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The Form of Ideology and the Ideology of Form

Cold War, Decolonization and Third
World Print Cultures



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8. Euforia, Desencanto

Roberto Bolaño and Barcelona Publishing in the Transition to Democracy

Paulo Lemos Horta

Published in Barcelona in 1998, *The Savage Detectives* (*Los detectives salvajes*) begins with the young narrator accepting an invitation to join the 'visceral realists' in Mexico City in the 1970s. In many respects the novel, including its polyvocal form channelling the voices of characters based on real-life poets such as Bruno Montané and Mario Santiago, is a love letter to ephemeral literary circles and their manifestos, magazines, carbon-copied pamphlets, and poetry scribbled on the margins of stolen books, in Mexico City and in the Barcelona to which Montané and Bolaño relocated to in the late 1970s.

Bolaño (1953–2003) lived over half his life and composed all his fiction in Catalonia (1977–2003), publishing 18 books, from *Distant Star* (*Estrella Distante*) and *By Night in Chile* (*Nocturno de Chile*) through to *The Savage Detectives* and *2666*. In Barcelona Montané and Bolaño collaborated in editing literary magazines in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Bolaño, who had toyed with a polyvocal generational panorama before in *The True History of Science Fiction* (*El espíritu de la ciencia-ficción*), a manuscript penned in the 1980s, revisits this material with humour in *The Savage Detectives*. But it is not parody, at least not without great doses of wistfulness. The scene when Bolaño and Montané arrived in Barcelona in 1977 from Mexico City was defined by the transition to democracy that followed the death of Franco in November 1975 and lent a radicalized edge to broader ideological conflicts of the Cold War

in the late 1970s and 1980s. It is difficult to gauge how much is lost in interpreting the novel, in Spanish and in translation, without taking into account the print culture in Barcelona at this time, in which Bolaño and his friends participated after they moved to the city from Cold War regimes in Latin America, and where they lived through the post-Franco transition. To forget this Cold War history is to lose the thread that bound the fictional movement to those who inspired it, even as they disbanded in the diaspora. It is also to miss out on the political possibilities that were very much alive in the 1970s for the real-life models of Belano and his friends. Cold War print culture provides a framework to unearth Bolaño as a lapsed Trotskyite and provocateur in Barcelona in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a figure mostly invisible and misunderstood.

Bolaño despised what he saw as the cosy relationship of Latin American writers of a previous generation with power and government cultural policies (García Márquez with Cuba, Paz with Mexico), and it is against the foil of the committed Latin American authors of the sixties and seventies that a mythology has been spun of Bolaño in exile in Catalonia (1977–2003). Yet Bolaño, as he emerges from this time, defies the opposition of the writing of engagement to romantic preoccupations with literary autonomy. The ephemeral archive of his early collaborations and editing eludes such clichés, and attests to other forms of international solidarity underneath the radar of the documented Left, Right and Non-Aligned circles of Latin American Cold War authors. In his writing in Barcelona as later in Girona and Blanes, Bolaño espoused sympathy for clandestine forms of fellowship such as that among underground Latin American artists in Europe and in Latin America. To understand such a solidarity, one must sort out the basic facts of the trajectory in Catalonia of a writer too often considered as if hovering in exile, out of time and out of place. Little wonder, given this scholarship, that Rebecca Walkowitz enlists Bolaño in her case for a form of writing ready to be consumed by a global marketplace. Nothing could be further from the case.¹

1 Rebecca Walkowitz, *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

Bolaño in Barcelona

It was in the Raval and the margins of society that Bolaño found himself when he moved in 1977 to post-Franco Barcelona, where his mother, sister, and Montané had established themselves. Concepts deployed to frame Bolaño's status in the Catalonia of his paternal grandmother—'cosmopolitanism' and 'exile'—evoke privilege and give little indication of the labor the drop-out pursued in Barcelona: garbage collector, waiter, dishwasher, and nightwatchman in Castelldefels.² Curiously missing in half a thousand academic articles indexed by the MLA on Bolaño are the terms closest to Bolaño's status in the city: undocumented migrant, and economic refugee. More fitting would be the experience described by Brazilian writer Silviano Santiago under the rubric of the cosmopolitanism of the poor.³ Bolaño's experience was cosmopolitan perhaps only in the sense described by Santiago, as was that of most friends he made for almost all of his life. As Ignacio Echevarría would note, they were primarily waiters, manual laborers and drifters; it was only in the last five years of his life, with the publication of *The Savage Detectives*, that Bolaño began to be received in literary circles.

Implicit in portraits of Bolaño as post-national is the dating of Bolaño as a post-Cold War author to the era of globalization of the early 2000s. Bolaño's reception in English after 2003 skews the perception of an author born in 1953 who had honed his distinctly countercultural preoccupations by the late Seventies. In the early Eighties, the author completed his first fictions, including *Antwerp (Amberes)* (1980), *Monsieur Pain* (1982), *The True History of Science Fiction* (1984), and the untranslated *Consejos de un discípulo de Morrison a un fanático de Joyce*, co-authored

2 Scholarship on Bolaño, as indexed by the MLA, tends to present him as a displaced, postnational writer, as evidenced by the most frequent keywords: 'Del fin de las literaturas nacionales'/'beyond the nation', 'Nación? Que Nación?', 'subjectividad pos-estatal', 'literatura transnacional', 'el exiliado', 'la voluntad de exilio', 'entre patrias', 'travel between worlds', 'Bolaño extraterritorial', 'la literatura extraterritorial', 'extraterritorialité', 'displacement', 'escritura global', 'arts of homelessness', 'commodification of exile', 'in the wake of cosmopolitanism', 'discrepant cosmopolitanism', 'el cosmopolitanismo del mercado'; *MLA International Bibliography* (search: 30 March 2020).

