

> *I understood that that's what Quiroga was like. Not very expansive, reserved, dour, solitary. I understood, in the process, that each person is as he is, not as one wants him to be. From that day on I was his friend without, however, ever breaking the distance that his way of being imposed on me. But that, I repeat, now that I am in front of his corpse I would not dare allow a tear to fall on his face or to him on the forehead. To somehow leave before my conscience some sign of farewell.*[3]

That was it. With each line that advanced, it was as if he redeemed himself from the failed relationship. On the paper soon being released from the typewriter's cylinder, that man, once incomprehensible to him, was becoming his own. Castelnuovo could mold Quiroga on the page and touch him in a way that had always been impossible. But he wanted more. He wanted to say what was not said in public, to write the stories he had heard from his family, to show everyone what went on that unsociable man's mind. The germ of Horacio Quiroga's conversion into his tragic character. Quiroga was all his and everyone would know the truth:

> *(...) nobody understood the tragedy of his life. Because Horacio Quiroga's life began and ended tragically. When he was six months old, according to what a first cousin of his, Jorge R. Forteza, whose testimony I invoke, told me, while his mother was breastfeeding him, one day, his father was brought home dead from three bullets. At the age of twelve, his stepfather, who was the only father the boy knew, suffered an attack of amnesia and forgot everything: speech, writing and walking. Horacio Quiroga, who felt a great affection for him, began to teach him everything from the beginning. When he managed to restore him back to normal life, another day, in his presence, the stepfather committed suicide. Already in his youth, he went out as godfather in a duel in which his best friend was participating, and while he*

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[2] "*Horacio Quiroga era un hombre adusto, puntiagudo, huraño. A su lado, se tenía la impresión siempre que se estaba frente a una planta salvaje, enzarzada, espinosa, que había que contemplar sin acercarse demasiado para no pincharse*" (Castelnuovo, "La tragedia de Horacio Quiroga").

[3] "*Comprendí que Quiroga era así. Poco expansivo, reservado, arisco, solitario. Comprendí de paso que cada uno es como es no como uno quiere que sea. Desde ese día fui amigo suyo sin romper, empero, jamás la distancia que su manera de ser me imponía. Pero eso, repito, ahora que estoy frente a su cadáver no me atrevo a dejar caer una lágrima sobre su rostro ni a darle un beso en la frente. A dejar de algún modo ante mi conciencia alguna señal de despedida*." (Castelnuovo, "La tragedia de Horacio Quiroga").

was checking the weapons, another day, he missed a shot and killed him. Finally, he married a woman who also committed suicide in his presence. Without counting the end, his own suicide, we have in his story four singularly tragic events.[4]

It was done, and now everyone would have his profile in front of them. The tragic portrait was already finished, but he still had to deal with the alienated man. The useless pain, the arid insistence of wanting to go to Misiones instead of the Soviet Union. To go back over his steps to undo what he had called the writer's tragedy and project it onto the cold canvas of ideology. After all, everyone has personal problems, but why not give the other a share of yourself? He resumed:

The writer who fights for the emancipation of a class (...) knows that tragedy is not in the constitution of human life. Rather, it is in the constitution of society. And that the dagger is not wielded by the muse of poetry, but by the muse of economy. He knows that all conflicts, the most serious ones - revolution, war, crises - do not recognize in their basis any other cause than that. If he suffers, he knows that he suffers not because of himself, but because of the society that makes him sick or oppresses him or exploits him or poisons him. And he knows that his pain is to no purpose if he does not join the pain of others, and instead of picking at his own wounds he tries to pick at the wounds of society. And instead of being satisfied with his pain, he tries to contribute with his experience and his action to create another society in which neither pain nor tragedy is possible.[5]

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[4] "*(...) nadie conocía la tragedia de su vida. Porque la vida de Horacio Quiroga comenzó y concluyó trágicamente. Cuando tenía seis meses, según me contó un primo hermano suyo, Jorge R. Forteza, cuyo testimonio invoco, mientras la madre lo amamantaba, un día, le trajeron al padre muerto de tres tiros de escopeta. A los doce años, el padrastro, que fue el único padre que conoció el muchacho, sufrió un ataque de amnesia y olvidó todo: la palabra, la escritura y la marcha. Horacio Quiroga que sentía por él un gran afecto comenzó a enseñarle todo desde el principio. Cuando logró restituirlo de nuevo a la vida normal, otro día, en su presencia, el padrastro se suicidó. Ya en su mocedad salió de padrino en un duelo en que participaba su mejor amigo, y mientras revisaba las armas, otro día más, se le escapó un tiro y lo mató. Finalmente, se casó con una mujer que también se suicidó en presencia suya. Sin contar el final, su propio suicidio, tenemos en su historia cuatro hechos singularmente trágicos*" (Castelnuovo, "La tragedia de Horacio Quiroga").

[5] "*El escritor que lucha por la emancipación de una clase (...) Sabe que la tragedia no está en la constitución de la vida humana. Sino en la constitución de la sociedad. Y que el puñal no lo esgrime la musa de la poesía, sino la musa de la economía. Sabe que todos los conflictos, los más graves, - la revolución, la guerra, la crisis- no reconocen en su base más causa que ésa. Si sufre, sabe que no sufre por su culpa,*

Yes, that was it. What good was it to write those short stories that so many would like to have written? Maybe I would give my left arm to be the author of "*Los desterrados*", "*Los precursores*", "*Los pescadores de vigas*". But what good are those pages if nothing was destined to the cause of the men who suffer? From now on, no one will overvalue his work. They will think not about what he accomplished, but about what he could have accomplished for us. Horacio Quiroga is far from being the model writer we need. So much ink wasted on *feuilletons* for the bourgeois society, so much idyllic love in service of alienation… The old tale of love. So much wasted talent. Let us get this over with:

> *Despite everything, I think about his tragedy. I do not think about his literature. (…) I think of everything that has happened to him and I feel the horror. The horror of his life and the horror of his death.*[6]

Done. Everything had been said. He was satisfied. It was written. It was, without a doubt, the best article on Horacio Quiroga, the most thoughtful, the most daring. The text would be featured in the next issue of *Claridad* magazine. Now everyone would think twice when reading a text by Quiroga and would think about the story he, Elias Castelnuovo, had told. He collected the paper sheets beside the typewriter and went to San José Street to deliver the text.

