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A.D. Bazhenova-Sorokina (Moscow)

**“THAT, WHEN TRANSLATED INCORRECTLY, WAS SAYING SOMETHING LIKE THIS”: VICTORIAN CONTEXT AND INTERTEXT IN THE WORKS OF JUAN BENET**

**Abstract.** The article analyzes Juan Benet's essays on Victorian literature, short stories “De lejos”, “Una linea incompleta” and “Viator” and his non-fiction book “Londres victoriano” in which the Spanish writer addresses 19<sup>th</sup> century Anglo-Saxon writers from Charles Dickens to Joseph Conrad. Benet is mostly known as an author who brought the discourse of European and American modernism to Spanish literature and as the creator of the Spanish new novel, who consciously renounced Spanish realism of both 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, his standing as a postmodernist writer is often debated, as the neomythologism and complex narrative structure of his novels are more often associated with American and European modernist landmarks. Proustian, Joycean and Faulknerian heritage of Benet is widely studied, while his connection to Victorian literature stays largely overlooked. Meanwhile, in his essays as well as in his short fiction, the author addresses his favourite 19<sup>th</sup> century writers, and in short stories he establishes intertextual dialogue with many of them, producing some of his greater postmodernist works. It demonstrates that pastiche, parody and allusions to Victorian discourse in his work are examples of Benet's postmodernist prose, only comparable epistemologically to his novel “En el estado”. Therein, intertextuality serves a goal that is undoubtedly postmodernist – that of showing the textual, fictional nature of narrated events, establishing an ironic dialogue with the reader and revealing the nature of the narrator as an entity that creates an illusion of reality rather than describing it, and deconstructing the author's own narrative practices.

**Key words:** Juan Benet; Victorian literature; intertextuality; Spanish postmodernism; George Eliot; Arthur Conan Doyle; Joseph Conrad.

А.Д. Баженова-Сорокина (Москва)

**«И, в неправильном переводе, это звучало примерно так»: викторианский контекст и интертекст в творчестве Хуана Бенета**

**Аннотация.** Статья анализирует эссе Хуана Бенета (1927–1993), посвященные викторианской литературе, его рассказы “Издалека” (“De lejos”), “Незаконченная строка” (“Una linea incompleta”), “Виатор” (“Viator”) и книгу “Викторианский Лондон” (“Londres victoriano”), в которых испанский писатель обращается к англо-саксонским писателям XIX века: от Чарльза Диккенса до Джозефа Конрада. Бенет известен прежде всего как писатель, перенесший дискурс европейского и американского модернизма на испанскую почву, и как автор испанского нового романа, последовательно отказавшийся от испанской реалистической традиции как XIX, так и XX века. В то же время его статус писателя-постмодерниста регу-

лярно ставится под вопрос, учитывая, что неомифологизм и сложнейшая нарративная структура романов Бенета чаще ассоциируют именно с американскими и европейскими ориентирами писателя. Активно исследуется фолкнеровское, прустовское и джойсовское наследие Бенета, в то время как его связь с викторианской литературой редко получает филологическое осмысление. В эссе Бенет неоднократно обращается к творчеству британских писателей XIX века, а в рассказах устанавливает интертекстуальный диалог со многими из них. Исследование показывает, что пастись, пародия и аллюзии на викторианскую прозу появляются в однозначно постмодернистских текстах Бенета, с их помощью автор решает именно постмодернистские задачи: показывает текстуальную, фикциональную природу повествуемых событий, устанавливает иронический диалог с читателем и обнажает повествователя, создающего иллюзию реальности, а не рассказывающего о ней, а также деконструирует собственные нарративные практики.

**Ключевые слова:** Хуан Бенет; викторианская литература; интертекстуальность; испанский постмодернизм; Джордж Элиот; Артур Конан Дойль; Джозеф Конрад.

Juan Benet (1927–1993), along with Juan Goytisolo, Luis Martín-Santos, Carmen Martín Gaité, Gonzalo Torrente-Ballester and some others is among the writers listed by scholars as the pioneers of Spanish postmodernism. Their generation broke off with the realist tradition (especially that of Spanish social realism), deconstructing reality and ideology through narrative experiments [Navajas 2016; Machín Lucas 2015; Agawu-Kakraba 2010]. However, up to this moment, a debate has been held on the nature and even the notion of postmodernism in Spain. Gonzalo Navajas in “Teoría y práctica de la novela española posmoderna” describes the Spanish rhetoric of the movement in the following way: “Postmodernism presents itself as literature of not-knowing. Analogous to the poststructuralist vision of reality, postmodernism sees the world not as an entity existing of its own accord and containing in itself the principles of its organization, but as an artificial construction of the mind” (“El postmodernismo se propone como una literatura del no-conocimiento. De modo paralelo a la visión postestructuralista de la realidad, el postmodernismo considera el mundo no como una entidad existente per se que contuviera en sí misma los principios de su organización sino como una construcción artificial de la razón” [Navajas 2010, 15]). Juan Benet is definitely one of the first Spanish writers to create the poetics of “not-knowing”, yet as he actively wrote for almost four decades and reinvented himself constantly, it becomes harder to define him as a postmodernist or a modernist exclusively.

