

The Reconstruction of Identity in V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* and in Caryl Phillips' *In the Falling Snow*: Life and narration.

La reconstrucción de la identidad en *The Mimic Men* de V.S. Naipaul y *In the Falling Snow* de Caryl Phillips in Naipaul and Phillips: Vida y narración

Miren Karmele Díaz de Olarte Cabada
IES Martín de Bertendona
kdiazdeolarte@yahoo.es

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Resumen. Este artículo toma como punto de partida el concepto de identidad narrativa según el cual cualquier reconstrucción coherente de la identidad requiere una aproximación narrativa al yo, dicho de otra manera, una historia de vida creada sobre la base de una reflexión sentida sobre los recuerdos personales. El concepto de identidad narrativa, aunque procedente de las ciencias sociales, tiene su correspondencia literaria en las narrativas en primera persona. Tanto Ralph Singh en *The Mimic Men* de Naipaul como Earl Gordon en *In the Falling Snow* de Phillips reviven sus historias de vida mediante la autobiografía y la confesión respectivamente, lo que nos invita a leer ambas modalidades de narrativas del yo como ejemplos fictivos de identidad narrativa.

Palabras clave. Identidad narrativa, narrativas del yo, historia de vida, autobiografía, confesión.

Abstract. This article draws inspiration from the concept of narrative identity which states that any coherent reconstruction of identity requires a narration of the self, that is, a life story created out of a meaningful reflexion on personal memoirs. The concept of narrative identity, albeit coming from the social sciences, has its literary counterpart in first-person narratives. Since Ralph Singh, in Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* and Earl Gordon, in Caryl Phillip's *In the Falling Snow* revisit their life-stories through autobiography and

confession respectively, it seems feasible to consider these two first-person narrative modalities as fictional examples of narrative identity.

Key words. Narrative identity, first-person narrative, life-story, autobiography, confession.

1. INTRODUCTION

The hybrid nature of Caribbean society, a melting pot of races and cultures, is the consequence of a past of slavery, indentured labour and deportation during the colonial period. A history of emigration necessarily linked to a process of bringing together different cultural realities that create inner tensions between the self and the environment. An identity conflict so deeply rooted in Caribbean idiosyncrasy that has become a major topic in Caribbean literature.

Naipaul, Trinidadian of Hindu origin, and Phillips, Afrocaribbean from St Kitts, are no exception to this trend. Both have exhaustively explored in their literature the impact of this double cultural adscription on the identity formation of colonial people. Their characters are mostly immigrants like themselves in a permanent struggle to make sense of their lives, to explain and understand themselves in order to find a coherence in the chaos of their selves. A chaos that can only be cleared by ordering the multiplicity of references that make a mess of one's life and that can only be organized through a narrative. This idea of life as a narrative has been thoroughly studied by philosophy and sociology; therefore, these two disciplines will constitute the theoretical background of our approach to the reconstruction of identity in Naipaul and Phillips. Both authors have had, somehow, the intuition that the making up of their characters' identity requires a narrative of the self that is carried out in their novels through different first person narratives.

The purpose of this paper is to ponder on the use of first person narratives in Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* and Phillips' *In the Falling Snow* as a transposition of the concept of narrative identity to fiction vis-à-vis the making of characters' identity.

2. A NARRATIVE APPROACH TO IDENTITY

La vida no es lo que uno vivió

*sino lo que uno recuerda y
cómo lo recuerda para contarla.* (García Márquez, 2003:1)¹⁷

The construction of a unified subjectivity involves the creation of an *ex post facto* narrative that allows the reorganization of someone's personal history in order to find some sense out of an apparently chaotic experience. The purpose of this inner exploration is to discover in that process an identity that is never finished, but building itself through the stories that we tell others and ourselves. It is a kind of hermeneutics of the self. This reconstruction of one's life is the result of a selection of forgotten, recovered, or ignored memories in an attempt to explain the present and outline future desires in the light of the past. This process crystalizes in a narrative that puts together the person itself and the cultural universe he lives in (McAdams, 2011: 112). In Stuart Hall's words: "Identity is the narrative of the self: it is the story we tell about the self in order to know who we are. We impose a structure on it" (1989: 16). He will go even further recognizing in that narrative a fictional nature that does not undermine "its discursive, material or political effectivity even if the belonginess, 'the suturing of the story' through which identity arises is partly, in the imaginary (as well as the 'symbolic'))" (1996: 4). For Weedon, fiction and narrative have a leading role in understanding the others' emotions:

Narrative -the telling of stories- is central to everyday communication between individuals. In narrating our experiences, we attribute meanings to them and in the process assume the position of knowing, sovereign subject. ... To narrate is to assume the position of a speaking subject. It involves the exclusion or marginalization of other possible subject positions and other meanings. (2004: 61)

In Woodward's opinion, narration is a dynamic process whose importance does not lie on the truth of story itself, but on its capacity to link the personal and social dimensions of identity in a given space-time framework (2002: 28). She quotes Hall to illustrate the power of narrative for the reorganization of the self: "In telling of stories about ourselves we are endeavouring to make sense of experience by putting together the often disjointed and fragmented pieces of everyday life including the crises and traumas as well as the

¹⁷Life is not what one lived, but what one remembers and how one remembers it in order to recount it. (My translation).

vanal aspects of routine into some kind of structure" (Woodward, 2002: 28-29). Arfuch, like Bakhtin, thinks that every life story shapes and orders not only the narrators's life but also the readers' and even life itself (2005:253). Thus, only through narration can a person bare his soul bringing to the fore private aspects of his personality that become public only through the narration of the self since:

No hay otro modo de dar cuenta, poner en forma- y, por ende en sentido- la propia experiencia que no sea a través del relato, oral, escrito, visual, audiovisual . . . Dicho de otro modo, la "vida", lo que cada uno atesora como la más prístina intimidad—aun cuando su entera trama no sea compartida con otros—no existe más que como un cúmulo de sensaciones, percepciones, vivencias, recuerdos, pulsiones, rasgos heteróclitos, cuya lógica, cuya temporalidad, solo aparecen en la narración. Por eso, en la escritura autobiográfica de lo que se trata siempre. . . es de encontrar justamente un sentido, el famoso "sentido de la vida", aun cuando se llegue, como en muchos casos, a la comprobación, desesperanzada, de su "sinsentido". (Arfuch, 2002: 243)¹⁸

The story of one's life, the autobiographic reflection, is, from this point of view, a tool to bring together the different aspects of the psychological dimension of the self in a coherent whole. A poliphony¹⁹of voices in a dialogic relation; different narratives, partial, biased, sometimes tangential to the project itself that can make room to the manifold aspects of the self. These narratives become a vehicle to transcend personal identity setting it in a social context that allows the construction of collective identities (Arfuch, 2005: 251).

Sarup contends that identity is "a mediating concept between the external and the internal, the individual and society, theory and practice. He sees in identity a convenient "tool" through which to try and understand many aspects—personal, philosophical, political—of our lives" (28). In Sarup's view, identity and narrative go hand in hand because

¹⁸ There is no other way to to give an account- to shape, and hence make sense- of one's own experience except through a tale whether oral, written, visual or autobiographical. ... In other words *life*, what one keeps as his most pristine privacy- even when its whole plot is not shared with others—does not exist except as a collection of sensations, perceptions, experiences, memoirs, drives, weird features, whose rationale, time-span, only occur in narration. Therefore, the goal of autobiographical writing is to make sense of the typical *sense of life* even when the outcome is, quite often, the hopeless evidence of its *senselessness*. (My translation).

¹⁹ Here McAdams opposes Hermans in that the latter thinks that the narration of identity is something finished and univocal. On the other hand, he agrees with Haggard who considers narrative identity as a clash of different aspects of the individual (2011: 102).

"we construct our identity at the same time as we tell our story" (15). Therefore, any reconstruction of a life-story is the result of a careful selection of events because "just as an author can arrange incidents in a story in a great many ways (numerous plots can be made from one story), a person can, to some extent, arrange the elements, the dynamics of his or her identity in many different ways" (18).