Madam's chauffeur

A little less than five kilometers from there, in a small room in a luxurious three-story mansion with 24 balconies, on the corner of Viamonte and Florida streets, in the office of the magazine *Sur*, a meeting was taking place. It was time to settle the details to finish the February issue of the magazine, which was almost ready. At the meeting were Eduardo Mallea, Jorge Luis Borges, Adolfo Bioy Casares, and Ramona Victoria Epifanía Rufina Ocampo Aguirre, or simply Victoria Ocampo, a direct descendant

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sino por culpa de la sociedad que lo enferma o que lo oprime o que lo explota o que lo envenena. Y sabe que su dolor es un cero a la izquierda si no se suma al dolor de los demás, y en vez de ponerse a hurgar sus propias llagas trata de hurgarle las llagas a la sociedad. Y en vez de conformarse con su dolor trata de contribuir con su experiencia y con su acción para crear otra sociedad en la cual no sea posible ni el dolor ni la tragedia" (Castelnuovo, "La tragedia de Horacio Quiroga").

[6] "*A pesar de todo yo pienso en su tragedia. No pienso en su literatura. (…) Pienso en todo lo que le ha sucedido y siento horror. Horror por su vida y horror por su muerte*" (Castelnuovo, "La tragedia de Horacio Quiroga").

of Lope de Aguirre, the colonizer. Yes, her, a fine flower of the Buenos Aires aristocracy, who owned and was in charge of *Sur*'s editorial office.

Victoria had no affection for or interest in Horacio Quiroga. Her gaze did not reach him, so to speak. *Sur* was for her the magazine of the cultural elite, to which, according to her concept, the bearded Uruguayan did not belong. As with *Claridad*, Quiroga had never published a single line in *Sur*. On the other hand, it was impossible to ignore his death: he was famous, and had been publishing his writings in that city for almost forty years, had hundreds of short stories, articles, movie reviews, *feuilletons*… his short stories were translated in Europe, in the United States. It was not possible to stay silent.

The other members of the magazine's board thought the same, even though they turned up their noses at the dead man. Jorge Luis Borges always took advantage of every opportunity to make fun of Quiroga, whom he called Uruguayan superstition: too popular, too vulgar, someone who had even dared to emulate – *to imitate badly*, in Georgie's words – the short stories Kipling had done better. Adolfo Bioy Casares, Victoria's brother-in-law and then still a writer at the beginning of his career, spent his whole life thinking that anyone who admired Quiroga was a lost cause. Eduardo Mallea, novelist and editor of the cultural section of the newspaper *La Nación* for six years, understood that Horacio's death was unavoidable.

They then resorted to Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, a postal worker and writer for whom they had no affection either. The acclaimed author of *Radiografia da Pampa* was a friend of Horacio. It was known that over the last two years he had been close to the writer, who was already sick in the Misiones jungle, before he decided to go to Buenos Aires to treat his prostate problems. It was up to him to say the most effusive words at the writer's funeral. It would also be up to him to pay homage to Quiroga on the pages of *Sur*. Even better, they decided to quote the speech he had given in full, which would even allow the text to be published in the following issue, and without any hurry.

Published on the final pages of that issue of *Sur*, the article was more a concession than a homage. Preceded by an editorial that, as much as it wanted to be impersonal and discreet, ended up being emphatic, clarifying to readers that he did not belong there. *Mineiros* are solidary only in cancer, Nelson Rodrigues seems to repeat to us from the depths of time. In that laconic final note, although not described, the aesthetic differences are highlighted:

> *A criteria that differed from the art of writing and the general character of the preoccupations we believe to be indispensable for nourishing that art separated us from the excellent short story writer that had just died in a*

hospital in Buenos Aires. As a testimony of respect to his memory, in a country where to just dare to have ideas and dare to express oneself in terms of beauty implies a heroism, we transcribe today these words pronounced by Ezequiel Martínez Estrada before the body of Horacio Quiroga.[7]

If the differences between the group of *Sur* and Martínez Estrada were already large, between them and Horacio Quiroga they were abyssal. The Uruguayan's popularity, seen as rude and unsociable, hurt the affectation of the local elite, given their general inclination to the Old World. It seemed to them that Horacio had nothing to offer: he was too brutal for the Europeanist ideal of the magazine's board. If one were to talk about wild beasts, it should be the ones from Asia or other faraway lands, not those from the north of Argentina, as he used to do. As for fantastic literature, they were already satisfied with that of Maupassant, Poe, and the locals José Bianco and Santiago Dabove. The bearded Uruguayan, for them, was one too many.

Horacio, for his part, had not had any sympathy for that group either, which was not part of his world. He had already taken a dig at Victoria in an old short story from the time he lived in Buenos Aires called "*Su chauffeur*", published more than a decade earlier, in 1925[8]. It was known that the Ocampo family educated their daughters with English and French tutors so that the girls could learn to speak, read, and write in those languages before Spanish. Victoria often complained, already as an adult, about her difficulties in expressing herself in writing in the language of her native country. She claimed to feel more comfortable writing in French, and it was in that language that she wrote an important part of her personal correspondence, including with Argentine friends such as Delfina Bunge.