One of the opponents of the notion of Spanish postmodernism, Malcolm Compitello, analyzes Benet’s historiographic fiction in his article “Benet and Spanish Postmodernism”, stating that even if this term can describe some of the cultural phenomena of the 1970s–1980s Spain, it does not, however, directly correspond to Benet’s writing. Furthermore, he comes to a conclusion that “there is no Spanish postmodernism, or in less polemical terms, that there is no need to use this term when speaking to current cultural events in Spain.

For all the avant-garde sword rattling, <...> for all the attempts to mark post-francoist Spain as essentially different from what preceded it, nothing essential has changed. Spain’s movement out of dictatorship did not signal a movement beyond the hegemony of modernist discursive practices, only the acceptance of an admittedly later stage of the political, economic and social ideologies that underpin the system” [Compitello 1991, 269]. As for Benet’s literary practices, he writes the following: “In Reiss’s terms (referring to Timothy J. Reiss’s “The Discourse of Modernism”) Benet is a writer who explores the limits ad quem of modernist discourse. He uncovers the problems that modernism’s hegemony over western thought processes has kept hidden below the surface, and exploits them in his work. He is, in the terms Suleiman describes, a modernist arguing against himself. Benet’s work may be symptomatic of modernism’s loss of hegemony but not of its usurpation by a different episteme” [Compitello 1991, 268]. Attributing some of Benet’s fiction to the realm of late modern writing is fair, yet the works of fiction created in the dialogue with Benet’s favourite writers, among which are Victorian authors, can be perceived as examples of postmodernist discursive practices in the strict sense of these words. Therefore, this article aims to highlight and analyse Benet’s connection with Victorian literature and the postmodernist turn of his fiction, where this connection is established through intertextuality as seen by Julia Kristeva, and through postmodernist irony, as perceived by Linda Hutcheon.

Juan Benet was an engineer and a prolific novelist, short story writer, playwright and essayist and one of the most influential Spanish writers of the post-war era, often called “the creator of the Spanish New Novel”, analogous to the French Nouveau Roman [Sanchez 2009], and frequently referred to as a Spanish Faulkner or a Spanish Proust. His essays and fiction as well as his direct influence on a circle of young writers in Madrid between the 1950s and 1980s provided a new direction for Spanish literature in the second half of the 20th century. As Eduardo Mendoza put it: “Juan Benet renovated Spanish literary language” (“Juan Benet renovó el lenguaje literario español”) [Mendoza 1993], having adapted literary experiment and neomythologism of the European and American modernist novel for Spanish post-war literature. In his first novels “Volverás a Región” (“Return to Región”, 1967), “Una Meditación” (“A Meditation”, 1970) and “Un viaje de invierno” (“Winter Journey”, 1971), Benet created a mythopoetical space named Región, a fictional entity in the north of Spain, akin to Faulkner’s Jocknapatawfa, Juan Rulfo’s Comala and Garcia Marquez’s Macondo. In his earlier work, Benet experimented with deconstruction of the formal plot and of the traditional narrator. Since finishing the Región trilogy, he wrote more experimental prose, short stories, plays and essays on literature, art and the history of the Spanish Civil War. Despite the fact that various contemporary writers, including his direct disciples Javier Marías, Felix de Azua, Vicente Molina Foiz, Eduardo Mendoza and others, singled out Benet as a point of reference, he received little recognition in his lifetime: only two important literary prizes were awarded to him (Crítica Breve for “Una meditación” (1970) and Planeta for his detective novel “El aire de un crimen” (1980). There

are two main reasons for this: Benet's open opposition to the Francoist regime and his anti-Spanishness. During his lifetime, Benet repeatedly showed disdain for Spanish literature and referred to European and Pan-American writers as those crucial in his literary upbringing: "It was this mixture of admiration for my American idol (Faulkner – A. B.-S.) and contempt for our own writers that compelled me in my spare time to start writing myself, with the humble purpose of filling the gap between Spanish and foreign letters" [Benet 1981, 61]. Those sources of inspiration mostly come from vanguard 20th century writers, such as Marcel Proust, James Joyce, William Faulkner and Samuel Beckett (Benet adapted four plays by Beckett that were staged in 1991 in María Guerrero Theatre). Yet there is also a strong connection between Benet and miscellaneous authors of Victorian literature, from Charles Dickens to Joseph Conrad. While Benet's connection with such authors as Proust or Faulkner has been studied widely, less attention is paid to his fascination with the Victorian Era, which played an important role in the writer's formative years, although it never became a direct influence on his poetics. Yet, Benet's dialogue with Victorian authors took a variety of forms and brought about some of the brightest examples of Benet's postmodernist fiction.