Robert Dunn, without an overt mention to narrative, also considers that self-reflection is the key to the construction of one's identity: "What makes the self a self is the individual's ability to make an object of the self, that is, the reflexive capacity of self-consciousness. The self thus functions as both subject and object" (1998: 32). Taylor holds the same opinion, for him the only way to know who we are is going back in time to understand what has taken us there: "To the extent that we move back, we determine what we are by what we have become, by the story of how we got there" (1998: 48). Therefore, our future identity is founded upon a narrative which is the seed of our forthcoming life, a new narrative itself. Arfuch states it clearly when she writes, "Contar la historia de una vida es dar vida a esa historia" (Arfuch, 2002: 38).²⁰ Arendt goes even further when she states that narrative takes man beyond his biological dimension, "Narrative is the individual dimension in which a man lives, the dimension of a bios- and not of a zoe - a political life and/or action recounted to others" (Kristeva, 2001: 27). Arfuch follows this same line of thought when she considers that "La identidad personal tiene una dimensión personal y colectiva que se despliega así a la manera de un relato ininterrumpido, de una tensión marcada más por un 'llegar a ser' que por el 'ser'" (2005: 282).

For Arendt the importance of narration does not lie on the narration itself but in the way it constructs the individual. One immortalizes his self becoming an agent in the political stage through a narrative that "conditions the duration and immortality of the work of art; but it also accompanies, as historical narrative the life of the polis, making it a political life, in the best sense of the world" (Kristeva, 2001: 27). Thus, the link between the social and the individual realm creates a space where the individual recognizes himself and is recognized as a social being. From this point of view, a narrative approach to life gets a symbolic dimension that can be grasped through the cronotope of the road that had already been developed by Bakhtin (Arfuch, 2002: 57).

²⁰ Telling a life story is to give life to that story. (My translation).

A narrative construction of identity entails a complex web of relations between the private and the public realm that recalls the Unamunian concept of *intrahistoria*;²¹ a reconstruction of life stories through the voices of subalterns, traditionally dumb, whose experiences constitute the background on which history is written:

Los periódicos nada dicen de la vida silenciosa de los millones de hombres sin historia que a todas las horas del día y en todos los países del globo se levantan a una orden del sol y van por los campos a proseguir la oscura y silenciosa labor cotidiana y eterna, una labor que como la de las madréporas suboceánicas echa las bases sobre las que se alzan los islotes de la historia. (1972: 27-28)²²

Phillips himself vindicates common and local concerns as the territory of narrative identity: "The historian is a storyteller. History is a story anyway so... I never saw them as... separate. When somebody starts to recount history... they are telling a story" (Pulitano, 2003: 275). This is an intuition already developed by Ginzburg²³ in the field of history and developed by Sharpe in his well-known article "history from below"; an approach to history as "an exploration of the historical experiences of those men and women whose existence is often ignored, taken for granted or mentioned in passing the mainstream history" (2001: 25). Charles Wright Mills takes this same idea to the field of

²¹ Unamuno develops his concept of *intrahistoria* in his essay *En torno al Casticismo* where he gets rid of the idea of history based on heroes and puts forward a new approach to history from anonymous lives.

²² Newspapers say nothing about the silent lives of men without history that, at all times and everywhere in the world, get up when the sun rises and go to the fields to continue their daily and never-ending dark and silent labour similar to that of underwater white corals that set the basements of the islets of history. (My translation).

²³ In *El queso y los gusanos*, Ginzburg develops his concept of history from the subaltern. Known as *microhistory*, it tells the life of a miller called Menocchio sent to the stake by the Inquisition. Through the life of this anonymous character, the author discovers different aspects of the economy of the time, of his sons' life, his beliefs and aspirations. Menocchio stands as a metaphor of what has been called the culture of the subaltern classes." (1997: 3).

Sharpe holds a similar point of view to that of Ginzburg. He uses the life of a soldier in the battle of Waterloo to show the abyss between the experience of that soldier and that of Wellington, architect of the victory according to British history. Sharpe, gets rid of Unamuno or Ginzburg, in that he sees in the systemic vindication of the subaltern, a latent danger that might turn the subaltern into hero, thus giving history a paternalistic tone he does not like. (2003: 38-59).

sociology in his book *Sociological Imagination* where he develops the idea of life stories as a tool to understand social history. According to him, the individual is not aware of the role of institutional contradictions and historical changes in his life (1959: 3-4). He defines sociological imagination as the capacity to untie the knots that link them. For him, sociological imagination "enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society" (6). In Mill's opinion it is high time for sociology to follow this relationship so much rooted in literature: "In the absence of an adequate social science, critics, novelists, playwrights and poets have been the major, and often the only formulators of private problems and even of public issues" (17). His innovative approach to sociology suggests an awareness of the links between the private and the public together with the necessity to understand both in order to grasp the meaning of each of them: "Neither the life of the individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both" (5). Life stories, then, no matter how personal or irrelevant, are the result of the intersection between the individual and the social realms.

