

Julio Llamazares and the Lyrical Novel:  
Memory and Metaphor in *Las lágrimas de San Lorenzo*  
(2013)

David F. Richter  
Utah State University

Abstract

From his earliest poetic collections, *La lentitud de los bueyes* (1979) and *Memoria de la nieve* (1982), Spanish writer Julio Llamazares's work exhibits a profound interest in time, memory, and natural landscapes. In his 2013 novel, *Las lágrimas de San Lorenzo*, Llamazares returns to consider these themes through the narrative genre, albeit infused with a persistent lyrical consciousness. This fragmentary post-modern novel relates a series of entangled memories wherein the meta-fictional protagonist, a self-conscious scholar attempting to write a novel titled *Las lágrimas de San Lorenzo*, recalls the stories of his youth while watching the shooting stars on the night of San Lorenzo with his son. Following a discussion of the primary motivations of Llamazares's earliest poems and novels, this paper examines *Las lágrimas de San Lorenzo's* lyrical imagery and how, through a series of metaphors, metonymies, and symbols related to the stars, the moon, and the landscape, the novel's structure challenges the generic boundaries of poetry and prose.

“[L]a memoria de cada hombre es su mejor invención.”  
—Julio Llamazares (“La memoria” 12)

Introduction

A major figure in Hispanic literature since the 1980s, Spanish writer Julio Llamazares has been referred to by critics as “uno de los creadores más sólidos y consecuentes de la literatura española actual” (Delgado Batista) and “uno de esos autores que están influyendo decisivamente en el desarrollo de la narrativa española después de Franco” (Beisel 193). From his earliest writings, the poetic collections *La lentitud de los bueyes* and *Memoria de la nieve* (published in 1979 and 1982, respectively),<sup>1</sup> Llamazares's work exhibits a profound interest in time, memory, natural landscapes, silence, and loneliness. Sonja Herpoel has suggested that in his poetry, as in his narrative, “sus preocupaciones mayores se destacan así la nostalgia recurrente de un universo incorrupto o el inexorable paso de las horas. [...] Soledad, memoria, silencio, sueño u olvido son las palabras claves alrededor de las cuales se va estructurando el universo particularmente denso del autor” (99, 110).<sup>2</sup> Perhaps more narrative than verse-like in their structure, the poems of those initial publications question the generic boundaries of poetry and prose. This confluence of genres is constant throughout Llamazares's writings, seen not only in his

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<sup>1</sup> In 2009, Llamazares's poetic works were published in a single volume, *Versos y ortigas* (Poesía 1973–2008), which contains the two aforementioned collections in addition to 30 previously unpublished poems spanning the writer's career. All references to Llamazares's poetry in this essay come from that volume. In-text parenthetical documentation of poetry refers to poetic line numbers.

<sup>2</sup> Silvia Cárcamo and Fiona Schouten also study the importance that memory plays in the writings of Llamazares. In “Del aforismo a la ficción,” Cárcamo addresses the way in which memory mediates autobiography and fiction in the works of Llamazares, and, in “Turning Photographs into a Silent Film,” Schouten examines the relationship between collective and individual memories in Llamazares's book *Escenas de cine mudo*.

involvement with a wide variety of writing formats, but also in the lyrical process and progression that infuse all of his writings.<sup>3</sup> Although he has almost entirely abandoned the poetic genre since those two initial publications, the lyrical impetus lingers throughout his writings. This melding of literary genres in Llamazares's texts confirms the author's assertion when asked in a 1999 interview why he stopped writing poetry: "Pero yo creo que sigo haciendo poesía en todo lo que escribo, porque mi visión de la realidad es poética" (Delgado Batista). This is certainly true concerning his narrative work published since the 1980s, and several scholars have noted this intersection of narration and lyric in his writings.<sup>4</sup>

In one of his most recent works, the 2013 novel *Las lágrimas de San Lorenzo*, Llamazares returns to consider the themes of memory and the passage of time through the narrative genre, albeit infused with a persistent lyrical consciousness. This fragmentary post-modern meta-narrative relates a series of entangled memories wherein the protagonist (a literature professor struggling to write a novel titled *Las lágrimas de San Lorenzo*) recalls the stories of his youth, adolescence, early adulthood, and adult life while watching the shooting stars on the night of San Lorenzo with his son, Pedro, in the countryside of Ibiza. Following the first chapter, titled "Una...", each of the 31 short subsequent chapters uses the same title, "Otra...", thus evoking the imagery of a series of shooting stars, each one a metaphorical tear, a memory, a smell, a love affair, a wave of the sea, a falling leaf, a snowflake, a wish, a dream, a face, a voice, a life now gone. Llamazares's prose is permeated with the lyrical mobilizations of these metaphors, connected with a variety of additional metonymies (such as those related to the moon and the nighttime), symbols (such as the smells of the landscape), and allusions that connect present and past, self and other. The result is a text that challenges the boundaries of genre, demonstrating the blurriness of the line that separates poetry and prose, lyric and novel. Following a discussion of the primary motivations of his earliest poems and previous novels, this essay examines the lyrical underpinnings of *Las lágrimas de San Lorenzo*, with the intention to study how the novel addresses issues of genre boundaries and how its hybrid structure points to thematic concerns such as contemplation, slowness, and the act of interpretation itself.