Starting from his first volume of essays, "La inspiración y el estilo" ("Inspiration and style"), a kind of literary manifesto published by Benet in 1966, the writer consistently renounced his connection with the Spanish realist tradition. He considered virtually all Spanish literature after Cervantes' "Don Quixote" to be provincial, betraying the grand style of its antecedents. Despite the fact that his biggest concern in "La inspiración y el estilo" was to explain his disdain for realism and for the 19th century fiction, even then he showed deep affection for Victorian literature, in which realism rubbed shoulders with gothic and other forms of unnatural narrative (as defined by Monika Fludernik and later by Brian Richardson, Jan Alber, Stefan Iversen and Henrik Skov Nielsen). Therefore, the first essay from this volume on Victorian literature, "Las dos caras de George Eliot" ("Two faces of George Eliot"), is dedicated to the British writer and to her balancing act of being a stylist and a realist. Benet considers most of her late work to be of a far lower quality than her earlier novels, which were much more experimental. Among her failures he names "Daniel Deronda", a novel that he claims not to have finished reading.

Benet once again brings up "Daniel Deronda" when analysing and critiquing Henry James's point of view on the mystery of George Eliot as the creator of the modern novel. He cites James's "Daniel Deronda: A Conversation of 1876", establishing a dialogue with James whom he reveres as the creator of the modern psychological prose and an author who united gothic and grand style. Benet disagrees with James in his vision of George Eliot, as for the Spanish writer the most prominent feature of her character was not her education, nor her enthusiasm for experimenting, but the following ambiguity:

"It is unusual to find in one individual a longing for virtue, an interest for justice, for order and the empire of reason or a doctrine, on one hand, and the cult of beauty, so

often gratuitous, unjust and arbitrary, on the other <...> It is so unlikely that when one person internalizes this duplicity, a whole new world of fictionalizing is born with it" ("no es frecuente encontrar en el mismo individuo el anhelo de virtud, el interés por la justicia, el orden y el imperio de la razón o de la doctrina, por un lado, y el culto a la belleza, tantas veces gratuita, injusta y arbitraria, por el otro <...> Tan poco frecuente es que cuando una persona incorpora esa duplicidad todo un mundo nuevo de novelar nace con ella") [Benet 1966, 151].

Although Benet does not appreciate "Deronda", in which Eliot in his view succumbs to realism and betrays her original way of narrating, there is a striking similarity between the setting of this book and Juan Benet's first novel "Volverás a Región", only published in 1967, but written across nearly 10 years, starting in 1952. Benet's novel is divided into two parts: a hundred-pages long exposition – a mock historiography of Región – and a dialogue between Doctor Daniel Sebastian and Marré Gamallo who meet in the 1960s, on what is to be the last day of their lives, to remember their past and the Civil War that left them with no future. The starting point of the plots of the two novels is thus a meeting between a man and a woman in a fictional locality (Leubronn in Eliot's Germany and Región in Benet's Spain); both of them revolve, among other things, around gambling and jewels. Gwendolen in "Daniel Deronda" is a gambler, at one point betting the only valuable thing she has got – her heirloom necklace; Benet's female character María Timoner, a love interest of Doctor Sebastian, becomes a victim of her gambling fiancé, who bets many of her jewels, even the engagement ring with a diamond that he had given her. More relevantly, in both cases the meeting becomes a framing device for two parallel flashbacks – those of the male and the female protagonists. In "Volverás a Región", these flashbacks take the form of parallel monologues which are organised as a strange, non-sequitur dialogue. The exact plot, the content of those monologues, is extremely difficult to reconstruct as the voices of the narrating characters and the voice of the author are intertwined, stripped of all individuality, going back and forth in time. Their monologues can be read as textually organised streams of consciousness, so that the exact events remain unclear, the points of view stay uncertain, and the truth of each event is questionable. Although the plot disintegrates and the reader is left to wonder about the missing lines, it is clear that the framework was inspired by George Eliot's novel (the male protagonists even share the same name). Yet there seems to be no consciously introduced intertext of "Deronda" in "Volverás a Región": the author does not quote Eliot nor make any apparent allusions to her writing.