3 Silviano Santiago, 'The Cosmopolitanism of the Poor', trans. by Magdalena Edwards and Paulo Lemos Horta, in *Cosmopolitanisms*, ed. by Bruce Robbins and Paulo Lemos Horta (New York: New York University Press, 2017), pp. 153–68.

with A.G. Porta (1984). Works dating before the end of the Cold War in 1991 also include *The Skating Rink* (*La Pista de Hielo*, 1989), *The Third Reich* (*El Tercer Reich*, 1989), and drafts of *Woes of The True Policeman* (*Los Sinsabores del Verdadero Policía*), which shares plot threads and characters with 2666.⁴

Rather than confirm the received narrative of Bolaño's smooth entry in a global market in the 1990s and 2000s, an immersion in the print culture of Bolaño and his collaborators in Barcelona in the 1970s and 1980s yields the question of how he came to be published in Spanish at all. An iconic photograph of long-haired Bolaño in his countercultural days included in the American edition of *The Savage Detectives* has long been credited with branding him as 'the Kurt Cobain' of Latin-American letters and stamping his passport to the world literary scene. In a Spanish context, this rootedness in the underground scene depicted in the photo speaks to barriers of class, ethnicity and belonging that for all his late success, Bolaño never succeeded in vaulting over. As he embraced the underground scene in Barcelona in the 1970s, Bolaño was very much aware of the 'repellent' effect of his publisher Xavier Sabater's dress and status as a 'lost addict,' precisely the kind of mythos critics have (mistakenly) claimed would have helped the Chilean author with publishers.⁵ And reflecting back on the 1970s in *The Savage Detectives*, Bolaño knew the poor impression, sartorial and otherwise, he made to literary gatekeepers. If anything, Bolaño held his choice not to court the mainstream as a badge of pride.

In the testimony of his time in Catalonia by writer friends, success had come too late. Bolaño lacked the necessary cultural capital. Latin American authors in Barcelona still start with a difficulty of finding readers in Spain, and many get by, as journalist Xavi Ayén notes, at the lowest rungs of the publishing profession, completing reader's reports for pennies.⁶ Bolaño did not even get that far. Bolaño lacked any cultural currency that might have been provided by a diplomatic upbringing (Carlos Fuentes, Valeria Luiselli), academic credentials (Jorge Volpi, Andres Neuman), journalistic contacts and earnings (García Marquez,

4 See 'Cronología Creative, 1979–2003', compiled by Valerie Miles, in *Archivo Bolaño* (Barcelona, Centro de Cultura Contemporánea, 2013), pp. 28–29.

5 Bolaño, 'Xavier Sabater', *A la intemperie* (Madrid, Alfaguara, 2019), p. 369. All translations are mine.

6 Interview with the author, June 2021.

Rodrigo Frésan). Until the last year of his life, he saw little international consecration. His publisher recalls numerous impediments to a literary career Bolaño faced as a boxer's son who had never learnt the etiquette necessary to survive the dinners of Barcelona publishing.⁷ Arguably, even now that his literary estate has in its corner a powerful agent, Andrew Wylie, old prejudices against Bolaño remain.

Euforia y desencanto: Barcelona, 1977

The underground scene Bolaño felt drawn to and its publishers, to the left of the historical socialist parties that would contest the election of 1977, experienced two distinct phases during the transition to democracy: euphoria and disenchantment. As the product of this countercultural scene from his residency in Barcelona from 1977 through 1980, Bolaño's longstanding ambition through his relocation to Girona and then Blanes would become to be published by an upstart press with credibility in that milieu, Jorge Herralde's Anagrama. But his first Barcelona publisher in the late 1970s would have none of the pedigree now retrospectively associated with Anagrama as a literary press, and was entirely a creature of the underground: Xavier Sabater's La Cloaca. Bolaño arrived in the year of greatest political and social expectations, 1977, in which Spain held its first free election since 1936, and the Communist Party which had formed the main opposition to Franco's regime was expected to fare well. Anticipating a radical political transformation, Barcelona and its underground scene teemed with possibility. In the summer of 1977 the CNT, the National Labor Confederation, held four days of action which welcomed half a million people to Barcelona. Young anarchists reconnected with old in 'ateneos liberatorios' throughout the city. The Frente de Liberación Gay de Cataluña had just been established in 1976. Communes sprang up in and around Barcelona, challenging traditional patriarchal notions of marriage, gender roles, and the nuclear family.⁸ Bolaño and his publisher Herralde would later recollect the novelist's

7 See Jorge Herralde, *Un día en la vida de un editor* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2019).

8 Pepe Ribas, Canti Casanovas et al., 'El underground y la contracultura en la Cataluña de los 70: un reconocimiento', exhibition, Barcelona, Palau Robert, May–November 2021. For a broader overview of the scene in Spain, see Germán Labrador Méndez, *Culpables por la literatura: imaginación política y contracultura en la transición española (1968–1986)* (Madrid: Akal, 2017).

attraction to the free love and counterculture of Barcelona upon his arrival in 1977, but those terms do not capture the radical social and political possibilities open at that moment and which the young Chilean fully embraced and explored.

In the realm of publishing proper, euphoria resulted from the relaxation of censorship laws after Francisco Franco's death in 1975. The Press Law of 1966, which superseded an earlier law dating to the Civil War in 1938 that placed publishing in a wartime state of exception, had already expanded the realm of free speech. It allowed the publication of leftwing literature and the founding by Herralde of Anagrama in 1969, which shared with seven other Avantgarde and anti-Franco presses a paperback imprint and a distributor, the target of a rightwing bombing in 1974. After censorship was lifted in 1975, writers and readers were able to confront the facts and legacy of the Civil War of 1936–1939. Civil War history dominated publishing lists across Spain in this transition period, providing the framework for the interventions of authors of various persuasions and Cold War affiliations.⁹