Horacio could not forgive her affectation. In "*Su chauffeur*", he created a priceless story: two high-society young sisters are having fun discussing

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[7] "*Un criterio diferente del arte de escribir y del carácter general de las preocupaciones que creemos imprescindibles para la nutrición de ese arte nos separaban del excelente cuentista que acaba de morir en un hospital de Buenos Aires. Como testimonio de respeto a su memoria, en un país donde sólo atreverse a tener ideas y osar expresarse en términos de belleza implica un heroísmo, transcribrimos hoy estas palabras pronunciadas por Ezequiel Martínez Estrada frente al cuerpo de Horacio Quiroga*" (Revista Sur, "Editorial," 108).

[8] "*Quiroga was insolent when he became annoyed at someone. He never liked Victoria Ocampo. He never contributed to Sur. A short story entitled 'Su chofer' has thorns that perhaps the director of the magazine never accused as daggers shot at her" ["Quiroga era insolente cuando le tomaba fastidio a alguien. Nunca quiso a Victoria Ocampo. Jamás colaboró en Sur. Un cuento que se titula 'Su chofer' tiene espinas que quizás la diretora de la revista nunca acusó como pinchazos dirigidos a su persona*."] (Amorim, El Quiroga que yo conocí, 24-25).

art and culture in French in front of the servants, that uncultured mob. Many contemporary and future readers understood the allusion to Victoria and one of her sisters.

In the short story, one day the girls' private driver provocatively quotes Proust in French as they chat with their friends. They were the kind of woman, says the driver, who only has eyes for their peers or subordinates. People who take pleasure in their socio-economic position and enjoy it:

> *But it is not enough to be the chauffeur of a girl of the world to interest her. You need the mystery of the contradiction between the job and the man, just as children are able to capture some interest by their talk, passing for revolutionaries. (...) A literary jolt, the fearful exhilaration of having a university student at your service – humiliate him a little and flirt with him a little – seemed to me the most effective in the genre.*[9]

This is how the character short-circuits his mistress's head and seduces her.

It is very unlikely that Victoria Ocampo was shaken by the short story, or even that she was aware of it. She was a figure much more given to being enchanted than to being disappointed. On her list of delights are Virginia Woolf, Le Corbusier, Drieu La Rochelle, Ortega y Gasset. But definitely not Horacio Quiroga. His name is not even mentioned in her vast memoirs, published in several volumes. But the fates of Horacio Quiroga and Victoria Ocampo had finally bumped into each other in that space awkwardly conceded on the final pages of that Buenos Aires elite magazine. Readers are left with the words by Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, learned from Horacio: "*He has taught us that blood is the best ink.*"[10]

A corpse in dispute

The smoke from the flames of Horacio's newly cremated body went high; his word was being detached from his flesh. What had been written – and published or kept in the drawer – remained, but what was recollected and made up on top of such recollections remained as well. Ezequiel

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[9] "*Pero no basta ser chauffeur de una chica de mundo para interesarle. Se requiere el misterio de la contradicción entre el oficio y el hombre, del mismo modo que los niños bien logran dar algún interés por su charla, pasando por revolucionarios. (...) Una sacudida literaria, el temible alborozo de tener a su servicio un universitario – humillarle un poquito y coquetear con él otro poquito – me pareció lo más eficaz dentro del género*" (Quiroga, "Su chauffeur").

[10] "*Él nos ha enseñado que la sangre es la mejor tinta*" (Estrada, "Horacio Quiroga," 108).

Martínez Estrada and Elias Castelnouvo were setting up the foundations for the memory of the one who would not be seen wandering in Buenos Aires, San Ignacio, or Salto, his birthplace, anymore. And "*the smell of words on the body*"[11] never dissipated, whether by those who lived with it or by how this smell would be evoked, narrated, and described by so many people from then on.

After all, who would have the authority to talk about that man who amassed such passionate final reactions for himself when he was no longer present to take his own stand? Who was the person who had lived up to this pair of unusual obituaries?

Being the lone anarchist came at the price of having few people willing to defend him. Castelnuovo had said so and the photographs published in the newspapers confirmed that there were not many people at the funeral of a writer who had enjoyed such fame throughout his life. His talent and strength have always allowed him, throughout his trajectory, to occupy public spaces, in the most diverse publications, over the last three decades. However, in that early 1937, and in the time around his death, Horacio, more than a writer, was a prematurely tired, aged, and forgotten man.

The first Argentine redress came only in the following year, in a curious and unexpected way. At the Argentine Congress, Senator Alfredo Palacios, from the Socialist Party, gave a speech that brought together the recently deceased Horacio Quiroga and Alfonsina Storni and a third man, so different from them in so many ways, but close to them during some key moments: Leopoldo Lugones. Concerning the three suicidal writers, the senator said the following:

> *In two years three of our great spirits, each one of which would be enough to bring glory to a country, have departed from existence: Leopoldo Lugones, Horacio Quiroga and Alfonsina Storni. Something is wrong in the life of a nation when, instead of singing it, poets depart, with a gesture of bitterness and disdain, in the midst of the glacial indifference of the State.*[12]

[11] "*el olor de las palabras sobre el cuerpo*" (Luis Gusmán, "Ropa difunta", 16).

[12] "*En dos años han desertado de la existencia tres de nuestros grandes espíritus, cada uno de los cuales bastaría para dar gloria a un país: Leopoldo Lugones, Horacio Quiroga y Alfonsina Storni. Algo anda mal en la vida de una nación cuando, en vez de cantarla, los poetas parten, con un gesto de amargura y de desdén, en medio de una glacial indiferencia del Estado*" (Mucci, Leopoldo Lugones: Los escritores y el poder, 17-18).