Another Victorian writer who was dear to Benet in his non-fiction and whose influence, unlike in the case of George Eliot, Benet openly admitted, is Joseph Conrad. His poetics is discussed in two essays by Benet: in "Algo acerca del buque fantasma" ("Something about the ghost ship") in "La inspiración y el estilo" and in a later essay "Onda y corpúsculo en *El Quijote*" ("Wave and corpuscule in *Don Quixote*") [Benet 1980]). The first one is dedicated to marine stories and to Conrad's style in his memoirs of 1906 "The Mirror of the Sea", a

book which Javier Marías would translate into Spanish in 1981. In the preface to this translation, Benet admires Conrad's literary perfection: "It is a book that is excellent from its beginning to the end, and, furthermore, written without hurry, it unfailingly provokes the sort of gentle reading that, without any eagerness for what is coming next, takes pleasure in the slow unfolding of a phrase or an image, so harmoniously and rhythmically designed from the start that its ending almost borders on a disaster" ("Es un libro que no tiene desperdicio y, más que eso, que, escrito sin prisa, provoca de manera indefectible esa clase de lectura mansa que sin ningún tipo de avidez por lo que procederá se recrea en la lenta progresión de una sentencia o de una imagen, tan armónica y rítmicamente trazada desde su inicio que su conclusión casi roza la catástrofe" [Benet 1981, 9]). For Benet, where George Eliot gave in to realism and its rules and logic outside the realm of literature, Conrad did not, and nautical fiction is a genre that for him, Melville or Poe was an opportunity to safely leave the problems of the society and break free from the tenets of realism. Although "The Mirror of the Sea" is definitely a post-Victorian modernist work, which is closer to Benet's own literary experiments, it is not the only work by Conrad that appears in the former's writing.

In 1973 Benet publishes a collection of short stories entitled "Sub rosa", which corresponds to the idea of a secret that cannot be revealed. The namesake novella is a sea adventure; Benet's only take on that genre. While "Sub rosa" combines the traits of Melville's and Conrad's marine narrative and preserves such typical features of Benet's fiction as the presence of a mystery that remains unsolved, there is a short story in the second part of the collection, called "De lejos" ("From far away"), that is a postmodern dialogue with Conrad's "The heart of darkness". The story is a third person narration that quotes the dialogues heard at a party and a story told by one of the dinner guests. He speaks about the mines of Región where an evil man named Conrado Blaer is looking for minerals that beforehand were known to be obtained from quartzite in Silesia (both the man's name and the placename are certain references to the ethnically Polish writer). The relationship between the guest who at that point was a young mining engineer and for whom it was the first job and Conrado Blaer is akin to that between Marlow and Kurtz in "The Heart of Darkness". The most prolific researcher of Benet's short prose Epicteto Díaz Navarro states that "a great part of Benet's text can be viewed as a response to Conrad's text in which the narrator and the protagonist are rewritten" ("buena parte del texto de Benet puede considerarse como la respuesta al de Conrad en la que se reelaboran el narrador y el protagonista" [Díaz Navarro 1992 b, 135]), as both structural parallelism and the characteristics that bear similarity to those of Conrad's protagonists, are partial. But the main similarity between the texts is their inscrutability and ambiguity.

Unlike "Sub rosa" in which Benet's irony is less evident, "De lejos" is filled with small details that undermine the pathos of the guest's sombre speech, such as him obviously addressing the waiter on several occasions during the otherwise dramatic moments of the text. For example, such interruption occurs when

the protagonist describes the supernatural apparition or a spirit that always followed Conrado Blaer:

"I think it was in that rickety shelter of a barn that I saw him (Blaer – A. B.-S.) for the second time, as a fugitive and an almost unreal apparition, in the middle of a dream: but it may as well be that he was not the only one I saw, and I'm coming to this. Yes, please, with some ice, that's fine, thank you. It was the other; something that will no longer abandon him" ("Creo que fue en el precario refugio de un granero donde hube de verle por segunda vez, en una de aquellas apariciones tráfugas y casi irreales, en medio del sueño: pero acaso no fue sólo a él y a eso voy. Sí, por favor, con un poco de hielo, así está bien, gracias. Fue lo otro; algo que ya no le abandonará más...") [Benet 1981, 219].