Anagrama carved its niche far to the left of mainstream electoral politics, in the heterodox Left of Che Guevara, the International Situationists, anarchists, Maoists, and trotskyites. 'Rupture, not Reform', was the rallying cry of this radical Left, and revolution rather than bourgeois democracy the goal, a goal that a passionate cohort of youth believed tantalizingly within reach. Anagrama's books spoke to the urgency of armed struggle, from *Los Tupamaros* (1971) and two books by Che Guevara in the year of the death of Franco (1975) to Ulrike Meinhof of the Baader Meinhof group and Antonio Negri in the years of the Red Brigades. In retrospect, the historian may find the appeal of such radical literature naïve, as does Julia Lovell's in her *Global History of Maoism* (2019). Decades later Bolaño himself came to regard as such his youthful flirtation with armed struggle in his journey to and from Chile in 1973. Yet in its time this literature had its purchase. In 1975, Mao provided Anagrama with the house's first bestseller. Anti-imperialism went hand-in-hand with radical communism for a press like Anagrama, which followed the French Minuit in publishing books critical of the Algerian war (see also Srivastava's essay in this volume) and in defence of the PLO and the Mozambican Liberation Front (FLM). This

9 See Herralde, *Un día en la vida de un editor*, pp. 42–68.

anticolonialism helps explain why when Herralde cultivated a literary list from the 1980s, he prioritized Indian authors in English: Amitav Ghosh, Pankaj Mishra, Hanif Kureishi, Vikram Seth, Gita Mehta, and Arundhati Roy, having been outbid for Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*.¹⁰

A rung below, the underground Bolaño was immersed in was alive with the euphoria of the questioning of sexual mores long patrolled and held in place—prohibitions against extramarital sex and homosexuality (illegal until 1970)—and the embrace of radical projects for the elimination of capitalism and private property. And its publishers and magazines—including Xavier Sabater, the first to take an interest in Bolaño—were active in supporting anarchist workshops, feminist and homosexual liberation movements, and the union-sponsored days of action of 1977. To immerse oneself in the world of these underground publications is to find preoccupations that dominate Bolaño's fiction: a fascination with violence, particularly authoritarian, and transgressive sex and sexuality; the rejection of institutions and authority, in all realms, from writing, education, and the arts, through politics and psychiatry; and an investment in communes and utopias. Bolaño in this scene was very much a young man of his place and time.

In the summer of 1977, rejection of the system seemed to presage its overthrow. When the revolution did not materialize, the mood quickly soured. The radical Left experienced a profound let down. In many ways, it was an asynchronous manifestation, delayed by the belatedness of the endurance of Franco's regime, of the disillusionment that followed the student protests of 68 in Paris, Mexico City, and elsewhere (the Paris protests had been among the subjects still forbidden by Spanish censors through 1975). In the victory of Adolfo Suárez's centrist coalition in the parliamentary elections of June 1977, the communist party fell woefully short of expectations, while Felipe Gonzalez's socialists did better than foreseen. In the election's aftermath, many proponents of the radical Left and readers of its texts became disoriented and disinterested in politics, seemingly overnight in the recollection of Anagrama's editor Jorge Herralde.¹¹ This is the *desencanto* remarked upon by historians and cultural commentators on Spain during this threshold moment in the transition to democracy — disenchantment.

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 118, 119, 169, 189, 200, 308.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 182.

In the more radicalized underground, disappointment and ennui gave way to anger. The radicalization of the scene had already been a response to the perceived pact made between Franco's regime and tolerated opposition parties in the first half of the decade, as a recent exhibit documents.¹² Before the election of June 1977, the counterculture could have dreamt that anything was possible. All of a sudden, dreams of utopia were shattered, and the underground fragmented into tribes in the peripheries of Barcelona. Many in the scene advocated violence and armed struggle. As this recent exhibit on the Barcelona underground in the late 1970s emphasizes, partisans of radical change did not want to let go of the anger felt in the election's aftermath, but cultivate it. Provocation became the imperative of the day, and *feísmo*—'the cultivation of the ugly.'

It was thus with bitterness that Barcelona's underground by the autumn of 1977 continued to make its own the music, fashion, attitude and slogans imported from American and European countercultural scenes and Paris and May 1968. Under the sway of *desencanto* the accent could fall on the 'aggressive and demonic side' of these international scenes.¹³ This edge was notable in the local reception of Allen Ginsberg, and the appeal of his casting of Moloch as the god of the bourgeoisie, guilty of burying the visionary powers of imagination. In an interview with a local critic, Ginsberg warned that the circuit of money-machine-car-bank-family-office-airplane obscured the circle of existence, and that 'man,' afraid his safety depended on money, repressed his nature to become a robot.¹⁴ When printed alongside sympathetic portraits of Baader Meinhof in magazines, Ginsberg's musings might appear to resonate with campaigns of urban terror across Europe. Thus for Bolaño to have written verses in the margins of his copy of Ginsberg in Barcelona in 1977 had a different charge than if he had done so as an American in California. Likewise his early use of Burroughs and the Beats, and adaptation of plot devices borrowed from novels like Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*, for the purpose of justifying fantasies of anti-bourgeois mayhem in Barcelona.

12 Ribas et al., 'El underground y la contracultura'.

13 Ibid.

14 Interview with Maria José Ragué, cited *ibid.* Texts by Ginsberg were set alongside Baader Meinhof, and their names appeared next to each other on the cover of the adult comic *Star*.