The year was 1938 and poets and writers gave themselves up to death and suffered from singular obituaries. To whom do life and works belong? Who builds the memory of those who are no longer there?

2.

THE RAIN TURNS INTO DELUGE AND THE WIND INTO HURRICANE – BECOMING A WRITER

On the banks of the Uruguay River is the city of Salto, in the Uruguayan far west. Across the river there is Concordia. To this day, Salto is the second-largest city in the country. Horacio was born there, the fourth child of Uruguayan Pastora Forteza and Argentine Prudencio Quiroga. Since childhood the boy was seduced by movement, by how things work, by science and poetry.

It is at the age of nineteen that we find him, small, muscular, in search of adventures, and filled with a pioneering desire: together with his friend Carlos Berrutti, he wanted to cross on his bicycle the 120 kilometers that separate the cities of Salto and Paysandú. They went by bicycle, a still rudimentary contraption invented a little more than thirty years before.

It was a vehicle that very few had access to: Horacio, son of a diplomat, was one of the wealthiest among his friends. The chosen route, going from the city where he lived to the next big city, had the extra appeal of going through a road rather close to the bed of the Uruguay River, always to the south.

Traveling, however, was not enough. More than going all the way, it was necessary to give some epic character to the quest. More than doing it, they wanted to showcase what they had done. To print, to give light, to publish! Thus, on the *continuum* between the desire for adventure and the desire to report, "*Para los ciclistas*"[13] was born, the chronicle of the trail explored over two days through muddy terrain, puddles, and the torrential rains of the Uruguayan spring. The text appeared on December 3, 1897, signed by "Two cyclists". It was the first text published by Horacio. Perhaps it was his debut as a writer. When is someone really a writer?

The editor in charge of publishing the feat was a man even younger than Horacio, Alfredo Lagos (1880-1926), who was in charge of the newly created newspaper *La Reforma*, which "*was published in the afternoons,*

[13] Quiroga, Obras inéditas y desconocidas, 25-28.

with the news, and was commercial and of general interest"[14], that is to say, a newspaper which is not particularly interesting in itself, and is more indicative of the moment of flowering of the South American press, with its small vehicles of commercial character run by young people, than anything else.

Riding the bike and then running the pen on the small notebook. Crossing nearby bogs and then reporting as if he had ventured into the wild sea. Amplifying hardships newly faced and telling them as if they were the greatest ones ever faced by a human being on the planet. The bicycle crossing was something else. Robert Louis Stevenson throbbed on the tip of Horacio's pen. The seas opened up, adventures were possible, and it was possible to tell them.

Like a logbook, "Para los ciclistas" is synthetic and descriptive. It resembles notes by explorers, but, at the same time, shows readers that they too can take the same route: "*In short: with dry weather and no headwind, the journey is extremely feasible*"[15]. But just as the bicycle crossing is not meant to be just a bicycle crossing, but a liberating experience, the article is also not meant as just an article, but a tale of adventure with a desire for literature. This is how, in Horacio's inexperienced pen, "*the rain becomes deluge and the wind a hurricane*"[16]. Something was being born beyond the worsening of the weather, something was growing.

The first trip, the first article, and the first traces of a style. What spreads across the white of the page, a little by chance, a little inadvertently, was not what Horacio imagined for himself.

He had his secret clubs, with his friends from Salto: first, The Musketeers; then, The *Consistorio del Gay Saber*. In them, all literary experience had to do with poetry, with free association, with the style in vogue at the time: the boys wanted to be musketeers, knights, poets, not a new Stevenson. But it did not matter, it was time for experimenting. And Horacio was proud of his article written with a friend and published under a pseudonym.

Thus, the debut was a surprise for Horacio himself. On those daily, solar, printed pages of *La Reforma*, and not on the poetic, nocturnal, handwritten pages of the youth notebooks, Horacio first got acquainted with his own printed word.

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[14] "*salía de tarde, era noticioso, comercial y de interés general*" (Manuel Olarreaga, El periodismo en el departamento de Salto, 13).

[15] "*En resumen: con tiempo seco y sin viento alguno de frente, el viaje es sumamente factible*" (Quiroga, Obras inéditas y desconocidas, 28).

[16] "*la lluvia se transforma en diluvio y el viento en huracán*" (Quiroga, Obras inéditas y desconocidas, 26).

He would grow to like it, that is for sure. He would ritually repeat travels and writings. For those born by the river, their whole life is a crossing. In his future years, Horacio would cross the city of Posadas and the town of San Ignacio with a rowing canoe, or a mighty Paraná River[17]; he would fantasize a journey on foot by two old septuagenarian *peones* in an attempt to return from Misiones to the Paraná they came from, after years of being away. The emerging desire was one of roaming, despite the adversities, or perhaps driven by them, to tear up paths, to expand horizons. It all started with that bicycle in the mud, with that ink in the notebook. The account of Horacio's bicycle trip registers that he and his friend are towed by a horse, that they fall into some stony fields due to a moment of inattention. At another time, they half sink in a bog. Living and telling were born together on that trip.

On which of these days, Horacio, did you become a writer? On the day you convinced Berrutti to take the trip with you? The day you hit the road? The day you saw your text being published? You deny it. You say no, it was not in any of these days.

As an old man, you look back on your past and say something else: your personal epic was never one of sport, but of making a living. That at some point you decided to be a professional writer, and that it all started when they first decided to pay you some change for your written lines: "*I started writing in 1901. That year, La Alborada de Montevideo paid me three pesos for a contribution. Since that moment, of course, I have tried to earn a living by writing*"[18].