## Poetry and Slowness

Born in 1955 in the region of León in a small village that has since disappeared, Llamazares began his professional life studying and practicing law for a short time. Since the publication of his poems in the late 70s and early 80s, he has dedicated himself entirely to writing. *La lentitud de los bueyes* and *Memoria de la nieve* offer long, drawn out poetic lines, some of them containing more than 50 words per line. Simply numbered 1 through 20 and 1 through 30, respectively, the long lines of the untitled poems of these two collections are dense with imagery, subtle in their suggestions, and impressionistic in tone. In many respects, much of what will be discussed regarding *Las lágrimas de San Lorenzo* emanates in tone and topic from Llamazares's earliest lyrical works. Poem 1, for example, from *La lentitud de los bueyes*, demonstrates Llamazares's interest in contemplative slowness:

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3 In addition to the two poetic collections mentioned, Llamazares is the author of seven novels, three collections of short stories, six books of travel writings, many essays and journalistic publications, and four screenplays, and he is the winner of a dozen literature and journalism awards.

4 For more regarding the confluence of genres in Llamazares's works, the interested reader could refer to Dorothée te Riele (206–11), José Antonio Llera (534, 538), Inge Beisel (199, 206), Ángel Basanta (n. pag.), and Silvia Cárcamo (n. pag.).

# HISPANIC STUDIES

*r e v i e w*

Nuestra quietud es dulce y azul y torturada en esta hora.

Todo es tan lento como el pasar de un buey sobre la nieve. Todo tan blando como las bayas rojas del acebo.

Nuestro abandono es grande como la existencia, profundo como el sabor de las frutas machacadas. Nuestro abandono no termina con el cansancio.

No es un error la lentitud, ni habitan nuestra alma las oquedades del conocimiento.

En algún zarzal lejano anida un pájaro de aceite que nace con el día. Siento su sed granate algunas veces. Su abandono es tan dulce como el nuestro.

Su lentitud no está desposeída de costumbre. (1-6)<sup>5</sup>

From the opening line, we read of a calm stillness, which is discussed in later lines as slowness, resignation, or depth. The polysyndeton of the first line, with the repetition of “y azul y torturada,” adds pause to the line as it draws it out further. The similes related to slowness and softness, like the ox walking on the snow, or the berries on the holly bush, create images of repose and contemplation. The result of an existence based in stillness is not tiredness, but rather, contemplation and knowledge. Indeed, we might say that slowness is the requisite condition for productivity, and this is manifest in the penultimate line that metaphorically connects the activity of the nest-building bird to the sweetness of the self and other who seek slowness in their own withdrawn condition.

Themes of a natural slowness are further elaborated in *Memoria de la nieve* and linked to the passage of time and the recesses of memory. In poem 10 from that collection, the lyrical “I” suggests that the silence and the snowfall provide solace from the pain of loss. The final three lines read:

Pero ahora ya la nieve sustenta mi memoria. Y el silencio se espesa tras los bosques doloridos y profundos del invierno.

Por eso puedo navegar sin velas. Por eso puedo remar sin remos.

Por eso puedo despedirme de mi amor sin llorar. (4-6)

The same snow appears in this poem, and Llamazares intimates that the cold winter landscape preserves the painful memories of the past frozen in time. But this understanding also provides strength, such that the lyrical “I” can paradoxically navigate without sails, row without oars, and say goodbye to a lover without weeping.

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5 Nearly all of Llamazares’s poems contain long lines such as these, which are separated each one from the other as if an individual stanza. This is one of many ways in which Llamazares’s works challenge traditional notions of genre. I discuss this in more depth in the coming pages in relation to the idea of the prose poem (and lyrical novel).

This contemplation of the passage of time and the fleeting nature of togetherness is further elaborated in poem 30 from *Memoria de la nieve*, where the poetic subject questions:

¿Qué espero aún de la espiral del tiempo, de esos cuernos epílogos que  
suenan en los bosques?

¿Quién atardece junto a mi corazón helado?

Por el paisaje gris de mi memoria, cruzan arrieros sin retorno, pastores y  
alfareros olvidados, bardos ahogados en el miedo lacustre de sus propias  
leyendas.