This request for more alcohol becomes a counterpoint in the narration and, in the end, leaves the reader wondering whether the unreliable narrator has imagined the diabolical "other" following Blaer or questioning the consistency of the whole story. The narrator is not eloquent: his style is too pompous at times (which can be explained by the influence of the alcohol that he drank), filled with digressions, providing almost no information about the most relevant parts of the story. In the protagonist's tale, Conrado Blaer is almost completely ephemeral, everything about him is uncertain: in the same description of the second time he met Blaer, after a second helping of alcohol, the protagonist affirms that he saw Blaer, then digresses into a speculation about knowledge and the nature of evil, describing the invisible "other" by Blaer's side and then saying: "It was Blaer, I will keep insisting upon it as long as I'm breathing; the only thing that he didn't have of Blaer was... his physical presence. And the other at his side <...>" ("Era Blaer, lo repetiré mientras viva; lo único que no tenía de Blaer era... su presencia física. Y lo otro a su lado <...>") [Benet 1981, 223]). In this way the plot reminds the reader of another Victorian favourite of Benet's, James's "The turn of the screw": an unreliable narrator giving a first person account of a supernatural encounter with evil incarnate that is put into the frame of a different narrative. Yet there are no direct references to James's text in "De lejos": the evident intertext is that of "The heart of darkness". It is also especially important to see how the strange first person story that misses all the most important plot points and fails to give a clear account of events ironically represents Benet's own way of writing, so often denounced by the critics and underappreciated by the readers. This ironic take on his own narrative techniques is a prominent feature of more than one of Benet's short stories.

In the next short story of the "Sub rosa" collection, "Una línea incompleta" ("An unfinished line"), Benet addresses yet another one of his favourite writers, creating a postmodernist narrative in which Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson appear in the land of Región, where they were supposed to solve a mystery. However, the story is unfinished and there is no solution left to the reader. Not only does the story pastiche Holmes's adventures, it is also bilingual. The exposition is in Spanish, while the pages of Doctor Watson's journal are written in



English, and their incompleteness illustrates Benet's classical idea, omnipresent in this collection, of the fundamental impossibility of breaking through to any truth or reality, which in short stories manifests itself in the form of enigmas that may never be solved, as some of the elements are always missing. This structure is not unusual for Benet's fiction, but the literary form of pastiche is unique for this instance.

Díaz Navarro describes how the two languages in the story are juxtaposed as two types of narration, as Benet uses all of the characteristic literary devices in the first and the third parts of the text, where everything is unclear, characters are never completely described, while the second, English-language part represents an ironic, parodic take on the genre of Holmes adventures: "The appearance of Sherlock Holmes not only represents a playful acknowledgment, but also forces the reader to perceive the ambiguity of the referent and its metafictional nature" ("La aparición de Sherlock Holmes no queda en mero juego de reconocimientos, sino que hace que el lector perciba la ambigüedad del referente y su carácter metaficcional" [Díaz Navarro 1992 a, 59]). The irony is made evident not only in the fact that Watson describes an unsolved case, that his journal ends in the very beginning of this story, but is also put in the words of Holmes himself, when he addresses his Spanish client: "Come. Come, sir <...>. You cannot fall into this modern habit of telling the stories wrong and foremost". Díaz Navarro comments: "...this type (of narrative) is definitely that of "Una línea incompleta" and of the majority of Benet's writings" ("...ese modo es, evidentemente, el de "Una línea incompleta" y el de mayoría de las obras benetianas" [Díaz Navarro 1992 a, 68]). While on the surface Benet is parodying the style of Doyle (dialogues between Holmes and Watson, Holmes' deduction skills and even the description of the day when the client came are exaggeratedly Doylean), the short story itself is an extreme case of self-parody. The postmodernist dialogue is established not only between two storyworlds, but between two literary traditions represented by two languages. The English part of the text is logical, details abide and they seem to serve a goal: to create or to solve a mystery, like it is always done in Holmesian fiction. The Spanish text is impenetrable, full of uncertainties and speculations. This juxtaposition is evident in the ending of the story, in which an incomplete letter written in English is found, and is evidently written by Holmes, but it is not quoted in English. Instead the ending of "Una línea incompleta" is a paragraph "that, when translated incorrectly, was saying something like this" ("que incorrectamente traducido venía a decir algo así <...>") [Benet 1998, 437]). So what the reader is left with is an incomplete story with an incomplete part of Watson's journal and an unfinished incorrect note (the narrator states that the second page of the text was either destroyed or possibly not even written by the sender [Benet 1998, 437]). It is especially ironic as both praise and critique directed at Benet are centered around the assumption that his style is foreign to the Spanish literary tradition. Therefore, the phrase "incorrectly translated" from English serves as an ironic self-definition of a Benetian text.