In the realm of underground letters and art, this embittered rejection of authority accentuated the rejection of the legitimacy of tastemakers and their established institutions. This rejection of the literary and artistic establishment formed the very *raison d'être* first for the magazine and then the press *La Cloaca*. 'The business of ART affects many of us who, like it or not, suffer its consequences,' Xavier Sabater wrote as a statement of the magazine's intent in November 1976. Seeking the worst pejorative to describe the workings of international capitalism of the mid-1970s, Sabater complained that Barcelona's publishing houses behaved like 'oil companies.' To shock the city's galleries and publishers, he invoked the sewer ('cloaca'), to found a magazine to give a voice to those 'creatures' that skulked about 'in the underworld' of the little world ('mundillo') of art. *La Cloaca* press, which would publish Bolaño as a Barcelona poet, would be established in 1978. Magazine and press were not just alternative—they remained adamantly *against the system* ('*antisistema*').¹⁵

The rejection of the publishing and art worlds and their corporate values was philosophical but extended to modes of dress and address, to the trappings of the artistic establishment, drawn, like the publishers themselves, from the most privileged in the Barcelona elite. 'The sewer'—the name captures well the '*feísmo*' in vogue in the underground, as part of the rejection of the art world's privileged aesthetics. In time, Sabater's interest in sound poetry, as a pioneer of 'cassette' poetry, would mark his presence in the alternative scene. But when Bolaño first met him and hung out together playing pinball machines in cheap cafés, it was Sabater's attitude rather than his knowledge of French poetry that made an impression. The Chilean was impressed with his stories of working on ships in the Northern Atlantic and the then rare tattoo Sabater sported from his time in Antwerp, part of his affected '*feísmo*'. Above all he was taken by Sabater's ability to produce his magazines and books from the 'rotten' youth of Barcelona: 'Xavier constructs magazines with the worst and the cheapest and the most rotten of Barcelona's youth literature'.¹⁶

And it was in this 'rotten' youth culture of the Barcelona underground in 1977 and 1978 that Bolaño found and furthered the collaborations that would see him into print. The Spanish poet Inma Marcos, a friend

15 Xavier Sabater et al., *La Cloaca*, 1 November 1976, cited in 'El underground y la contracultura'.

16 Bolaño, 'Xavier Sabater', *A la intemperie*, p. 369.

of both Bruno Montané and Xavier Sabater, bridged the world of the recent immigrants from Chile by way of Mexico and the local scene. In this circle, Bolaño found the Barcelona poet A.G. Porta, with whom he would finally achieve a breakthrough in the realm of prose publication half a decade later with their co-written *Consejos de un discípulo de Morrison a un fanático de Joyce* (1984). In the late seventies Sabater was the only publisher to take any interest in Porta or Bolaño. It was his anthologies that afforded them harbor, and his makeshift production of 'rotten' magazines that enabled the editing of their own, with the same principals: Marcos, Montané, Bolaño, Porta. What Bolaño and Montané would share with Sabater, and the underground scene in general, was the rejection of the system—political, economic, literary, artistic.

However indebted to Anthony Burgess, the anti-bourgeois mayhem of *Consejos*, started in the desencanto of 1978–1979, may not readily translate for an Anglophone context. As a recent exhibit on the Barcelona underground culture of the 1970s notes more generally of the scene, news and trends from other countercultural scenes arrived in Barcelona in a fragmented fashion, without context. From the last years of Franco's regime in the early seventies, taking advantage of the relative proximity to Paris and distance from the surveillance of Madrid, youth programs such as *Radio Juventud* and magazines like *Fotograma* snuck in what snippets they could from movements elsewhere. Well into the transition, post-Franco, these samplings seldom offered a sense of the whole picture.¹⁷ Whim shaped the connections made between different cultural artifacts. This is a key insight into the intellectual make-up and editorial practice of writers like Bolaño imprinted by this scene.

In this context Bolaño was hardly alone in mashing high art, the poetry of Baudelaire with popular genres from not only crime, sci-fi, and Eastern esoterica, through pulp and borderline exploitation true crime and erotica. The same points of reference in high and low art inform this scene and his fiction: anthologies of American feminist poets, H.P. Lovecraft, Arthur Rimbaud, Jim Morrison, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs, Hunter S. Thompson, Truman Capote, Werner Schroeter and Wim Wenders. Bolaño was of this underground scene in his fear of the revival of fascism only a couple of years after the death of Franco, and rebellion against an ultra-conservative expression

17 Ribas et al., 'El underground y la contracultura'.

of family and bourgeois morality as it was still very much in place in Spain. And he was also representative of the scene in terms of some of the specific iconography and rhetoric deployed, from the Nazi iconography recurrent on the covers of the adult comic *Star*, to the grab bag of currents of sexual liberation that interested this scene and Bolaño, from gay liberation through radical lesbian separatism. Some of these clusters of images and associations may appear garbled from the vantage point of a cultural history that distinguishes with precision among countercultures in London and on the West and East coast of the United States. But they snap back into place if one steps into the archive of the underground Barcelona scene where Bolaño and others had knitted them together and spoken of them in the same breath.

Bolaño as Editor in Cold War Barcelona

Bolaño and Montané, Chileans arriving in Barcelona by way of Mexico City after the fall of Allende and the repression of the student movement, found another term to describe what they saw in the elections in Spain in 1977: counterrevolution. In their first literary magazine, in November 1977, they found common cause with the Spanish radical Left disillusioned by the move toward the centre of the parties contesting the election. The 16-page magazine *Rimbaud, vuelve a Casa* borrowed its subtitle from Lenin's *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, and for its conclusion his denunciation of the social democrat for taking from Marxism only what the bourgeois and liberals found tolerable, and excising what they could not — revolutionary violence. The magazine was aimed at fellow travellers not only in Peru and Mexico but also in Barcelona and Madrid.¹⁸

Montané and Bolaño were convinced the reaction against the revolutionary Left in the countries they had lived in had crushed incipient forms of the popular exercise of power and destroyed the utopias of their generation. Registering the mood of the more radical Left in Spain, they believed 1977 to be an important crossroads for the commitment to revolution. They were clear about the path they opposed — art for art's sake, a retreat into the office of the writer, away from the public sphere. They sought to witness the potential for a revolution even as they felt it

18 Roberto Bolaño and Bruno Montané, *Rimbaud, vuelve a Casa* [1977].

to be lost. Less defined were the contours of poetry of disenchantment. In their preamble letter to *Rimbaud*, Montané and Bolaño, spied common challenges in Spain and Latin America and saw need to resist the 'brutal' routine enacted by 'bourgeois and fascist states'. But how? 'Emerging nervous and tense from solitude and clandestine phone calls', they wrote, 'our only poetic certainty is that life—suffered, lived, enjoyed—is ever more distant from attempts to reflect it, to change it through verbs and images'.¹⁹