Woodward, quoting Carolyn Steedman, contends that "The past is re-used through the agency of social information" and she adds:

This 'social information' indicates the wider context in which personal stories are told. As Paul Ricoeur argues these stories enable us to make sense of our lives but they are linked to the wider narrative to the social context (1991). ... Personal stories link us to the broader social framework in which public stories are told. (2002: 29)

According to Arfuch individualism is at the root of the idea of intimacy, that, ironically, becomes an overt expression of the self when "el yo, la primera persona se hace cargo de la enunciación tomándose a sí mismo como testigo" (2005: 240-41).²⁴

In the narrative of Naipaul and Phillips, the search of identity is closely linked to the social dimension as the cause of an identity crisis that sways between past experience and present self-concept. A narrative deeply rooted in a particular time-space framework that constitutes a key element for identity formation as an experience of maturity or loss. A narrative that attempts to recover the space of enunciation of the colonial: "si pierdo mi lugar de enunciación, no puedo hablar. No hablo luego no existo" (Todorov, 1992: 22)²⁵.

²⁴ The self, the first person, takes charge of enunciation taking the role of witness. (My translation).

²⁵ If I lose my place of enunciation I cannot talk. I don't talk therefore, I don't exist. (My translation).

3. LITERARY GENRES AND THE SEARCH OF THE SELF

The conception of identity as a narrative of the self demands some sort discursive genre of autobiographic nature that allows the individual to express his intimate feelings and to revisit his experiences. The biographical space is a plural and hybrid territory where there is room for different approaches to the self such as the autobiography or the confession. Naipaul's and Phillips' narrative, so focused on identity, could not stay in the sidelines of autobiographic genres as an instrument to depict the self of their characters through the revision of their lives. Autodiegetic narrative forms allow the reader to follow the evolution in the characters' identity formation from subjectivity to objectivity, thus alternating the emotional realm with the political, the feeling with the thinking, with a deep reflexion on the self and its circumstances. The outcome is a primally personal narrative grounded on day-to-day life that gathers the Janus-faced dimension of the intimate and the public spheres as a constitutive element of the self: "Asumimos la esfera de la intimidad como la que más íntimamente nos constituye y representa, aunque para reconocerla tengamos que enfrentarnos a su exterioridad, lo que no es ella, su opuesto-o su complementario-, el otro lado del umbral, lo público" (Arfuch, 2002: 239).²⁶

Both Naipaul and Phillips show a great mastery in their use of autobiographical genres as a way to mirror the inherent complexity of modern identity as poliphonic, plural and changing. In their hands, the reconstruction of their characters' life stories becomes a kind of hermeneutics of the self intended to order their inner chaos; a desperate attempt to identify the root of their uneasiness so as to be able to make some sense of their lives. Their use of these fictionalized, self-referential narratives contextualizes the characters' identity crisis in a complex world of crossed individual and social references which, according to Taylor, results in "an acute form of disorientation, which people often express in terms of not knowing who they are, but that which can also be seen as a radical uncertainty of where they stand" (Taylor, 1989: 27). In Miriam Allot's words:

The autobiographical memoir, the epistolary method, the 'dramatical consciousness', the withdrawal of the author from the scene, the stream of

²⁶ We assume the realm of privacy as the one that most closely make us up and represent us even though to recognize it we must face its external, what it is not, its opposite or its complementary-the other side of the threshold, the public space. (My translation).

consciousness; all these methods are designed to heighten the desired effect of authenticity and verosimilitude by locating experience in the individual consciousness and by making that consciousness operate in an individual consciousness and by making that consciousness operate in a particular place at a particular time. (1959: 24)

In *The Mimic Men*, Naipaul chooses autobiography as the narrative tool to give voice to Ralph Singh, author and protagonist of a novel which constitutes a detailed, albeit disordered account of his life from his childhood to the moment of the narration. It is a mature text, written with enough temporal perspective to allow a deep, sincere reflection on his past experiences with the intimate commitment to bring his experiences back to life, reevaluate them in the light of his present uneasiness, and put an end to his inner entropy.

