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“Towards a Definition of the Mexican Postnorthern Condition
in Carlos Velázquez’s *La Biblia Vaquera*”

In 2009, Rafael Lemus, a Mexican literary critic wrote about Carlos Velazquez’s *Biblia Vaquera*: “Cada cosa [en la Biblia Vaquera] -el norte, la narrativa, el español- está dejando de ser lo que es y está empezando a ser -todavía sin forma definida- algo distinto”. (Everything in *La Biblia Vaquera* -the north, the narrative, the Spanish- it’s turning into something else- not defined yet, but essentially different from what it was). From Lemus’ affirmation I want to recall two elements: what changes: el norte, la narrativa, el español; and the result of this transformation: something else/ algo distinto. In what follows, I will try to elaborate what is this “something else” that the Mexican North it’s becoming from Rafael Lemus’ perspective.

The stories of *La Biblia Vaquera* portray the Mexican North: from the frontier with the United States of America to the States of Durango and Coahuila. In PopSTock! the stories’ fictional setting, the borderlands and the Mexican North are ironically depicted. San Pedroosvelt, Monclouyork, and Monterrey are some of the sites in which we see unfold a complex representation of social life in Northern Mexico. The cities’ diverse fictional residents include a wrestler and the drug dealer of a famous corrido singer, and the narratives deal with their struggles with constant mobility and transmutation. Their one common theme and connection is the eponymous “Biblia Vaquera,” a figure that is itself a shape-shifter, simultaneously object and character. About this “shape-shifter”, Inés Sáenz Negrete has written that this one should be understood as: “La omnipresencia de un sujeto multiforme y múltiple, una especie de nahual llamado la biblia vaquera, hecho a base de montajes, un “inquilino de las formas presentes”. (126). This element itself could be interpreted as that something else *that is becoming* the north, the language, and the narrative, at least following Lemu’s perspective.

The “nahualistic” characteristics of *La Biblia Vaquera*, pointed out by Saézn Negrete, have a close relationship with the one of the Mexican/US Borderland, at least as Gloria Anzaldúa described it: “[...] Soy un amasamiento, I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not

only has produced both a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings.” (80). Between the “amasamiento” of Anzaldua and the “sujeto multiforme [...] hecho a base de montajes (multiform assembled subject)” of Velazquez, described by Sáenz, I argue that *La Biblia Vaquera* beyond being the main character and object of the Velazquez’ stories it is metaphor and metonym for the borderland’s constant change and movement. There are, however, some differences between Anzaldua’s conception of the borderland and Velazquez’ one. While Anzaldua suggest that the new mestiza, the borderland, it’s a form of appropriation of the borderland itself and of the feminine and different oppressed genres identities present in this geographical area. Velazquez’ borderland depicted in *La Biblia Vaquera* more than a way of (re)appropriate space and identities it’s a limit point where the “corrido” has surpassed any logic. This means in Sáenz words that the fictional space of Velazquez it’s a: “[...] gran meseta poblada de marcas, peleas de lucha libre y música de todo tipo. Es un espacio que “remite [...] al movimiento, al dinamismo de las formas, y designa a la realidad como un conglomerado de superficies y territorios transitorios, potencialmente desplazables” (Bourriaud, 89). Un espacio propio de la altermodernidad, de la estética radicante. La precariedad se vuelve un telón de fondo de nuevos tipos de escritura y de cultura.” (131). From this perspective, Velazquez depicts a fictional Mexican North that practically is always changing, and it’s composed by multiple discourses.

The relationship between the Mexico and the United States of America borderland and the Mexican North is complicated. In recent years the border experience has broadened and been displaced throughout Mexico, particularly its Northern states. Social practices and pressures have made of cities such as Torreón, Durango, and Tamaulipas new borderlands, even though they are far from the international frontier itself. Nevertheless, beyond the problematic of the borderland itself, Velázquez points out first an issue with the conception of the Mexican North. In the author’s words, he wanted to: “darle carpetazo a la etiqueta de “literatura norteña” tal como se conocía hasta hace algunos años. Una etiqueta que por supuesto fue creada desde la trinchera editorial [...] (126). Furthermore, Velázquez thinks that: “el norte no pertenece a México. Que esto es la verdadera tercera nación.” (125). These concerns of the author are well depicted in his *Biblia Vaquera*, specially in “La Condición Postnorteña”.

“La Condición Postnorteña” is the story of Paulino, a famous corrido composer who is looking for a new pair of Biblia Vaquera boots¹ which are sold out. Despite Paulino’s attempts to get a new pair of B.V boots he fails. That’s when he decides to sell a horse and his soul to the devil in exchange for his precious boots. However, the devil proposes a different arrangement to Paulino: her wife in exchange for the boots. To do so, Paulino and the devil set a mise-en-scene, where Paulino has lost everything he has (his house, his songs’ copyright, his money, his animals, his lands) because of gambling. However, Paulino’s opponent is willing to change his mind if Paulino’s wife accept to have sexual intercourse with him. Without an option, Paulino’s wife accepts, nevertheless she will not have sexual intercourse strictly, she is willing to attend to a Valentin Elizalde’s concert to dance with her date mate, and then after that: “Luego ya veremos” (84), says Paulino’s wife. When the devil finds out that he will not get what he strictly wanted he refuses to give Paulino the boots. At the end, the farce seems ended, but Paulino’s wife and her sister decide to defy Paulino’s authority by attending without him to the Valentin Elizalde’s concert into which the devil revenges on Paulino, by dancing with her wife and burning her until “varios sombrero-dudos” opened fire to the devil. The story ends when Paulino and her wife are together in a hospital, and she tells her husband that she has seen again on stores the Biblia Vaquera Boots.