Cunning, you turned "starting to write" and "starting to receive" into synonyms, implying "starting to publish". When you published that, Horacio, on the eve of completing half a century in this world, you were just repeating a conception of life that was being forged over the years: the one which says that writing is not a gift nor an art, but a craft, and that, therefore, it has to be paid like any other. That inspiration is a chimera. That writers must be treated as professionals and that their descendants must have the right, as an inheritance, to receive copyright for a period longer than the mere ten years then enforced by Argentine law.

That was your public image, that is how it was forged: a professional writer. There was practically no page of yours that was not paid. As an adult, no more literary magazines, no more favors, no more giving a hand: mass-

[17] Feats present in short stories as "*Los remos de 'La Gaviota'*" (1918) and "*En la noche*" (1919)

[18] "*Yo comencé a escribir en 1901. En ese año, La Alborada de Montevideo me pagó tres pesos por una colaboración. Desde ese instante, pues, he pretendido ganarme la vida escribiendo*" (Quiroga, Todos los cuentos, 1206).

circulation newspapers and magazines – remunerated, as it should be. Whoever crossed your path calling you a master, with a pat on the back, inevitably left with a story for a lifetime, never printed on paper, but in memory, like the one told by César Tiempo. It happened in 1925, when your young admirer came to you with an invitation to collaborate on a text in the magazine of his friends from high school, of which he was the editor:

> *I had to pass him a glass of water and I took advantage of the opportunity to remind him that I had written to him asking for a contribution destined to a youth magazine, ex-high school classmates, whose address I had been entrusted with.*
>
> *— Do you know I live of what I write?, - he said, looking me straight in the face. —. I don't think you are in a position to pay me.*
>
> *He left me speechless.*[19]

While the mature writer established himself as craftsman in scenes like this, which took place in 1925, the young man continues cycling, with confidence in a future whose shape looked great in the distance, even if the specifics were still too far away to even be imagined. To tell a rational truth in order to hide the truths you no longer dare to confess, I know it very well. I will not confront you, I will not judge you. I will just tell some stories about you.

Writing against indifference

Let us just say, with a touch of fable: Horacio's passion for the bicycle continued. And the same goes for that other passion. Writing was a good way to be noticed, to make his own voice rise in that flat city. He began to publish frantically.

First in a weekly magazine called *Gil Blas*, run by his friends Adrúbal Delgado and José María Fernández Saldaña, known as the Maitland. There he poured his lyrical verve, born from the – affective, chemical, and literary –experiences that, with his friends Alberto Brignole, Julio Jaureche, and

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[19] "*Yo tuve que alcanzarle un vaso de agua y aproveché la coyuntura para recordarle que le había escrito requiriéndole una colaboración destinada a una revista de jóvenes, ex-compañeros de bachillerato, cuya dirección me habían confiado.*

— Usted sabe que vivo de lo que escribo?, - me dijo mirándome derechamente a la cara. —. No creo que ustedes estén en condiciones de pagarme.

Me dejó mudo." (Tiempo, Cartas inéditas y evocación de Horacio Quiroga, 9).

José Hasda, were shared by the group of musketeers. Horacio, the D'Artagnan, felt the need to make himself heard.

The magazines and newspapers that flourished in Salto at that time were the possibilities for the musketeer verses and ideas to try bolder flights, among peers and beyond the nights of party and poetry, and to get to the printed letter and the light of day. On the pages of *Gil Blas*, already in its fifth issue, Horacio will take a risk with his first literary text: a prose poem called "Noturno". (Horacio, can I say that this is your literary debut? Or will you insist that it was only when you received the first three pesos?).

A calculated risk, because the boy hides his name once again. This time, the pseudonym chosen is Guillermo Eynhardt, the protagonist of the Hungarian novel by Max Nordau (1849-1923), *Fin de Siècle* (in Brazil, published as *Moléstia do Século*), very much in vogue at that time. Of the very short text, few memories remain, among which the most eloquent being those that capture the lyricism of the chemistry student in love with electroplating, who was then Horacio: "*The moon appears, and, in its galvanizing light, each leaf is a piece of silver, and each ray of light, a fantasy. (...) All is mystery. From the moon, which resembles a voltaic arc, to the wind that seems like a caress*."[20]

Magazines followed one another, opening and closing like fireflies in the night of Salto. The boys tried themselves as editors, journalists, editors, poets, and then, when the experiment was over, they went on to live adult lives, as doctors, engineers, lawyers, or merchants.

In the following year, when they founded *La Revista Social*, Horacio started to try his hand at yet a third genre, the everyday chronicles [*crónicas de costumbres*]. With the expertise acquired throughout his twenty years of existence, he began to rebel, on the pages of the magazine, against all sorts of conventions: mourning, the proper ways of dancing in public, ways of expressing love, among many others. His fun consisted of teasing readers and social rules. He was the authority.

Not satisfied with writing in other people's magazines, Horacio decided to found his own. The title was pompous and serious: *Revista del Salto. Semanario de Literatura y Ciencias Sociales*. It was quite a contrast to the Spanish *picaro* honored by his friends' magazine, *Gil Blas*. It contrasted even with the playful spirit of the musketeer brotherhood.

But it had to be that way, for Horacio's new task was to transform local society, according to his own words. It was necessary to say what he was

[20] "*La luna aparece; y, a su luz galvánica, cada hoja es un trozo de plata, y cada rayo de luz, un ensueño. (...) Todo es misterio. Desde la Luna que semeja un arco voltaico, hasta el viento que parece una caricia*" (Quiroga, Obras inéditas y desconocidas, 29).

coming for. It was a task as brief as it was frantic. Throughout the twenty issues, published over the course of its five months of existence, between September 11, 1899, and February 4, 1900, Horacio signed 24 texts of several genres: editorial notes, everyday chronicles, poems, short stories, theater criticism, programmatic texts. More importantly: for the first time, he dared to use his own name.