For Phillips, confession is his narrative approach to give visibility to Earl Gordon's, one of the main characters of *In the Falling Snow*, long-lived invisibility. He does so by means of a self-contained long monologue, a kind of novel within a novel that serves a double function. First, because it is key to understand the dysfunctional relationship between Earl Gordon and his son Keith. Second, because it constitutes a fictional version of the inner history of the first generation of Caribbean emigrants to Britain, the so-called *Windrush Generation*. From this point of view, Earl Gordon's monologue can be read as a translation of Phillips' commitment to rewrite history through the stories of those who have never been heard. Phillips is explicit on this underlying intention in his narrative when, in an interview with Jenny Sharpe, he declares:

The larger historical question regarding memory has to do with our own collective memory of history as a community, as a society. So my way of subverting received history is to use historical documents, use first-person voices, digest what they're saying, and somehow rework them. (1995: 157)

3.1. Writing life: autobiography in naipaul's *The Mimic Men*

The Mimic Men (1964) is the story of Ralph Singh, born in an Indian family in British colony who, since his teens, has been struggling with a deep feeling of cultural displacement. Every effort to find his place in a society whose cultural references he never recognizes as his own has been doomed to failure, but it has been his disappointment as a politician in his native Isabella what has taken him him to look into the root of his misfit.

It is a fictional autobiography in which his protagonist and narrator goes back in time to his childhood and recalls his life up to the moment he is writing. He overtly declares that his intention is not the writing of a chronological account of a period of his life but a reflection on history from within in which he, somehow, takes the role of a subaltern:

These are not the political memoirs which, at times during my political life, I saw myself composedly writing in the evening of my days. A more than autobiographical work, the exposition of the malaise of our times pointed and illuminated by personal experience and that knowledge of the possible which come only from closeness to power. (6)

Ralph Singh's narration gets longer as he discovers its therapeutic effect on him, "I THOUGHT WHEN I began this book that it would be the labour of three or four weeks . . . After eighteen months of the anesthetizing order of life in this hotel, despair and emptiness had burnt themselves out" Naipaul (2002: 265). He is aware of the moment he decided to write his life and the reasons for it. He feels the need to impose order in his own life in its most politically active moment, a moment of social turmoil and deep inner emptiness. A personal dislocation consequence of his maladjustment to the artificial world created by Europe in the Caribbean, whose cultural diversity makes him feel lost in an ocean of contradictory cultural messages:

It was during this time, as I have said, that I thought of writing. It was my hope to give expression to the restlessness, the deep disorder, which the great explorations, the overthrow in three continents of established social organizations, the unnatural bringing together of peoples who could achieve fulfillment only within the security of their own societies and the landscaped hymned by their ancestors. . . I am too much a victim of that restlessness which was to have been my subject. And it must be confessed that in that dream of writing I was attracted less by the act and the labour than by the the calm and the order which the act would have implied. (32)

Through the act of writing, he becomes aware of the eye-opening power of the writing itself. As narration unfolds, its claryfing role becomes more evident since it allows Ralph Singh to understand relevant past events that he was unable to grasp in real time. In this way narration itself turns into a psychoanalytic process:

And to me it is strange that it is only now, as I write, that I see, like the sympathetic historian of a revolution who detects the seed of disaster in some minor and unregarded action, it is only now I see that all the activity of these years, existing as I have said in my own mind in parenthesis, represented a type of withdrawal, and was part of the injury inflicted on me by the too solid three-dimensional city in which I could never feel myself as anything but spectral, disintegrating, pointless, fluid. (53)

Ralph Singh, conscious of the cathartic role of his narration, changes gradually the focus of his writing. Thus, his initial intention to write about history becomes an insight on his powerlessness to change the course of history. Only by understanding that role might he feel at ease:

My first instinct was towards the writing of history, as I have said. It was an urge that surprised me in the midst of activity, during those moments of stillness and withdrawal which came to me in the days of power, when with compassion for others there also came an awareness of myself not as an individual but as a performer . . . It was the shock of the first historian's vision, a religious moment if you will, humbling, a vision of disorder that was beyond any other man to control yet which, I felt, if I could pin down, might bring me calm. (85)