An even greater degree of self-parody is seen in another short story by

Benet, "Viator", which from the very beginning shows an ironic parallel with the text of the aforementioned "Volverás a Región": the narrative starts with the narrator's warning about the problems that a traveller might find in the lands of Región. What follows is a long exposition and, finally, some dialogue. The structure is similar, but the short story differs from the novel as the figure of a traveller (the title "Viator" means "traveller" in Latin) in the story is not the representation of the reader, as it was in the novel, but the narrator himself, who also happens to be the protagonist. This first person narrator recounts an event that occurred during one of his first returns to Región (a definite allusion to the novel's title, literally translating as "You will return to Región") at the train station of Las Cabezas (a constant point in the landscape of Región, translated as the Heads). The story that is told and the setting are extremely evocative of a Victorian narrative: firstly, because it revolves around a ghost story; secondly, because it takes place at a train station and involves trains and timetables, and railmania was one of the features of Victorian England that Benet took into consideration; finally, the story has an open ending, yet it does not preclude the reader knowing that the protagonist stayed alive as he was able to give an account of the events. One more detail that evokes Victorian motives is a strange line from the narrator's text: "Those are the lands in which – as a famous opium addict from the last century would put it – "across a distance of a thousand miles no dog would find a shelter from the snowstorm, nor a bird of the so-called wrens will get an excuse to have breakfast" ("son tierras en las que – como diría el famoso opiómano del siglo pasado – 'en una distancia de mil millas un perro no es capaz de encontrar refugio contra una tempestad de nieve, ni un pájaro de los llamados trogloditas hallará excusa para desayunar'") [Benet 1972, 311]. The quoted phrase seems to be a stylistic homage rather than a quote, but the biggest mystery is that of the hidden reference. The narrator who bears resemblance to the author and states that the opium eater was famous must have recalled an Englishman, but it seems impossible to guess who that might be – the stylized text might refer to Charles Dickens with his love for exaggeration and metaphor (De Quincey is more famous as an opium addict, but all the mentions of distances in "Confessions of an opium eater" are exact numbers) or to Charles Darwin, who studied wrens, and also took opium. In fact, many English writers of the nineteenth century could fit the description, and this might mean that the author consciously prevents the reader from guessing who exactly he referred to. Either it was an Easter egg for a few close friends or a joke – a quote without an actual referent. Julia Kristeva in her studies of intertext states that all the texts are devoid of the actual author, so this notion of a referent for which one cannot be found, a sign that only points into the right direction, looks like the ultimate postmodernist game. What matters is the general Englishness of the text that resonates in contrast to the discourse of "Volverás a Región": while the descriptions in the novel refer to the lands of Región and to its nature, and the first thing the reader knows about the locality of Región is that there is no railway station in it, although there is a railway, in "Viator" the trains are the center of the narrator's attention. While in "Volverás a

Región”, the abstract traveller is going to leave Región, in “Viator” the problem is getting there (Díaz Navarro analyses the parallel opening sentences of the two texts, yet does not specify this difference between the directions of the traveller [Díaz Navarro 1992 a, 113]). In the novel the mythical dimension of Región is described by the extradiegetic narrator who is rarely uncovered in the course of the third person narration, while the narrator of “Viator” is also the protagonist (although the term is not exact, as literally nothing happens in the story, except two dialogues and the arrival of a late train). The novel’s ephemeral narrator is a historiographer of Región, while that of the short story is foreign to this land, although his words “on one of my first returns to Región” [Benet 1998, 309] suggest that there were more occasions. Thus, the tragic plot of “Volverás a Región” and its deconstructed narration are parodied in this story which presents all the features of Benet’s prose that are characteristic of the Región cycle, but seen from the outside, so that its strange and mythical life is perceived exactly as it is – as fiction. Nothing happens in “Viator”, and the only conflict that can be seen in this story is the conflict of the narrators and their stories. While the protagonist is waiting for the train he meets another person who urges him to play cards and tells him the story of the mad station director, while later the station director tells both of them the ghost story about the miners who were killed in a train crash. The reader will sympathise with the latter for two reasons: he saves the protagonist from a professional gambler, as that one runs off at the end of the story, but also the story itself is simply better told. Intertextuality works in a very different way in “Viator”: as there is no particular text which the author references, the narrative does establish a dialogue with Victorian poetics via a parody of a gothic horror story and via an enigmatic quote that alludes to Victorian narrative as in general – as seen by Benet.

According to Kristeva, in the structures of dialogical discourse, “writing reads another writing, reads itself and constructs itself through a process of destructive genesis” [Kristeva 1986, 47]. While the novels of Benet are often monological, there is seldom any kind of polyphony and the discourse of holistic narration is always more significant than the individual voices of the characters. The short stories in which Benet uses Victorian intertext are much more open and can be read as a dialogical text. This dialogue with the literary Other that helps to define oneself turns out to be an important feature of Benet’s postmodernist writing.