It was his own magazine, his name was exposed on the front page; in its editorial, a true call to battle called for "old school veterans" and "shy enlightened ones" to occupy the publication's columns, launching their attacks. The typography improved issue by issue, although always at the end of the eight pages of each copy, the editor regretted, sometimes the lack of illustrations, sometimes the lack of room to conclude a text. From number eight onwards, the magazine got a dust jacket, with a subtle message on the back cover, inviting merchants and businessmen to advertise there.

This call was also answered, although a little late, in the first December 1899 issue of the magazine, number 13: there were eighteen advertisements, for tailors, drugstores, lawyers, designers, music teachers, homeopaths, watchmakers, and a multipurpose carpentry shop, called Central, which manufactured window blinds, coffins, and even offered a complete funeral service. The loyal local merchants will follow the magazine until its final issue.

And then it was over. The end of *Revista del Salto* happened with the publication of the twentieth issue, prematurely. The final issue was prepared with care: in addition to the final note, strategically placed on the final pages of the magazine, signed by Quiroga – "*Por qué no sale más la Revista del Salto*"[21] – there is also an Open Letter by Atilio C. Brignole, addressed to the editor. In both texts, the "indifference of the scene" is accused as responsible for its disappearance. The editor complains that the magazine was open for submissions, but no one wanted to buy the magazine, no one wanted to write for it, so the magazine was over!

An onomastic index, following the editor's note, corroborates the idea that this was a project with a beginning, middle, and end. In it, we see the 24 texts by Horacio Quiroga, in addition to nine unsigned social columns. Almost half a hundred authors had their texts published: forty-seven, to be more precise. The main ones were Horacio and his friend Atilio Brignole. Then came other confreres – such as Alberto Brignole, José María Fernández Saldaña, Asdrúbal Delgado –, relatives – such as Eduardo Forteza –, and the editor's favorite poets: Bécquer, Gutiérrez Nájera, Heine, Hugo, Lugones, Catulle Mendès, and Amado Nervo.

[21] Quiroga, "Por qué no sale más la Revista del Salto," 164-165.

Horacio's disappointment, in his final words, was displayed without dissimulation. The editor looked down on his readers, said that they were looking for distraction rather than reflection, and made it clear that he was uncomfortable with the cold reception the magazine had received. He seemed to shout: Enough! His ideal does not fit in that provincial world. Horacio wanted more, he could do more. That is why he was going to leave.

I am not from Salto. I am from Paris!

After all the emotions with the bicycle, the poetry, the life in the literary fellowships, the editing of a magazine to call his own – after all that, what else? It is true that Horacio had been satisfied with each of those adventures, but everything seemed little to him. As he went on publishing, other, bigger plans came to mind: what if he went to Paris?

The idea was being gestated. Arguments for leaving were not lacking: the word Paris alone loomed larger than all of them. Yet they circled around his head to plan the big leap, the journey that would launch him to new horizons: it was the year of the Universal Exhibition in the City of Light, the first one in the new century; it was his chance to venture out as a cyclist in the local races; he could meet French and Latin American poets and writers he so admired, such as Nicaraguan Rubén Darío; he would meet the French women; he would be recognized as a great writer; Why not go? He had the inheritance money for his father's death and his mother could help him monthly until he could manage things on his own. He would go.

Intoxicated with himself and his talent, Horacio left to fulfill his great fate. Literary fate, of course. He wanted to be a writer, even though it was so difficult for him, until then, to sign his own name, oscillating between Nordau's character, Portuguese names, and anything else that could veil his own signature, while he discovered and built himself properly as an author.

Horacio, when, on March 30, 1900, you set sail for Paris on the *Città di Torino*, were you already a writer? I know that you hesitated before the identification form and ended up filling in the "occupation" field something that referred not to the literary fellowships, nor to the bike rides, but to your work of the last few weeks: "*giornalista*". Neither a writer nor a poet: journalist.

Revista del Salto was the solid thing you had. It was even the strongest of the social justifications for your trip: you would work as a *La Reforma*'s correspondent for the Universal Exhibition and some cycling competitions. As he discovered the ins and outs of the City of Light, he would tell the readers from Salto about it. And who knows, if your articles came from Paris, people would care more about them... Who knows?

Ten days before the trip, and although family and friends had accompanied him to the harbor of Salto for the first leg of the trip, Horacio was set to travel alone. His first and most important company were two notebooks that would serve as diaries. At 22, he was heading for the unknown. The small steamboat *Montevideo*, which would take him from the river to the sea, traced its path through the narrow waters for the umpteenth time, presenting to the young man a series of possibilities and desires that he could not determine, lost between intangible ideals and brutal impatience.

His first lines recorded in the notebook did not have the intimacy of someone who was used to his own voice, but they were prematurely trying to forge literature. In the ten days he spent traveling around the country, through the rivers, Horacio kept a monumental image of himself in his diary, which remained until the moment he got to the sea: "*I seemed to notice in my friends a goodbye that was more than affectionate, that went beyond the ship, as if I saw myself for the last time. I even thought that the people filling the wharf was staring at me, like I was predestined...*"[22]

Feeling grandiose, Horacio reads and writes. Away from the looks he might consider critical, the idea of writing his first novel emerged:

> *I often listen to music, well-known music, that turn me completely visionary. For a few days, the idea of making a novel has been germinating in my head. I let it work, not gathering the courage, for now to provoke a birth that I believe will be premature. In Paris or Buenos Aires, I will try… In addition, I have been beset by some aureoles of grandeur such that I have never felt before. I believe myself distinguished, very distinguished, with a future, above all, of rare glory.*[23]

He wants to be great, but at the same time, the book's subject must come from lived experience. The writing wants land to be built upon, even if the land in question is a still immaterial Paris or a Buenos Aires yet to become part of his more concrete plans. The infinite period over the waters, however, was muddying plans that were already as little concrete as his

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[22] "*Me parecia notar en la mirada de los amigos una despedida más que afectuosa, que iba más allá del buque, como si me viera por última vez. Hasta creí que la gente que llenaba el muelle me miraba fijamente, como a un predestinado…*" (Quiroga, Quiroga íntimo, 60).