The two Chileans addressed the Hora Zero movement in Peru. In Barcelona in 1977 Bolaño remained intrigued by the possible affinities that veterans of Mexican *infrarrealismo* like himself might find with those of other Latin-American avantgardes of the 1970s. The Peruvian group by then was known for its proletarian poetry and committees for cultural production. Both movements had traversed a common path, defined by dictatorships and the oppression of student movements of the 1970s in Latin America. Distinct from but not atypical of Barcelona *desencanto* after 1977, Bolaño expressed the hope that those who had trodden a common Marxist path might bring that radical energy to aesthetic projects. Bolaño succeeded in persuading Jorge Pimental of Hora Zero to collaborate on the anthology, which would include the work of eleven young poets and be printed in Mexico in 1979 under the new title *Naked Boys under a Rainbow of Fire* (*Muchachos desnudos bajo el arcoiris de fuego*).

An attitude and what Bourdieu terms a habitus defined the movement that Montané and Bolaño had been involved in in Mexico City, *infrarrealismo*.²⁰ Bolaño had coined the term *infrarrealismo* from Soviet sci-fi author Georgi Gurevic's 'Infra Draconis' (1959), the account of a cosmonaut crew's encounter with dark stars (in Spanish, 'infrasoles'), planet-stars in which the light and heat produced is drawn back to the stars, which remain dark. Gurevic relates the story of a fourteen-year interplanetary expedition to a dark star seven light days from Earth. The crew must abandon its mission after an initial approach determines that the surface is made up of dark water and affords no spot to land. The oldest crewman resolves to descend by himself in a journey without

19 Bolaño and Montané, 'Rasgar el Tambor, la Placenta (carta al Movimiento Hora Zero de Perú)' in *ibid.*, n.p.

20 There as many *infrarrealists* as *infrarrealists*, and scholars have sketched genealogies emphasizing a link or break with Surrealism.

prospect of return, transmitting to other cosmonauts the details of his descent through the planet-star's outer layers, at the last sighting in an abyss a city. 'There are four light-hours until the end of the solar system; four-light days to the closest star', Bolaño's manifesto begins, 'But can we be sure it is a void? We only know that in this space there are no luminous stars, if they do exist would they be visible? What if there were bodies neither luminous nor dark? Couldn't it be in celestial maps, just like those of earth, that we mark city-stars but not citytowns?'²¹ Bolaño picked out the image of the old cosmonaut's mission, and his making out, in his last transmission, the contours of a city that reveal the shape of a cupola, the light from illuminated streets, and fantastical beings.

Reaching out in November 1977 to members of Peru's Hora Zero, but also to young poets in Barcelona, Bolaño wrote out of the conviction that aesthetic affinities might survive among veterans of 1970s avantgardes. From the underground he would dismiss as sterile the work of young mainstream Spanish poets during this 'shared disenchantment'.²² He held more faith in the insights informed by the university protests of Mexico in 1968. The challenge in the aftermath of such moments is to capture 'the ambiguity that lingers in the streets — as astonishment and a desire to bite and be bitten — ... the savagery of one who realizes that to be [present at this time...] is to be sitting on a powder keg, and is able to express it'. What is needed he suggests are 'other forms of risk' that 'could unite the revolutionary moments of history with a personal life story in terms and realms... not only unknown but dangerous'.²³ He held hope for a poetry of 'total experience' that was yet to be published: 'Che Guevara and Jules Verne, an adventure of the body, in space, of revolution'.²⁴ The unknown Bolaño doubled down, in the sci-fi realm of Verne, on a revolutionary energy in the realm of aesthetics.

In the Barcelona underground scene Bolaño found common cause against the co-option of revolution by bourgeois democracy. This was a hot topic in Spain, but also across socialist circles in Europe. And though it runs counter to the consensus of how Bolaño was discovered, it was in a small publication by an anti-fascist committee that his work first

21 <http://manifestos.infrarrealismo.com/primermanifesto.html>

22 Bolaño, 'De la inutilidad', *A la intemperie*, p. 390.

23 Bolaño, 'Apuntes sobre la poesía de Orlando Guillén', *A la intemperie*, pp. 381–83.

24 Bolaño, 'Islas a la deriva, por José Emilio Pacheco', *A la intemperie*, p. 353.

travelled. Counter to assumptions of the appeal of Bolaño's writing to, or even its production for, a world literary market, this first recognition took place in Eastern Europe, behind the Iron Curtain. From this flicker of recognition the impetus for exiled authors to contact him arose, and allowed him to benefit from networks established by authors in exile in his magazine editing in the early 1980s.

That Bolaño was first included in a collection in East Berlin before entering the radar of the literary scene in Santiago, Barcelona or Paris should not surprise. Bolaño's *infrarrealismo* was inspired by Soviet science fiction, and the *Hora Zero* movement he admired partial to Marxist-Leninism. If the literary historian pans out and maps the travel of the writing of his closest coauthors in the late 1970s and 1980s—Bruno Montané and Barcelona author A.G. Porta—one observes it was also first exported to Central and Eastern Europe. By 1977, Montané had already been translated into German, Polish and Czech. And by the mid-1980s, Porta's writing was translated into Hungarian and included in anthologies of contemporary international literature.²⁵ The vector of the first international travel of this underground writing is clear and points across the Berlin wall.

Bolaño appeared alongside Montané with two co-written poems in *Los poetas luchan contra el fascismo*, published in 1977 by the Chilean anti-fascist Committee in the German Democratic Republic.²⁶ The collective volume took a long historical view of Chilean writing against fascism, including Gabriela Mistral and Pablo Neruda, Nobel laureates who had witnessed the rise of *falangismo* and Franco and the beginnings of the Civil War teaching at Madrid's *residencia de estudiantes* and serving in the Chilean diplomatic corps in the 1920s and 1930s. Editor Sergio Macías made unmistakable the testamentary purpose of the volume: 'we will not concern us with the romantic, epic or descriptive, nor the anti-poem nor lyric or intimate verse'.²⁷ The goal was unveiling the horror of Pinochet's military regime.