Ralph Singh's memories are an attempt to integrate in a coherent whole the psychological and social dimensions of his life in order to understand his place in the world. In so doing, his vision of himself changes, and that change occurs as narration unfolds, in the subjective time of writing. Thus, Ralph Singh reconstructs his own subjectivity on the reflection of his own motives, on their rereading and recurrent questioning so that he can become familiar with them and transfer this new gained knowledge of himself to his writing:

As I write, my own view of my actions alters. I have said that my marriage and the political career which succeeded it and seemed to flow from it, all that active part of my life, occurred in a sort of parenthesis. I used to feel aberrations, whimsical, arbitrary acts which in some way got out of control. But now, with a feeling of waste and regret for opportunities missed, I begin to question this. I doubt whether any action, above a certain level, is ever wholly arbitrary or whimsical or dishonest I question now whether the personality is manufactured by the vision of others. The personality hangs together. It is one and indivisible. (199)

Finally, narration has accomplished its role as a tool to order identity since it has allowed Ralph Singh to accept himself, and redirect his life to a space of calm far from his fantasies so much longed for since he started writing his autobiography. Thus, writing has turned into some sort of meditation in that it has freed him from his inner turmoil, the Hindu ideal of detachment:

It does not worry me now, as it worried me when I began this book . . . I no longer yearn for ideal landscapes and no longer wish to know the god of the city. This does not strike me as a loss. I feel, instead, I have lived through the attachment and freed myself from one cycle of events. It gives me joy that in so doing I have also fulfilled the fourfold division of life prescribed by our Aryan ancestors. I have been a student, householder and man of affairs, recluse. (273-274)

It is at that point that Ralph Singh recognizes the power of narration to reconstruct identity, "So writing, for all its initial distortion, clarifies, and even becomes a process of life" (274). A process of clarification that starts by assuming the past dishonesty of his articles about his father in *The Socialist*, the first of many others published long time ago. Texts that he now considers "balanced, fair, with the final truth evaded, until at last this truth was lost" (205); autobiography, then, turns into his own psychoanalytic instrument to come to terms with himself, so that it becomes "more than a release from these articles, it has been an attempt to rediscover that truth" (205).

Ralph Singh's autobiographical writing, developed among reflections on his own narrative process, brings about a disorganized narrative, without a chronological pattern, "By these re-creation the event became historical and manageable; it was given its place; it will no longer disturb me. And this became my aim. . . to impose order on my history, to abolish that disturbance which is what a narrative in sequence might have led me to" (266). He looks back into his past casually, in a narrative that starts the first time he arrived in London as a young man to his final settlement in a second-rate hotel in London in his forties. In the middle of these two moments he tells his childhood and early youth in Isabella, a dark period of his life that witnessed his first assaults of anxiety, genesis of his

internal dislocation; a moment that runs parallel to the self-awareness, the beginning of an identity formation that, according to McAdams²⁷, starts in the teenage years.

Ralph Singh's inner motivations are the leitmotif of an oppressive self-centered narrative in which he appears mostly surrounded by flat characters with the exception of his father, his political mate, Brown, and his wife whose depictions are at the service of a better understanding of him and his tortured self.

The paradox of Ralph Singh's narration is that his inner identity chaos resolves itself through a disordered narrative, metaphor of his own self. Thus, his narration becomes some sort of jigsaw puzzle, apparently disjointed, which is but a projection of Ralph Singh's own inner fragmentation, whose coherence he finally finds in the writing of his own autobiography in the isolation of a small hotel in the outskirts of London: "My life has never been more physically limited than it has been during these last three years. Yet I feel that in this time I have cleared the decks, as it were, and prepared myself for fresh action. It will be the action of a free man" (274).

3.2. Telling life: confession in Phillips' In the Falling Snow

In the Falling Snow (2004) is a novel in which Caryl Phillips develops the identity crisis of his protagonist, Keith Gordon, a middle-aged son of a Caribbean immigrant whose life has been a chaos since he left the island he was born in to find a better life in England. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this study, our interest lies on the life story that his father, Earl Gordon, tells his son just before his death. This narration is a long monologue that takes place in the time of the narrative and that shares with Ralph Singh's autobiography its self-referentiality but, unlike his, it is oral and has that painful pitch, that tone of complaint of someone who seeks to cry out a life of frustration.