[23] "*Oigo a menudo música, músicas conocidas, que me dejan completamente visionario. Germina en mi cabeza – hace días – la idea de hacer una novela. La dejo obrar, no animándome, por ahora, a provocar un parto que creo será prematuro. En París, o Buenos Aires, probaré… Además, me han entrado unas auréolas de grandeza como tal vez nunca haya sentido. Me creo notable, muy notable, con un porvenir, sobretodo, de gloria rara*" (Quiroga, Quiroga Íntimo, 66).

image of grandeur. Unlike his friends who admired him in the harbor, there was no one to notice him on the ship: "*What deadly drudgery! What endless boredom! Sometimes I get horribly irritated in Salto, among my friends, my things, etc. And what won't it be like here, alone among Italians, Genoese and Neapolitans, rude and indifferent! To think that this will last twenty days!*"[24]

It was still the end of April. The days go by slowly. The grandiose destiny was quickly giving way to homesickness, the glorious future to the comfort of what was already familiar, the women of Paris to his girlfriend of Salto. One week later, he recorded:

> *What comes to my mind, sometimes, in bursts, is the illusion that I could be in Salto, on the corner, watching people I know pass by, on a warm and soft night, watching her, or maybe dancing... In those moments I formally deny having undertaken this trip, the most stupid trip I have ever taken, stupid, yes, stupid; I will become an idiot and a Genoese…*[25]

He was filled with boredom, and with the despair of having already left but without getting anywhere. The memory of the girl who stayed in Salto and whose name cannot be said takes him under the form of romantic nostalgia, to soon fade away. It is thirty-four long days of solitude on the water, between Salto and Genoa, dedicated to several readings that he had brought in his luggage, mostly novels, such as *Sueño de Rapiña*, by Uruguayan Carlos Reyles, and the recently released *Fécondité*, by Émile Zola, and *Manon Lescaut*, by Prévost.

On April 23, at nightfall, after unprecedented loneliness and unparalleled silence and boredom, he finally arrived in Genoa. Stumbling, he left the ship without saying goodbye to anyone, with his newly acquired dislike for the locals, and went to have dinner in a restaurant on Via Balvi, the city's Main Street. With relief, he felt his legs working and moving again. He was free from the endless sea.

The plans were always of grandeur; however, the young man failed to plan the steps to reach it. Everything was diffuse, as in the young writer's

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[24] "*¡Qué mortal pesadez! ¡Qué aburrimiento tan enorme! A veces me fastidio horriblemente en el Salto, entre mis amigos, mis cosas, etcétera. ¡Y qué no será aquí, solo entre italianos, genoveses y napolitanos, groseros e indiferentes! ¡Pensar que esto durará veinte días!*" (Quiroga, Quiroga Íntimo, 61).

[25] "*Viene a mi cabeza, a veces, por ráfagas, la ilusión de que podría estar en Salto, en la esquina, viendo pasar gente que conozco, de noche templada y suave, viéndola, o acaso bailando… En esos momentos reniego formalmente de haber emprendido este viaje, el más estúpido de los que he hecho, estúpido, sí, estúpido; me volveré idiota y genovés…*" (Quiroga, Quiroga Íntimo, p. 72).

first impressionist narratives. Horacio was not sure what to do in the city either. For now, all he had left were the trains, first from Genoa to Modena, and then from Modena to Paris, his final destination. At the Modena station, he sat down to write, lamenting the feeling of invisibility:

> *I'm writing and waiting for the train to Paris in Modena, a station on the border. (...) I am very discouraged from this trip, all the unknown faces, without admiring much because I'm alone, without communicating my impressions to anyone. As for the language, I can communicate quite well, although sometimes I blurt out an expression in plain Spanish due to the difficulty of finding the equivalent in French.*[26]

However, there was no one who saw him. The invisible South American felt bad. Being used to showing off his gifts – as a dandy, as a poet, as a cyclist – in his hometown, after almost a month and a half without being noticed, he at least hoped to make himself known, from across the ocean, by his articles about Europe, published for the locals` delight. It was his only chance for recovering his own image, reviving the generous looks of friends and family from the farewell in Salto. For that, he would have to keep the bitterness inside his personal notebook.

The journalist should have more objective words for his readership, those of the South American artist, restless with what he was discovering in the new environment. That is how the editor introduced him to readers in his first published article: "*Horacio, as those of us close to him call him, proposes visiting the Universal Exhibition, having made a commitment with us write his impressions for us by letter, which will be published in our sheet as valuable contributions.*"[27]

When facing the blank sheet, however, whether for public or private purposes, Horacio was the very image of rootlessness. It was strange to be away from home, away from his people. When he took hold of his pencil, he wrote

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[26] "*Estoy escribiendo y esperando el tren para París en Módena, estación de frontera. (...) Estoy bastante desanimado de este viaje, todas caras desconocidas, sin admirar gran cosa porque estoy solo, sin comunicar a nadie mis impresiones. Con el idioma me entiendo bastante bien, aunque a veces suelto una expresión en pleno castellano por la dificultad de hallar la equivalente en francés*" (Quiroga, Quiroga Íntimo, 92).