25 A.G. Porta, *Textos en español* (Budapest, Tankönyvkiadó, 1986) and *Égtájak 1984. Őt világrész elbeszélései* (Budapest: Europa, 1984). Porta also placed the story 'Elektrosokk' in the magazine *Nagy Világ*, 10 (1985).

26 'Carta' and 'En el pueblo' in *Los poetas chilenos luchan contra el fascismo*, ed. by Víctor Contreras Tapia and Sergio Macías Brevis (Berlin: Comité Chile Antifascista, 1977), pp. 264, 271.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

In form and content, Montané and Bolaño's chapbook *Rimbaud* (1977) dovetailed with the anti-fascist collection. All three poets included are presented as Communists and sympathizers of *Hora Zero*. Inma Marcos, identifying as a revolutionary feminist, contributes a poem where the narrator describes night as 'an electrocuted ghost' and tires of 'dreaming in morse / photocopying echoes / the repeated gestures in countless sequences / pores that are the corridors of torture'.²⁸ Darío Galicia presents himself as a disciple of 'the feminist poet Diana Bellesi' and the first to have attempted to found 'a homosexual communist party' and a 'homosexual proletarian commune' in Mexico. He is represented by a poem which imagines a future where the automatization of harvests and factories has freed workers from labour and 'the children of abundance' are free to break with gendered norms.²⁹ And Montané envisions a world where the war has ended, atomic bombs are shown in open air museums, and 'where tortures are the memory of disillusion, towards certain pieces of the past'. The narrator imagines in the ruins of great cities violent entertainments 'where not a single drop of sisterly blood will be spilt'.³⁰

After being listed by Sergio Macías and the Berlin committee as an anti-fascist author in 1977, the following year, 1978, Bolaño appeared in *Literature Chilena en el Exilio* as a poet 'first exiled in Mexico, now exiled in Spain'.³¹ Why should we not remember him as such? The overlooked three issues of *Berthe Trépat* (1983) helps explain why Bolaño did not seek the mantle of exiled author, and refused to inhabit that profile in his subsequent literary career.³² An impetus for the publication was provided by sociologist Soledad Bianchi, who as editor, from her exile in Paris, of Chilean poetry of the diaspora resisted the military regime in Chile. Yet though Bianchi provided the first issue's editorial and connections with prominent poets, the magazine was not hers. Edited in Barcelona by Montané with help from his artistic family and friends and via correspondence with Bolaño in Girona, *Berthe Trépat* reflects, from its title to its content, a conscious choice on behalf of the two Catalonia-based poets to eschew the profile of the political exile magazine.

28 *Rimbaud, vuelve a Casa*, biography, p. 15, and poem, 'Flujo Violento', p. 7.

29 *Rimbaud, vuelve a Casa*, biography, p. 15, and poem, 'Velocidad, Vapor y Sueño', p. 4.

30 *Rimbaud, vuelve a Casa*, 'La Guerra ha Terminado', pp. 8–14.

31 See Roberto Bolaño, 'Bienvenida, in *Literature Chilena en el Exilio*, 8 (1978), p. 17.

32 See <https://culturadigital.udp.cl/index.php/documento/revista-berthe-trepat-1/>

Named after the pianist in Julio Cortázar's novel *Rayuela* (*Hopscotch*, 1969), *Berthe Trépat* presents itself as an eclectic venue 'for pleasure, like a game, like hopscotch' (*rayuela*), with an emphasis on irony and humour along with 'solidarity, hope and skepticism'.³³ Enrique Lihn anchors the 47-page issue with poems that play on Odysseus, his own memories of Cincinnati, Lewis Carroll, and Kandinsky ('I travel but not to an Eldorado of my choosing, with no confidence in objective fate').³⁴ Like the Spanish poet Inma Marcos, Bolaño contributes verses of solitude, romance and eros, evoking 'the dirty windows of the port of Barcelona'.³⁵ From Rome, the Chilean exile Antonio Arévalo writes a poem for Pier Paolo Pasolini, while from Barcelona, Víctor Esteban contributes an apocryphal history of a necromantic late eighteenth-century French cult. Guillermo Nuñez, a Chilean painter exiled in Paris, muses if there is a way to write about the native peoples of the Americas he identifies with that is not archaeological, wondering at one point what the native peoples think of the murals devoted to them. Typical of the underground, the politics are of sexual liberation. A certain cultural dislocation permeates some of the contributions, but it would be a strain to interpret them all through the prism of exile.

The editors made this clear by anchoring the magazine's second issue in 1983 with Enrique Lihn's letter to the poets of Rotterdam.³⁶ Lihn's letter provided cover for Montané and Bolaño.³⁷ Placed as an introduction to the volume, Lihn's letter to the poets of Rotterdam pre-

33 Soledad Bianchi, 'Divaga Introducción imprescindible sobre a Berthe Trépat', *Berthe Trépat*, 1 (1983), pp. 3–5.

34 Enrique Lihn, 'Souvenir de Cincinnati', *ibid.*, p. 13.

35 Roberto Bolaño, "El Aire," *ibid.*, p. 23.

36 Enrique Lihn, 'Carta a los poetas en Rotterdam', *Berthe Trépat*, 2 (1983), pp. 3–13. Lihn referred to the exiled poets gathered who had in that city and were anthologized by Bianchi in an anthology published in Rotterdam in 1983, *Entre la lluvia y el arcoiris: algunos jóvenes poetas chilenos* (Rotterdam: Instituto para el Nuevo Chile, 1983).