Confession as a genre has been deeply studied by María Zambrano who considers it to be living word: "toda confesión es hablada" (every confession is spoken) (1988:18). It appears in moments of personal crisis, of "confusión y dispersión" (confusion and dispersion) (18). For her, it is self-exploration in a moment of despair, it is a complaint:

²⁷ McAdams contends that we start working on our narrative identity in our late teens or early youth, but it is a labour that never finishes because "Stories are never set in stone. Instead, narrative identity continues to present a psychological challenge for much of the rest of the adult life course. People continue to make sense of their own lives, and the lives of others, through narrative" (100).

Precisamente cuando el hombre ha sido demasiado humillado, cuando se ha cerrado en el rencor, cuando solo siente sobre sí 'el peso de la existencia', necesita entonces que su propia vida se revele. Y para lograrlo, ejecuta el doble movimiento propio de la confesión: el de la huida de sí, y el de buscar algo que le sostenga y aclare. (18-19)²⁸

Her approach to confession is shared by Phillips, for whom "the confessional mode seems to me to suggest, first of all, a deep necessity to speak, a deep necessity to communicate, which is born of a hurt, a displacement, a sense of exclusion".²⁹

In *In the Falling Snow*, Phillips inserts in the normal development of the plot a long first person speech by Earl Gordon addressed to his son, Keith, which constitutes a heartfelt revision of his life. Earl Gordon's story, told by an old, ill man, starts unexpectedly when he suggests his son going home: "'Rest? . . . 'This is no time to rest. Me, I want to go home'" (268), but not to his home in England, as his son thinks: "'You don't understand me, Keith'" Phillips (268). This is his introduction to a long, retrospective speech in which he reconstructs a life story that starts with a lament born from a deep necessity to be heard: "'I want to go home Keith. I don't mean some stupid English house. I mean home, home. . . . You understand what I mean? I'm not from here'" (269).

His is a chronicle of a failed rite of passage that has not a linear development. It starts with his arrival to Great Britain from the Caribbean, moves back to his life on the island of his birth and finally focuses on his life in England. His story is riddled with references to the Great Britain found by the emigrants of the *Windrush Generation*. A history of racism, violence and exclusion that makes of Earl the metaphor of a generation of colonials educated on the idea of the grandeur of the mother country.

When he arrives in England he is a gullible, unexperienced, somewhat startled twenty-two year old exposed to a cultural shock. As a consequence, since the very beginning, his speech shows his helplessness vis-à-vis a world of references he does not understand

²⁸It is precisely when man has been to humiliated, when he is enclosed in resentment, when he just feels on his shoulders "the burden of existence" that he needs have his own life revealed. To that end, he carries out the double motion of confession: getting rid of himself and looking for something that supports himself and clears him up. (My translation).

²⁹In an interview to Steven Clingman, Phillips explains that "confessional modes" are deeply personal and a way to give voice to characters that need to be heard. Among them, he mentions: "There's the journal, there are letters, there are logs. So there are different forms, but they all add up to the same thing" (137).

coming from a colony ruled by the white man: "Jesus Christ, I don't know England have such poor white men" (269). This first impression confirms all the opinions, facts, hopes and fears he had heard on the ship during the journey. A turmoil of conversations about Britain and the British that would pop up many years later in an long, hurried monologue in indirect speech with no stops or full stops. Two pages, metaphor of Earl Gordon's emotional strain, that herald the future nervous breakdown that would redraw his life: "Even before I get off the damn boat England punishing my mind and my body and teaching me a hard lesson about what kind of place it is" (269). However, he is fully aware of the reasons of this confusion: "I know then, right at the start, that serious pressure reach my head because my mind don't understand what my eyes looking upon, but I have to keep this worry lock up inside of me so nobody can tell what it is that I feeling"(271) and this is so even though he himself recognizes that he didn't meet real England till he reached London (272). London atmosphere and landscapes, so alien to his tropical sensibility, take him to the Caribbean in a sudden change of the story that now goes back to his life on the island. His narrative, then, loses its overhasty tone to get in tune with Caribbean rhythm and the predictable, ordinary life of the island where, despite his emotional distance with his father, he had a family, friends, a job in the plantation, and everything that provides the individual with a social identity that is lost the moment he arrives in England.

