

**MEMORY AND REPRESENTATION
IN HISTORICAL NOVELS
("The Forty Days of Musa Dagh" by Franz Werfel)**

The object of the inquiry is historical novels. The notions of memory and representation are the general framework within which historical novels acquire significance.

The study of the intersection between memory and representation ontologically goes back to the Platonic concept of *eikōn*, the representation of the absent through imagination, and to its Aristotelian linkage with the time-factor. In the dialogue *Theaetetus* Plato brings forth the concept of memory linked with its representation: one remembers as far as the traces of the absent are present, and forgets as soon as they are effaced. Thus follows the problem of adequacy between memory and its representation that leads to the problem of truth and falsification. True representation of the absent through image, as *eikōn*, differs greatly from the false, defined by Plato as *phantasma*, with the corresponding adjective *phantastique* /Plato. *Sophist*: 235-236/. This differentiation sets out the epistemological and ontological studies focused on the adequacy of discourse and memory, developed into that of literature and history.

History in its essence is chronological, construed through the evidence of the recorded trace, as *inscription*, where, in contrast to *writing*, trace is circulated as a material sign in servitude to memory. The implication of *inscription* forms, differentiated as evidence, records, and archives serves as a kind of accumulated knowledge for subsequent historical temporalization. It also forms a raw material for making more systematic treatises on history. Memorization goes back to the ancient *hupomnemata*, books of life, where one wrote down quotes, examples and actions that one had witnessed. They served as memory aids and were a common thing for a whole cultivated public. Thus, *inscription* serves as material for memorization; meant to be substituted for a recollection. It seeks to capture the already said, collect the already happened for the purpose of making the recollection of the somewhat

disjointed, fragmentary facts and figures a systematic discourse, as accomplished and adequate to reality as possible. Actually, trace as inscription contributes to the constitution of a past, toward the contemplation of which it directs the reader. As a result, inside a culture strongly stamped by memory, developed a discipline quite explicitly oriented by a concern for an objective, true systematic temporalization. This discipline of history then, through the very act of memorization, implies a contextualization in the frames of which, time and space are subordinated to a kind of depersonalization. History thus is a kind of depersonalized memorization at the true, adequate reflection of an absent, past reality. The historian, in fact is able to reconstruct through heterogeneous elements a homogeneous history of mankind. We see it emerging as a discipline with *Analogy* and *Succession* as its organizing principles and specific spatio-temporal denotations. It is true to assert, following Aristo, that memory exists when time elapsed /Aristotle, On Memory and Reminiscence. III 449 b 31449b 26/ or that memory is of the past, or that all memory involves time. Thus, time, regarded as a kind of movement, a sequence between an earlier and a later moment coincides with memory.

Time, however, acquires different connotations in literary context. It departs from historical homogeneity, or Kronos (Cronus, also Kronos, a Titan, the father of Zeus, Poseidon, Hades, Hestia, Demeter, and Hera.), distinguished by Deleuz /Repetition and Difference. Columbia University Press, 1994/ towards the point of intersection between eternity and temporalization, as Eon (a power existing from eternity; an emanation or phase of the supreme deity). Time in literature is the subjective and deeply personal time of Eon. Sometimes it is the lost and sought as in “A la recherché du temps perdu” of Proust; and sometimes it is the fragmented time that assumes the endless task of repetition as sacralization in “A Hundred Years of Solitude” by Marquez.

The criteria of truth and objectivity governing the historical discourse are inappropriate to a literary construction of history, where we move in a different context from that of depersonalization and adequacy to reality. Historical facts undergo transformation or sublimation as circulated in literary context. The reflection of the past takes up residence in a new space—a discontinuity, enigmatic in its principle, in its original