37 The second issue of *Berthe Trépat* (1983) mostly included Chilean authors. Luis Herмосilla imagines an installation to enact exile, 'an event that violently rips him from his surroundings, that separates him from his neighbourhood, his house, his friends, his family, his furniture, his objects, etc' (pp. 24–26). Soledad Bianchi referenced the poets who spoke at the Rotterdam meeting, captivated by Gonzalo Millán's concept of counter-exile to describe those who face a remote reality, after almost ten years of absence from their home country in contact with 'other tongues, customs, arts, cultures'; (pp. 14–23). The inclusion of an apolitical poem by the Mexican infraredrealist Mario Santiago, breaks the spell of the selection of Chilean authors.

empt the spell of exile, and actively makes a case against its allure. He warns poets of reducing cultural labour to a strictly partisan end, remarking on the coincidence of Allende's fall and the persecution of writers and intellectuals in Cuba. Lihn dismisses magazines and prizes for politically committed literature as stalwarts of political utopias built by dictators. He bristles at the presumed moral superiority of exile, venturing that not all those who could return would do so, and not all who wanted to leave, could.³⁸ Lihn is skeptical of the stated project of the poets who had gathered in Rotterdam: to pick up the thread of their national poetic tradition, hoping to reach their 'natural' readers. Lihn would rather the Chilean exile become a good poet in an adopted country than 'cultivate an artificial, popular Chilean identity, in search of 'national' readers'.³⁹ It is tempting to see echoes of Lihn's piece in Bolaño's own famously ironic meditations on the literary pretensions of exile of a decade and a half later.⁴⁰

Montané and Bolaño chose, in contrast with Bianchi's anthologies of Chilean exile poetry, to represent their corner of the Barcelona underground. For this reason they included local alongside Latin American contributors. Rootedness in this scene is evident in the first cover, a photograph of a mysterious city square superimposed upon a map of the Born neighbourhood in Barcelona. The break with exile writing is clearly signalled by the inclusion of the work of Bolaño's frequent coauthor, A.G. Porta, in Catalan. Porta used a 'cut-up' method, mixing words and phrases from Joaquim Mallafré's Catalan translation of Joyce's *Ulysses* from 1981.⁴¹ Porta's experiment, enabled by this first translation of the novel into Catalan, serves as a reminder that eclecticism was a guiding editorial principle of *Berthe Trépat* in 1983, with less of a link, relative to 1977's chapbook *Rimbaud*, between ideology and form. In this Montané and Bolaño's editorial practice in

38 Lihn is not at all convinced that exile will produce better poetry, suggesting rather that censorship had provoked the development of new formal responses and devices in poetry penned in Chile, and that, in any event, the best work of the younger generation of poets had already been published by 1973 almost like 'prefigurations' or 'premonitions', 'Carta a los poetas de Rotterdam', *Berthe Trépat*, 2 (1983), p. 12.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

40 Roberto Bolaño, 'Exiles', *The New York Review of Books*, 13 April 2011, <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2011/04/13/exiles/>

41 A. G. Porta, 'Outsider — Pàgina 338', *Berthe Trépat* 1 (1983), pp. 30–33.

the mid-1980s resonates with the whims of countercultural publishing in the Barcelona of their time.

In drafting *The Savage Detectives* and *2666*, Bolaño would continue to care about what his fellow Marxists read, even after what he saw as the pendulum swing to counterrevolution, in Spain as it had done in Mexico and Chile. The young radical's contempt for the bourgeois Left never entirely faded, nor his interest in the political violence of those years, a violence imposed by states (viewed with horror), and deployed by guerrilla groups fighting them (viewed with some sympathy). Jorge Volpi dismisses the visceral realists of *The Savage Detectives* and their quest for cult poets as juvenile, faulting their real life models and Marxist magazines for 'slumming'.⁴² To understand Bolaño in his time, I counter, one has to take small Marxist magazines such those Bolaño published with Montané in Barcelona seriously, with their earnest statements of solidarity with the communes set up by young poets in Sabadell, outside Barcelona—a sign that rather than 'slumming', Bolaño remained genuinely drawn to such social commitments and experiments upon his move to Spain. Slumming was not really an option for an author from a modest social background never able to make a living from his writing, and whose experiences of and friendships made via manual labour were genuine.

Decontextualized, it is also easy to dismiss the Beat leanings of the '70s generation the novel portrays. But contexts matter. Bolaño and his circle read Kerouac, Bukowski, Burroughs, and, for that matter, Patricia Highsmith in a highly charged environment, published by underground and literary labels, Star Books and Anagrama, known among young readers for its radical credentials. Porta recalls that Bolaño was very much attuned to the intellectual inheritance and radical profile of Anagrama as a press that had established itself first by publishing the work of favourite intellectuals of his like Hans Magnus Enzerberger.⁴³ For an aspiring author mired in the 'rotten' underground of horribly photocopied chapbooks, reading Kerouac or Highsmith in Anagrama editions would hardly have constituted an act of intellectual slumming. And reading Noir in the 1980s and experimenting with the form in

42 Jorge Volpi, 'Bolaño, epidemia', *Revista de la Universidad de México*, 49, marzo 2008, pp. 197–98.

43 Email, Antoni García Porta to Paulo Lemos Horta, 5 July 2020.

fictional and screenplay form, as Porta and Bolaño did together, hardly need be seen as an apolitical act. Spanish Noir was strongly imbued with the history and politics of the *desencanto* that coincided with its revival as a genre in Spanish letters in the 1980s. While A.G. Porta himself preferred classic authors like Highsmith, which he read in French, he recalls his Chilean friend having a much deeper interest in contemporary Spanish Noir authors,⁴⁴ perhaps, I would venture, because of the way it handled political disenchantment, an insight useful to interpret not only early Bolaño but other plays on the genre through to 2666.