The Northern Condition is depicted in this story in the arrangement made by Paulino and the devil. When the devil finds out that he will not get the “transaction” in the terms he has thought, he starts an argument with Paulino:

-Que no, Paulino. Hasta que no afloje tu vieja no lucirás esta temporada primavera-verano botas de Biblia Vaquera. Tal fue la condición.

-La única condición que yo valido es la del norte. La condición nortea. La de todos los pelaos que cuando se involucran en acuerdos no se fruncen. Pinche diablo, pa eso me gustabas.

-Ah, qué Paulino éste. Se te va la tonada. Dando y dando. Espérate a aquellito y te amanezco las botas. Además te voy a regresar a su mujer girita girita. Contentita. Bien atendida.

-Mira puto. Podrás ser el diablo, pero a mí me la pelas. Sin botas no hay trato. Y como me vuelvas a decir que se me va la tonada te parto tu madre. (85)

¹ Here Biblia Vaquera is a leather

Paulino's identification with the Northern Condition (condición norteña) immediately places the devil in an antagonist perspective. This one is not necessarily a Post-Northern Condition. Furthermore, Paulino's description of the Northern Condition, as the one of "los [...] que cuando se involucran en acuerdos no se fruncen." (those who get involved in arrangements and do not betray them) is accusing the devil of betraying the previously arranged exchange. However, the devil respects the agreement, he is willing to do things as were agreed but the agent of change of the agreement is Paulino's wife. From this perspective, Paulino's wife is the character that is shifting the Northern Condition towards a Post-Northern one, but what is exactly the Northern Condition that Paulino talks about?

Paulino is perhaps the best representative of the Northern Condition. The actions and attributes of this character depict somehow what this condition is. Beyond being an obsessed Norteño with a pair of unobtainable boots, Paulino is stubborn. As he says: "Que me voy a resignar ni qué jijos de la China Hilaria. Yo soy más cabrón que bien parecido y voy a tener mis botas de piel de Biblia Vaquera aunque tenga que venderle mi alma al diablo." (75). There are four attempts of Paulino trying to get his boots -first one when he goes to the local boot shop and asks for them; then when he knows someone who wears a pair of Biblia Vaquera boots and Paulino tries to buy them; third attempt when he tries to reach "El Infierno" the best store of boots and never make it; and fourth when he negotiates with the devil. For every of these attempts there are also continuous plans that Paulino elaborates to achieve his valuable object of desire. Nevertheless, Paulino always fails and for every time he makes up a plan or tries an attempt, his wife and all the characters involved in these failed transactions tell Paulino: "se te va la tonada"². In other words, everytime that Paulino acts according to the Northern Condition, refusing to quit, and accepting his involvement with one plan or transaction until its last consequences, and he fails, he receives from the others the reiterative affirmation that he is out of tune (tonada). Beyond the musical connotations, basically what this affirmation is telling to Paulino is that he is out of place and time, therefore the Northern Condition is too.

Being aligned by the Northern Condition is being out of place and time: it is trying to get what it's impossible to get even by the most extreme procedures: like exchanging sexual intercourse with one's wife in exchange of a pair of Biblia Vaquera boots. At the end of the story

² Strictly 12 times is Paulino told that "se te va la tonada"; the 8 other times he is told the same idea but with different words, for example: se te derrama la tonada, se te descompone la tonada, se le perfidia la tonada, and so on

when Paulino's wife ask him why he hasn't bought yet his boots now that they're being sold again, Paulino says that: "[...] se me fue la tonada, mi alma. Ya sabe que se me va la tonada. Se me va la tonada. [...]" (88). By accepting his "out of place and time" Paulino confronts and performs the Post-Northern Condition which is not necessarily the opposition to the Northern Condition but the realization that this previous condition has already escaped somewhere else, it is out of tune, and at the same time is being performed in a new universe of different tunes and rhythms. That tune that is out of place is the North true core element, at least for Paulino, and by knowing that it is impossible to keep this condition together the Post-Northern Condition is the awareness of the end of all boundaries that could keep together the stubbornness and compromise of the North by trying to achieve specific objectives. That's why Paulino does not buy his pair of boots, because his mediums to get this object did not fulfill his objective, and the new ways to achieve them are essentially different.

I conceive one possible and direct consequence of the Post-Northern Condition depicted in this story. The first one is its close relationship with the Postmodern Condition that Lyotard has described, into which: "[...] the very notion of society, in terms of national identity, is losing credibility in this pluralistic, global marketplace." (218). The reason of this loss is that "meta-narratives" can no longer hold "legitimization". This means that "the meta narratives" are just another discourse around others. Just like Paulino's plans and attempts to get the Biblia Vaquera boots, the Northern Condition is just another one among the plural conditions that live now in Velázquez' Postnorthern Mexico.

The consequence of this fracture between the Northern and the Post-Northern Condition seems somehow paradoxical because the main meta-narrative -the transaction of a pair of Biblia Vaquera boots- more than being defied is reinforced and nourished by different narratives. From this perspective the Post-Northern Condition is a construct that admits any possible narration but at the same time only a privilege one that is hazardous and autoregulated will be maintained: just like an economical flow that is regulated by an "invisible hand" that randomly reintegrates to the market even products that seemed to be sold out. I argue that the Post-Northern Condition is a place where all discourses could find a possible illustration and then we could say that "When all sides recognize themselves in the same product (space), we can be sure that the product (space) in question is ideology at its purest — a kind of empty vessel containing antagonistic elements." (Zizek, lareviewofbooks.org). The work would be then to specify how these ideological

structures are, first depicted in Velazquez' short stories, and then built into and out of textual reality.