rupture. It detaches itself from the Platonic *eikōn* to sink into the realm of non-knowledge, fantasy, the *phantasma*. Memory, thus, is decontextualized and acquires the active kynesis of recollection as the Aristotelian *anamnēsis* (recollection, a concept that Plato develops in his dialogues *Meno* and *Phaedo*). It conveys shades of meaning, missing in the historical context: recollection of the feelings the absent has evoked. This recollection leads to the problem of trace as writing, in the sense of *graphē*, which comprises the allusion to other than itself or the feelings evoked by this other. It is present as another presence, which is the pure presence in itself. The presence of writing evokes the dual meaning of the Platonic *pharmakon* (*Fedrus*)¹ as means of healing or as poison for memory, further speculated by Derrida (Plato's Pharmacy). Exposing the basics of grammatology, which borders upon the original writing, Derrida brings forth the metaphor of the Book of nature, a reference to God's difficult-to-read, yet, possible-to-interpret handwriting of the world, which can be deciphered only through existence. Here, writing is regarded as a trace, hint, sign of the lost spirit, the original lost text, which has been erased. In this context trace as writing becomes identical to the idea of Dionysian God whose presence becomes more acutely felt because of its absence.

Franc Werfel (1890-1945), an Austrian-Bohemian novelist, playwright, and poet, strongly influenced by the expressionism movement, did not depart from giving an adequate reflection of reality, focusing on the ideal of expression. He sought for the fusion of the West and the East, by expressing meaning or emotional experience rather than physical reality, which is in the ideology of expressionism. Werfel adopted as well Marxist ideas and took part in the antimilitarist movement of 1918. His

¹ The Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the King James Bible defines the word as follows in its Greek Lexicon:

5331 φαρμακεια pharmakeia, far-mak-i'-ah; from 5332; medication ("pharmacy" [pharmaceutical]) i.e. (by extens.) magic (lit. or fig.): -sorcery, witchcraft.

5332 φαρμακευς pharmakeus, far-mak-yoos'; from φαρμακον pharmakon (a drug [or medicine] i.e. spell giving potion); a druggist ("pharmacist") or poisoner, i.e. (by extens.) a magician: -sorcerer.

5333 φαρμακος pharmakos, far-mak-os'; the same as 5332: -sorcerer. (Pharmakos was actually the ritualistic practice of the sorcerer in ancient Greece over a victimized scapegoat.)

antimilitarist ideas, his struggle against any form of violence were traversed into the field of literature. Literature became the chosen form of expression, in servitude to ideology. As a result, an idea-centered literary discourse was created which did not become a transformation or any kind of sublimation and never belonged to the pure field of *phantasma*. It was rather constructed on the basis of the Platonic *eikōn*, the adequacy to a past reality. In this respect his novel “Forty Days of Musa Dagh” is posited in the intersection of the historical and the literary, writing and inscription.

Werfel, inspired by the historical events of 1915-1921, wrote his novel *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh* (1933), a fictionalized account based on his detailed research of historical sources (Werfel had read a hundred volumes on the Armenian history for eight months to be able to write the novel. He had told reporters: “The struggle of 5,000 people on Musa Dagh had so fascinated me that I wished to aid the Armenian people by writing about it and bringing it to the world” /Bobelian, 2009: 83/.

The novel is thus based on historical documentation and the evidence of witnesses published by Johannes Lepsius under the title “Report on the Condition of the Armenian Nation in Turkey” (1916) and in the magazine “Ararat” (Nov. 1915) published in English in London. History, thus, is posited in a privileged position, affirmed through literature’s identity. As a result, literary form is transformed into a representation of the privileged historical content. The homogeneity of the historical discourse, its natural escalation and spatio-temporal context are preserved in the novel. Nevertheless, historical reality is deeply intensified as a result of its fragmentation. We deal with a specific spatio-temporal context with an extremely high density. The fragmented and limited time factor (the forty days) associated with a limited, fragmented space factor (the mountain Musa Dagh) emphasizes the intentional existential nature of the being-as-such in its pure ‘being’-ness. By means of reduction of the external factors, a new surrealistic space is strictly condensed, reduced to a static point with no expounding possibilities; whereas time, in contrast, acquires the downward direction of an escalation in depth. The triumph of the existentialism in the novel is strengthened by bringing into congruence two contradictory realities; the surreal reality of the depicted fragment and the historical reality of the reflected events. The reader is

subconsciously under the influence of the events, the historicity of which serves as a documentary proof making him factually believe in the triumph of existentialism. The existentialism of the pure being is emphasized by the implication of one more marginal factor, safeguarded by history: the factor of death; or being doomed to death. The presence of death as inescapable reality stresses the fullness of being-in-itself.