One of the last works of Juan Benet was a non-fiction book, a commission from Rafael Borrás for a series called “Ciudades en la historia” (“Cities in History”). It was an opportunity for Benet to give his regards to a place and time he truly connected with: Victorian London. “Londres Victoriano” was published in 1989 with a preface in which the author jokingly reaffirmed the reader that they would not find much new information about the city or the era, but that they might still enjoy the amenity of the read: “The result (of the research and writing – A. B.-S.) may be very arbitrary and barely formative, but it would be sufficient for me if you found it entertaining, a virtue that I can rarely achieve” (“El resultado puede ser muy arbitrario y muy poco formativo pero me confor-

maría con que fuera ameno, una virtud que rara vez logro conseguir”) [Benet 2008, 9]. In this book, Benet balances the global history of the British Empire with the life of its capital in the 50 years of Queen Victoria’s reign. The book starts with the death of William IV and ends with dual accounts of the deaths of Oscar Wilde and the Queen. Divided into chapters, the text recounts the history of different classes, of technological advances, the railroad mania and favourite pastimes of Londoners. These stories mention Benet’s favourite Victorians from George Eliot and Anthony Trollope to Stevenson and Joseph Conrad, but two authors are singled out: Dickens and Doyle. The person described in “Londres Victoriano” right after the Queen is Dickens, and the excerpts dedicated to him focus on the beginning of his career and the (not immediate) success of “The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club”. The serialized story found success after Dickens introduced the character of Samuel Weller, a person from the lower classes who speaks in a funny way, which Benet compares to the manner of Sancho Panza: “...it was a new language: a blend of cockney forwardness and elaborate humor; a powerful synthesis that typically combines street talk with the fascinating magic of the most evocative of rhetorical figures, that of the metaphor” (“...era un lenguaje nuevo: una mezcla de desenfado cockney y elaborada gracia; el poder de síntesis que acostumbra a tener la expresión callejera, combinado con la fascinante magia de la más sugerente de las figuras retóricas, la metáfora” [Benet 1981, 29]). The following success of Dickens’ prose is equally important to Benet, as it is the success of a new language and of a new kind of literature. In his criticism of the Spanish literature of the 19th century, he always pointed out that the regional language had no value in the works of many Spanish writers of costumbrismo (a specifically Hispanic mode of describing habits and customs of different classes and people of different parts of Spain and Latin America associated with Romanticist journalism, essayism, and realist fiction). Therefore, it is obvious that what he was looking for in Spanish literature (in vain) was this playful experiment with language that Dickens had carried out.

In the last chapter of the book, special attention is paid to Doyle: “Fifty years on, Holmes and Watson together with Strand Magazine repeated and revived the same passion that Pickwick and Weller had awakened in the Monthly Magazine (“Cincuenta años después Holmes y Watson repetían y despertaban con el Strand Magazine la misma pasión que Pickwick y Weller habían levantado con la Monthly Magazine” [Benet 1981, 196]). In the case of Doyle, Benet admires the invention of the mythical character and muses on the problem of Sherlock Holmes’s rebirth, thinking it extremely valuable:

“He (Doyle – A. B.-S.) was not just instigated by his editor’s impressive offer; he understood that he could not <...> deprive his audience of a man who had no reason to die and cut his epic journey short; he understood that he was not exactly the master of his protagonist – if only in the literary and legal dimension, but not in those that transcended paper and fiction thanks to the metamorphosis of the word into the intimate reality of the meaning; he understood that he had transformed him into an innate element

of the fabric of that mysterious, criminal London, as grey as lead and unsettling, which without Holmes might fall victim to the empire of injustice and unpunished crime <...>” (“No le (a ACD) le movió tan solo la impresionante oferta de su editor; comprendió que no podía <...> privar al público de un hombre que no tenía ninguna razón para morir y dejar truncada su epopeya; comprendió que no era dueño de su personaje más que en la medida literaria y legal, pero no en aquella otra que trascendía al papel y a la ficción gracias a la metamorfosis de la palabra hacia la íntima realidad de su significado; comprendió que le había convertido en un elemento constitucional con el Londres misterioso, criminal, plomizo e inquietante que, huérfano de Holmes, podía caer bajo el imperio de la sinrazón y el crimen impune <...>”) [Benet 2008, 197].