[27] "*Horacio, como lo llamamos los íntimos, se propone visitar la Exposición Universal, habiendo contraído con nosotros el compromiso de relatarnos por carta sus impresiones, las que serán publicadas en nuestra hoja como valiosas colaboraciones.*" (Quiroga, Obras Inéditas y Desconocidas, 220).

To us, poor exiled from the supreme intellectual life, the vision of Paris is a nostalgia for a place we have never seen and that, today or tomorrow, will lead us to get to know it. Find me at last, in Paris. The first impression felt when contemplating the cities of these latitudes is extremely sad. We are used to houses with flat roofs, completed at the top with little balconies or anything else, separated, so to speak, and with paintings of more or less good taste. Here the houses are crammed so close it looks like a great coldness compressed them into blackish groups, freezing and hungry. From Genoa to Paris, one sees nothing but shacks that were never painted or washed – windows, small, with no taste whatsoever –; tall houses that more resemble pierced walls, damp houses with four to ten storeys – usually six – , walled up on a street of four meters, and that for us, children of the horizon and full sunshine, are the reason for more than one bitter nostalgia.[28]

These were the opening sentences of his article "Desde Paris I", which was going to be published in Salto, on May 29. Although he had been excited to write it, he soon realized that in the near future he would not know at all what impression his words would make on his friends. What was not rootlessness was astonishment caused by the modern city, the vehicles, the mob, the hustle. He remembered the passer-by in Baudelaire's poem and believed he saw her on a corner of the Quartier Latin, while he somewhat felt like the man in the crowd of a certain American short story writer who, at that time, was already beginning to disturb him.

The sensation of being invisible in the metropolis of three million inhabitants was paid for by the vertigo caused by the human mass, an experience that he had never had before:

Life in the great boulevards – of which much is told –, is very agitated, above all pondering. Calculating the number of carriages that pass for a single

[28] "*Para nosotros, pobres desterrados de la suprema intelectualidad, la visión de París es una nostalgia de un lugar que nunca hemos visto, y que, hoy o mañana, nos lleva a conocerle. Héme por fin, en París. La primera impresión que se siente el contemplar las ciudades de esas latitudes, es tristísima. Estamos acostumbrados a las casas de techo plano, rematadas en lo alto con balconcillos o cualquier otra cosa, separadas, por decirlo así, y con pinturas de más o menos buen gusto. Aquí las casas están tan juntas que parece que un gran frío las comprimió en grupos negruzcos, helados y hambrientos. Desde Génova hasta París no se ve otra cosa que casas de media agua que nunca fueron pintadas ni lavadas – ventanas, pequeñas, sin gusto ninguno –; casas altas que más bien parecen muros agujereados, casas húmedas de cuatro a diez pisos – seis por lo general –, amuralladas sobre una calle de cuatro metros, y que para nosotros, hijos del horizonte y del pleno sol, son motivo de más de una amarga nostalgia.*" (Quiroga, Obras inéditas y desconocidas, 100-101).

> *one, is an enormous task – according to the common phrase –. In two rows, in three, in four in five, in six; two hundred carriages, 80 bicycles, 15 automobiles, 1000 people, all in one block of the boulevard, by day, by night, at all hours, bunched together, constrained, squeezed, stunned, waiting for the civil guard to give the order to move, because another equal number of vehicles are crossing any corner. This is repeated every two minutes. It is not easy to cross the boulevards with impunity; one must run, stop, dodge, run again, step back: stop (may Valbuena excuse me), run again and that in just fifteen meters.*[29]

It was not just the indistinct mass and its hustle that captured him. He was also seduced by what was unique, the faces, clothes and adornments of women and men, especially men:

> *Individuals walk by with forty centimeters of hair and eighty of beard (no exaggeration); citizens who not satisfied with carrying mourning in their hat, wear wide crepe armbands; individuals with beautiful, shaved faces, with their little Italian straw hat coquettishly tilted on their silky artificial ringlets, wrapped in a cape that drapes down to their feet, and they walk in slow, soft steps, exhibiting the comical feminism of their gait and their painted faces. The most extravagant and vulgar characters we could ask for pass by; Armenians, Turks, Chinese pass by, Arabs pass by, all dressed in the fashion of their country. Anyone who could pass by in a three million-strong, magnificently heterogeneous city, in sum, passes by. Except blacks. That's for sure, during the twelve days I've been in Paris, I have barely seen three. And right here, where there is everything and nothing amazes, they stand out.*[30]

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[29] "*La vida de los grandes bulevares – de que mucho se cuenta –, es agitadísima sobre toda ponderación. Calcular el número de carruajes que pasan por uno solo, es tarea ímproba – según la frase usual –. En dos filas, en tres, en cuatro, en cinco, en seis; doscientos carruajes, 80 bicicletas, 15 automóviles, 1000 personas, todo en una cuadra de bulevár, de día, de noche, a todas horas, apelotonados, constreñidos, estrujados, asombrados, esperando que el guarda civil dé la orden de marcha, porque otro número igual de vehículos están cruzándolo en una esquina cualquiera. Esto se repite cada dos minutos. No es fácil atravesar impunemente los bulevares; hay que correr, detenerse, apartarse, volver a correr, retroceder: pararse (perdone Valbuena), correr de nuevo y eso en sólo quince metros*" (Quiroga, Obras Inéditas y Desconocidas, 101).

[30] "*Pasan individuos de cuarenta centímetros de cabello y ochenta de barba (sin exagerar); ciudadanos que no conformes con llevar luto en el sombrero, llevan anchos brazales de crespón; sujetos de cara lindísima y afeitados, con su sombrerito de paja de Italia coquetonamente inclinados sobre sedosos bucles artificiales, envueltos en una capa que les llega a los pies, y van marchando lentamente, suavemente, exhibiendo el cómico feminismo de su andar y de sus caras pintadas.*