The literary form in *The Forty Days of Musa Dag* is compatible with all existing requirements for a classical novel: the building, escalation, culmination and solution of the plot. The plot is intertwined from various psychological devices, dialogues, monologues, and descriptions that serve to decipher the mystery of the macrocosm through the existence of a microcosm. The ideological centre is the existential being of a microcosm that has the right of being and the right of being this particular one. It also has the right to choose to struggle against the threat of its disappearance as particularity, be it in the form of a human being, a nation or mankind. And its existential being as particularity makes it unconquerable, serves as the precondition for its impossible victory. The novel valorizes the simple existence that is the aesthetics of existence and the government of oneself, regarding it as the way to ascend towards one's true essence. The way towards it lies through molding oneself by means of severe self-discipline, or one's body's subjection to the Spirit. And this is the way to triumph, the way to the eternity.

The novel was written in 1933 and, thus, apart from being linked to the past as history of the Other, of that which is at once foreign and shameful for the history of humanity (The Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire of the 1915-1921), unfolds the circularity of time warning of a possible future (the fascism, the Second World War in the years from 1939-1945) that would already be the history of the Same. In this respect the novel *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh* is commemorated to the memory as the possibility for oblivion. The gradual escalation from memory as a trace to memory as the precondition for the oblivion lies in forgiveness, hard forgiving, applied by Ricœur in his *Memory, History, Oblivion*. Forgiving is unconditional, unlimited and with Derrida's formulation (*Le siècle et le pardon*) either it includes the sphere of the unforgivable, or it doesn't exist as such. The literary construction of history comprises simultaneously the acts of recollection, oblivion and

forgiving; to recollect and remember in the sake of forgiving and forgetting. Through these metamorphoses the true transcendental history and literature of mankind is molded where "...no man's guilt is not yours nor is any man's innocence a thing apart." /Saroyan, 1996/.

Obviously, Memory may be viewed as the fundamental mode of being, upon the basis of which various disciplines are affirmed and posited. With Foucault's formulation, "... it will necessarily lead thought back to the question of knowing what it means for thought to have a history." This question was to bear down upon philosophy, heavily and tirelessly, from Hegel to Nietzsche and beyond. In its broadest outline, this is the question of memory, as an impossible history of thought, posited between the oblivion and the Return.

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Ս. ԿՈՒՅՈՒՄՉՅԱՆ – *Հիշողության վերարտադրումը պատմավեպում*. – Հոդվածը պատմական վեպերի հիմքը հանդիսացող ժամանակ, հիշողություն, նկարագրություն, վերարտադրում և բոլորն հանձնել երևույթների, հասկացությունների ուսումնասիրությունն է: Այն ընդգրկում է անտիկ աշխարհի փիլիսոփաների՝ Պլատոնի, Արիստոտելի, Սոկրատեսի, ինչպես նաև որոշ ժամանակակից փիլիսոփաների՝ Դերիտայի, Ռիկորի սահմանումները, դիտարկումները, և այս համատեքստում բացատրում հիշողություն և նկարագրություն, ճշմարտություն և հնարանք, ինչպես նաև ժամանակ և հիշողություն հասկացությունների միջև կապը, որոնք հիմք են հանդիսանում պատմավեպի և վեպի միջև առկա հիմնական տարբերության համար: Այս համատեքստում դիտարկվում է Ֆրանց Վերֆելի «Մուսա լեռան քառասուն օրը» վեպը՝ որպես հուշամատյան:

Ս. КУЮМДЖЯН – *Память и ее воспроизведение*. – В статье исследуются основы историко-литературного романа: временные категории, понятие памяти как способности к воспроизведению информации о событиях, явлениях, фактах, процессах прошлого, их описание и введение памяти в сферу сознания человека, чередование истинных событий и их преломление в воображении автора, свободная форма изложения и использование избирательной памяти.

Ссылаясь на высказывания, замечания, наблюдения, истолкования древних и современных философов, автором статьи обосновываются связи между понятиями память и описание, правда и вымысел, используемые в историко-литературных романах.

Динамика развития связи понятий (время, память о прошлом и воображение автора в настоящем) приобретают плоть и кровь в романе Ф. Верфеля «Сорок дней Муса-дага».