Henri Garric analyses “Londres victoriano” as a non-fiction book that, nevertheless, is valuable as a work of Juan Benet the Novelist, and states that “having left the domain of the novel, Benet, at least externally, abandoned the most well-known features of his writing” (“en quittant le demaine du roman, Benet a, au moins en apparence, abandonné les traits les plus connus de ses pratiques d’écriture” [Garric 2015, 53]). It is true that Benet’s narration in “Londres victoriano” is at its clearest, although the writing in his essayistic work is in general more transparent than in his fiction. Yet there seems to be another reason for the amenity and straightforwardness of Benet in “Londres Victoriano”: in this book, the author connects with the writers and the circumstances that he describes in a different way: their lives are the direct object of his study – not their fiction. While in short prose he parodies his own writing, ironically exaggerating its characteristics by juxtaposing them to those of other writers, in “Londres Victoriano” he allows himself to tell the stories of this Victorian capital without literary experimentation, the lack of which is an experiment in itself for the writer.

It is evident now that Benet did not only approach Victorian literature as a reader and a critic, but also as a writer, finding inspiration and establishing dialogues with some of the authors. All the things that Benet admires in Victorian narrative – great plot, recognizable characters, good humour – are the ones that most of his fiction is consciously lacking. It is obvious that, within this oeuvre, none of the existentialist problems characteristic of Benet’s fiction are addressed, no connection to the writer’s political and social present is made (although it seems that one of the reasons for the writers love of certain Victorians is the parallelism between the struggle for the new literature that starts before modernism in England and the situation with Spanish new novel) – even the nature of language and consciousness is only a pretext for an actual intertextual game that exists for its own sake. Benet does not deconstruct Victorian poetics in his short fiction; instead, he deconstructs his own style by presenting it as parody or an incorrect version of the English original, thus replying to his opponents, showing the misconception of comparing him to British writers, and at the same time mocking himself with no satirical self-deprecation. Linda Hutcheon in her book “A poetics of postmodernism. History, theory, fiction” argues: “Newman is not alone in his viewing of postmodern parody as a form of ironic rupture with the past <...>, but, as in postmodernist architecture, there

is always a paradox at the heart of that “post”: irony does indeed mark the difference from the past, but the intertextual echoing simultaneously works to affirm – textually and hermeneutically – the connection with the past” [Hutcheon 1988, 125]). This idea of connecting with a different era and a different culture through parody is especially important in the case of Juan Benet. The Spanish writer never dreamt of living in Victorian era and was realistic about its political and social problems (which are described in great detail in “El Londres Victoriano”), but there is some nostalgia in the way he works the Victorian narrative, having a laugh at his own post/modernist style which is part of a new discourse. His relationship with Victorian literature thus takes many forms and results in some of the most comprehensible and humorously ironic of his writings.

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## ПРОБЛЕМА ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ В РОМАНЕ ИЮНЬ ЛИ «ДОБРЕЕ ОДИНОЧЕСТВА»: НАРРАТОЛОГИЧЕСКИЙ АСПЕКТ\*

**Аннотация.** Проблема идентичности неоднократно привлекала внимание философов (П. Рикер) и психологов (Дж. Брунер, Д.П. Макадамс, К. Маклин, В. Данлоп). В статье предпринимается попытка исследовать репрезентации данного феномена в художественном тексте. В качестве предмета исследования выступает не удостоенный пока вниманием литературоведов роман современной американской писательницы китайского происхождения Июнь Ли «Добрее одиночества». В произведении постулируется принципиально повествовательный характер идентичности: герои уподобляют жизнь совокупности историй, где каждому отведена определенная роль. Подобная «нарративизация» реальности позволяет персонажам упростить взаимоотношения с близкими, придать смысл своему существованию. Вместе с тем искусственность такого рода построений рано или поздно себя обнаруживает: мотивы игры, самообмана, иллюзии выходят на передний план. Июнь Ли подчеркивает экзистенциальную функцию «автонарративов». Они страхуют героя от непосредственной встречи с собственным «эго», а возможно, его отсутствием. По мнению когнитивистов, «я» человека – это «мираж», сформированный множеством автобиографических сюжетов. Персонажи романа не столь категорично трактуют природу человеческой самости, но признают вынужденную необходимость поддерживающих (оберегающих) ее историй (несмотря на их очевидное несовершенство). Высказанные в статье соображения могут оказаться полезными в изучении других текстов, затрагивающих тот круг философских и социально-психологических проблем, которые явились отправной точкой для настоящей работы.

**Ключевые слова:** Июнь Ли; идентичность; герой; роман; нарратив; нарратология.

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## The Problem of Identity in Yiyun Li's Novel “Kinder than Solitude”: a Narratological Aspect\*\*

**Abstract.** The issue of identity has repeatedly attracted the attention of philosophers (P. Ricoeur) and psychologists (J. Bruner, D.P. McAdams, C. McLean, W. Dunlop). The article attempts to investigate the representations of this phenomenon in a literary text. The subject of the research is “Kinder than Solitude”, a novel by Yiyun Li, a contemporary American writer of Chinese descent. It has not yet come into the

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