In the alternative and underground scenes represented by Herralde and Bolaño, it is difficult to mistake the persistence for readers of the *habitus* of their subculture, the carrying over of a set of dispositions, even as this evolves from manifestoes and calls to action and expands into fiction and art. The genius of Anagrama was to encourage a readership that had been built from 1969 to 1977 on Guevara and Baader-Meinhof, and had found its first bestseller in Mao in 1975, to embrace a wider range of issues and sensibilities, first women's and gay liberation, then the countercultural scene of Bukowski and Burroughs, under the fold of a radical politics and attitude, uncompromising with bourgeois values. In Bolaño's underground scene one observes a similar shift, on a more aspirational level, with the chapbook *Rimbaud* in 1979 with its selection of three poets who prioritize (only two years after Herralde had done so in Anagrama) the dovetailing of feminism, gay liberation, and revolutionary politics. It is important to recognize common countercultural influences at play in both scenes: in 1983 Montané and Bolaño publish poems riffing on Burroughs, the same year Anagrama launches its first literary imprint that would be anchored by the work of Burroughs, Bukowski, Thompson and Highsmith. But it is important also not to underestimate the barriers that a stubbornly underground and anti-commercial author like Bolaño would find as he turned to fiction in the 1980s and sought to find a foothold on Anagrama's list, a press that over the course of the decade would accrue increasing literary prestige. It is quite a jump from Sabater's rotten chapbooks to the Spanish house of Kazuo Ishiguro, Martin Amis, Julian Barnes, Graham Swift, and Vikram Seth.

44 Ibid.

The correspondence of Jorge Herralde puts to rest any claims that the publisher positioned or produced Bolaño for an international audience, or that the nature of Bolaño's writing somehow made it appealing to the publisher commercially, in any language. Herralde is convinced of the minor market potential of Bolaño's writing throughout, from the first approach by Bolaño in the second year of the existence of Anagrama's literary list, 1984, through his reading of the novel he would publish to critical acclaim, *The Savage Detectives*. As late as 2000, the year after Bolaño scooped up the Rómulo Gallegos Prize, Herralde would find himself defending in the press the decision to publish fiction by the Chilean's that was '*militantemente minoritario*,'⁴⁵ a phrase that captures well his sense of Bolaño as a partisan, a soldier in the defense of the literature for the few against the demands of commercial publishing.

Conclusion

The received narrative of Bolaño as a writer of and perhaps for the world market does not accord with the record of the archive of his collaborations in Barcelona at the tail end of the Cold War and of Spanish *desencanto*. But why should one automatically look at Bolaño from New York, as if it is his passage into English that first marks his entry into world letters? Such a spatial and temporal view produces distorting assumptions about the nature of his appeal to an American audience. If one looks at Bolaño from Barcelona and Catalonia, where he pursued his literary career and penned all his fiction, a different constellation emerges—of literary actors, activities, collaborations, magazines. From a radicalized and disenchanting Barcelona underground scene at the tail end of the Cold War a different world was viewed, a distinct set of contacts across borders and hence mode of internationalism. Chilean exiles reached out to him, drawing Bolaño into the sphere of the oppositional writing gathered by the Chilean anti-fascist committee in East Berlin. Bolaño engaged the broader community of exiles from South American dictatorships in Europe and elsewhere, but was also grounded in the experience of Latin American manual labor in Barcelona which he partook of (not 'slummed' in).

45 Jordi Gracia, *Los Papeles de Herralde: Una historia de Anagrama 1968–2000* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2021), p. 375.

This existence was very far from the literary circuits, networks, and festivals of prestige, what Bolaño's friend from his brief years of recognition Enrique Vila-Matas calls 'music for underachievers'.⁴⁶ It is difficult to map onto the models inherited from Pierre Bourdieu, because Bolaño was not an author propelled to world recognition by awards that might have allowed his publisher to transmute symbolic into commercial capital. In Spain, prizes from the most lucrative (Planeta) to Anagrama's own Herralde prize work in effect as advances.⁴⁷ And the Herralde prize hardly guarantees translation into English, much less attention from FSG or *Time*. Bolaño's writing was militantly anti-commercial, in Herralde's apt summation, he was a guerilla or underground author, the belatedness of his recognition the regret of his publisher and his friends, for all the fixation on his somewhat fortuitous posthumous postscript in Anglophone letters.

From the Barcelona underground scene Bolaño and Montané sought to tap into less a circuit than a patchwork of contacts, defined by the gaps between and the looseness of the connections, not quite the *network* of literary models. The thrilling and ephemeral quality of these contacts is beautifully illustrated by the image of an international underground surrealist collective recruiting passers-by by cold calling pay phones, recently rescued from Bolaño's vault in *Cowboy Graves (Sepulcros de Vaqueros)*. Most of their desired anthologies of writing in exile and the diaspora and the imagined communities between the remnants of avantgardes scattered across Latin America would never materialize. A few magazine issues were published in Barcelona, and contributions made to a chapbook in Mexico. But some of the oppositional political quality of the early Bolaño survives in *Distant Star*, the first book he would publish with Anagrama, and *By Night in Chile*, the first book to be translated into English, both books of Pinochet's Chile. And more of that world of avantgarde dreams and poetic utopias survives in the literary circles evoked in *The Savage Detectives* and *2666*. Without this context, Anglo-American readers might be forgiven for recognizing in Bolaño's writing only a mirror of what they know: Kerouac, hardboiled Noir, American sci fi, rather than Soviet cosmonauts, the more radicalized

46 Interview with the author, 2017.

47 Bolaño himself disparaged national literary prizes in 'Sobre la literatura, el Premio Nacional de Literatura y los raros consuelos del oficio', *A la intemperie*, pp. 261–64.

noir of Spain in the early 1980s, and Latin American takes on Georges Perec and French poets such as Rimbaud who gives Bolaño his first name, Arturo.

Barcelona in the 1970s and 1980s was also a place where the radical left that admired the Red Brigade overlapped with support for anticolonial struggle, not only in the lists of Anagrama, but the trajectories of characters of what became the polyvocal middle section of *The Savage Detectives*. In a book devoted to literary movements and circles born of anticolonial struggle, I offer this case study of Bolaño hoping to bring into focus resonances, from the attention to South Asian and Latin American contexts, and comparable forms of solidarity.

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