Earl Gordon's narration is sometimes interrupted by third person digressions that focus on his son's worries about him and his own family, thus allowing the reader to know, albeit obliquely, his indifference towards his current life in England. Since his only interest is to revisit his life story, his narration at times stops to make sure that he is being listened to: "'One minute saying something to you, and the next minute you gone' 'You don't want to hear what I have to say?'" (287).

Earl Gordon's confession has a double dimension, on the one hand it constitutes a sort of expiation, a release from the guilt towards his son whom he had not seen until he was six: "'It's not you that I don't want, son. I just don't want this life, because England already hurt me enough as it is. It seem like every time I discover some peace of mind then something else come along to trouble my head'" (317).

On the other hand, it has a personal dimension, in that it is the cronicle of a constant withdrawal. His first renunciation takes place when he gives up his moral commitment

with his mother: "She tell me no matter what anybody say about me being a failure I must never give up my reading" (280). Readings that he lives as escapism from the monotonous, aimless life in the sugar plantation where he works: "Even though I don't have no plans, I still have my dreams, and my dreams all locked up in the law book and the dictionary that I used to carry everywhere" (274).

He also has to withdraw from sharing his life with his best friend, Ralph, his only emotional anchor to the Caribbean in Britain, killed in a racist raid. This was the first of a series of mental crisis that would be a constant in his life: "For a week now I been hearing these blasted people in my head, but nothing they say make any sense and I can't seem to make them stop" (310). As a result, he would also give up any possibility to create a family (315). Finally, he gives up his own dignity when he is despised by the British because of his skin colour: "I already know the truth is that they just can't tolerate being close to a coloured but they will take us as a last resort if no Englishman will work for such low wages" (295)

His speech follows his emotional state; inner pressure demands a hurried speech with no space for dialogue and no full stops, as if his urge for expression prevented from interruptions. A monologue in Caribbean English without auxiliaries or with the present tense to refer to past events that stands as the only remainder of his former identity.

Earl Gordon's confession finishes as it started, with the author deep into homesick, in his memories of a, maybe idealized, but familiar past when he had a place of his own in the world. Through his narration he has soothed his initial desperate cry of despondency transforming it in nostalgia as well as turning his guilt into tenderness:

A part of me want to turn back the clock and find myself in the Harbour Front bar with Ralph, and I want somebody to give me back my law book and my dictionary, and I want back my mother and my father and Desmond and Leona. Your face is so peaceful and I looking down on you, Keith, and I want to tell you about tall, crazy Ralph who you never going to meet, and how the two of us sit together drinking beers and listening to the wind passing through the palm trees and the two of us thinking in England. The idea of England is fine. I can deal with the idea. You undestand me, son? I can deal with the idea. (318-319)

His life story is a good example of Mill's theory on the influence of the social on the individual, for Earl Gordon does not forget any of the details that made of Britain in the

fifties a hell for black people: the fear of miscegenation, "nigger runs" by Teddy Boys, accommodation problems or pubs restricted to white people. At the same time, his monologue paints a portrait of a post-war Britain blind to its own multicultural nature where the mute, downtrodden first generation of Caribbean immigrants were cast out from official history. Hence, Earl Gordon's narrative is history made story, a kind of *intrahistoria* of Caribbean blacks in post-war Britain as well as a tool to reconstruct their social identity and to vindicate their contribution in the making of contemporary Britain.

4. CONCLUSION

Narrative identity, although stemming from the field of social sciences, has a long tradition in literature through the use of autobiographical genres. Ralph Singh's autobiography in *The Mimic Men* and Earl Gordon's confession in *In the Falling Snow* are two examples of the transposition of the concept of narrative identity to the creation of fictional characters from the inside. Ralph Singh's quest for identity is represented by an abstruse, disordered account of his life whereas Earl Gordon's story, more plain and straightforward, is the cronicle of its loss. Thus, the value of their life stories does not lay on the *what* but on the *how*, that is, what really matters is not the tale itself but the trace it has left in their authors' lives. From this point of view, narrative itself becomes another feature in the depiction of characters and it is that symbiosis between form and content that turns narrative identity into a valuable tool for the analysis of literary characters.

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