

**EXPERIENCE AND OBJECTIVITY  
IN THE WRITINGS OF  
RAFAEL SÁNCHEZ FERLOSIO**

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## INTRODUCTION

Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio's estrangement from what, in 1986, he refers to, in a discriminating fashion,<sup>1</sup> as *la ficción narrativa*—an estrangement which supposedly commenced after the publication in 1956 of his prize-winning novel, *El Jarama*—is as widely attested as it is misconstrued. This rather ascetic image of a writer embarking upon a radically new venture which converged exclusively on the discipline of linguistics is a partial and in many ways inaccurate representation of Sánchez Ferlosio's activities during this period. According to Juan Benet, Sánchez Ferlosio's research was accompanied by a considerable and sustained output of writings, not simply on the subject of linguistics, but covering also "un campo bastante amplio del saber humano".<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Sánchez Ferlosio's governing preoccupations are more appropriately described as relating to theories of knowledge, perception and learning; his interest in linguistics is one element in a much broader field of enquiry. The renunciation of fictional writing, moreover, is not as complete as it might seem. In an interview for *La Estafeta Literaria* in April 1956, Sánchez Ferlosio explained that he had in preparation "[una] novela larga, localizada en Extremadura", stating also that his publishers were about to bring out an

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio, *La homilia del ratón* (Madrid: El País, 1986), 102.

<sup>2</sup> In Frederico [sic] Sánchez Ferlosio, *Industrias y andanzas de Alfanbú*, prologue by Juan Benet (Navarra: Biblioteca Básica Salvat, 1970), 14.

edition of his short stories.<sup>3</sup> Of the three unpublished novels mentioned by Darío Villanueva in his 1973 monograph, two (*Los encinares* and *Escopeta negra*) are subsequent to *El Jarama*; the third, *El fontanero*, was written at some stage between *Industrias y andanzas de Alfanbú* and *El Jarama*.<sup>4</sup> Sánchez Ferlosio's latest novel, *El testimonio de Yarfoz*, published in 1986 and constituting what he calls "la punta del iceberg de una extensísima obra repartida en miles de folios y cuadernos", was in fact written in the years 1970-1971, only a short while, that is, before the appearance in print of his theoretical and speculative works, the *Comentarios* (1973) and *Las semanas del jardín* (1974). These three works appear to have been composed at about the same time. Thus, while a sea-change undoubtedly does take

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<sup>3</sup> Mauro Muriz, "El Jarama: una novela hecha con cálculo infinitesimal", *La Estafeta Literaria*, 41 (1956), 4.

<sup>4</sup> According to information received by Darío Villanueva from Sánchez Ferlosio himself, the short story, *Dientes, pólvora, febrero*, is in fact the opening chapter of the unpublished novel *Los encinares*. Furthermore, if one matches Sánchez Ferlosio's statement in *La Estafeta Literaria* against the small number of short stories actually in print at the time of this remark (four prior to *El Jarama*, the longest of which is roughly nine pages long, and two after (excluding *Dientes, pólvora, febrero*)), it seems likely that Sánchez Ferlosio has written other stories which he has chosen to withhold from publication. See Darío Villanueva, "El Jarama" de Sánchez Ferlosio: su estructura y significado (Santiago: Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, 1973), 52. In "Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio, Premio Nadal 1955, interpretado por su padre, Rafael Sánchez Mazas", *ABC*, 8 January 1956, we are informed that "[Sánchez Ferlosio] prepara una novela que titulará, probablemente, *Los encinares*, cuya acción se desarrolla en una comarca extremeña. Tiene, además, otros cuatro originales, dos que no se publicarán nunca, porque no le gustan, y los otros dos sin concluir" (52). In his *Coto vedado* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1986), Juan Goytisolo writes: "Ferlosio me confió el manuscrito de una obra suya, de concepción un tanto kafkiano, que quería someter asimismo a la consideración de Planeta. *El fontanero*—así se titulaba la novela—era probablemente un simple hito en el camino que debía conducir de *Alfanbú* a la aventura portentosa de *El Jarama*; pero, aun

place after *El Jarama*, it is one of slow transition; of evolving emphasis rather than of radical departure. As Sánchez Ferlosio himself commented in *El País* in 1986: "No se trata de mucho tiempo sin haberme dedicado a escribir literatura."<sup>5</sup> If one is to believe Sánchez Ferlosio's own account, his abandonment of literature came about only after the completion of the *Historias barcealeas* (which include *El testimonio de Yarfoz*), as well as the publication of the *Semanas*: "no llevo treinta años sin escribir literatura", he declared, "sino la mitad."<sup>6</sup>

The present study has a double purpose: to bring to light Sánchez Ferlosio's neglected theoretical writings; and to relate them to his published fiction. This will entail a reassessment of the novels. I shall aim to show that what is implicit in Sánchez Ferlosio's narrative works is also discussed by his theory. While any neat equation between the literary and theoretical works is to be avoided, it is possible, nevertheless, to discern in them important parallels and continuities.

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teniendo en cuenta su índole de obra menor, despuntaba por su agudeza, rigor e ironía en el baldío panorama español del momento" (220).

<sup>5</sup> Igor Reyes-Ortiz, "La creatividad de la ira: cuatro nuevos libros de Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio", *El País*, 4 December 1986, 3-4 (3).

<sup>6</sup> In Miguel Ángel Trenas, "Sánchez Ferlosio: treinta años después de *El Jarama*", *La Vanguardia*, 7 December 1986, 11.