Solo estoy, en esta noche última, coronado de cierzo y flores muertas.

Solo estoy, en esta noche última, como un toro de nieve que brama a las  
estrellas. (1-5)

The meditative slowness of *La lentitud de los bueyes* is translated into landscapes of memory, melancholy, and coldness in *Memoria de la nieve*. With metaphors based in the gray landscapes of the mind and the memories of past individuals—such as the lonely field workers, forgotten laborers, and poets drowning in their own stories—the poetic “I” here is resigned to the darkness of his own loneliness amid cold winds and dead flowers. This is emphasized through anaphora in the final two lines, “solo estoy,” and represented through simile by a lone bull in the field that bellows at the nighttime stars. In these poems, Llamazares discusses the passage of time and the persistence of memory, the contemplation that leads to the production of new knowledge. These considerations are linked to the harsh realities of wintertime cold and loneliness, thus evoking the bleak aspects inherent to the human condition.

Although these poems might not be categorized as prose poems per se, their lengthy lines certainly resist what we might call traditional poetic versification and meter, and in many ways could conform to what critics have referred to as the prose poem. Throughout its existence since romanticism and French symbolism to a resurgence in the 60s and 70s in the US, some have linked the prose poem to other sub-genres, or have called it by other names, including “still-lives” or “cubist vignettes” (Delville 1) for Gertrude Stein; lyrical “dream epiphanies” for James Joyce (Delville 7, 14); “polyphonic prose” for Amy Lowell (Delville 6-7); “rhythmic prose” for Paul Fort (Delville 6-7); “short shorts” for Margaret Atwood; short “fables,” “one paragraph stor[ies],” “sudden fictions,” “micro-fictions,” or “modern parables” according to prose poem writer Russell Edson; “short austere surrealist vignettes” for writer Charles Simic (Delville 17, 170); “thing poems” or “deep image[s]” for poet Robert Bly (Delville 1, 16, 17); or simply “paragraphs” or “narratives of consciousness” (Delville 7, 15, 92-93, 244) according to critic Michel Delville, whose book *The American Prose Poem: Poetic Form and the Boundaries of Genre* constitutes a foundational study of the genre. In any case, the form and content of the prose poems suggests a “controversially hybrid and (aesthetically and even politically) revolutionary genre” (Caws 977) based on what Delville calls “arbitrariness,” “instability,” “subversive potential,” and “self-proclaimed hybridity” (ix). *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetic Terms* refers further to pictorial imagery, emotion, metaphor, brevity, intertextuality,

a political orientation, nostalgia, and startling juxtapositions as defining characteristics of the prose poem (Caws 977–78).

Readers encounter many of these hallmarks of the prose poem in Llamazares's poems and novels, such as the poetic imagery, symbols, metaphors, other figures of speech, and the appeal to a lyrical progression and sensibility. Further, his poems seem to embody the ideas of the paragraph, the still life, the vignette, or the "thingliness" of the prose poems previously alluded to. As each line in Llamazares is offered as an individual stanza, separated each one from the other, the lines resist traditional organization. Each line is its own self-contained statement, idea, or assertion. As some of the lines are more akin to paragraphs than poetic lines, Llamazares's poems move beyond what scholars might even call free verse. In this sense, the lines appear to be closer to narrated paragraphs than poetic lines. This confluence of narration and lyrical process dovetails with the thematic concerns of slowness, stillness, and meditation embodied by the poems. As Delville suggests regarding the "prose poem's discursive and formal hybridity," it shows "a clear indication of poetry's capacity to challenge the power of genre as a gesture of authority and to transgress accepted rules and boundaries for the purpose of forcing us to contemplate those rules and boundaries" (x). Delville later writes that "the prose poem has often been used as a means of questioning and redefining the methods, aims, and ideological significance habitually attributed to both poetry and prose" (17).<sup>6</sup> In Llamazares's poetic work, the long lines, the generic hybridity, and the density of the imagery require deliberation and contemplation on the part of the reader.

## Narrative and Memory

Julio Llamazares, however, is best known for his narrative works rather than his poetry. The topics previously dealt with in his poems are treated with additional focus in the novels that followed Llamazares's poetic collections, and in line with his poetic vision of reality, his novels continue to be inspired by a distinctly lyrical consciousness. The author hints at this interdependence of genres when he states that "pocas veces he sentido la necesidad de contar en verso un sentimiento o una emoción, seguramente porque lo hago continuamente también en prosa. No en vano, cuando hacía poesía, me decían que era un poeta narrativo y, cuando comencé a publicar novelas, me dijeron que hacía novelas poéticas" (*Versos* 10). Similar thematic concerns also permeate both lyric and narrative writings for Llamazares. According to Inge Beisel, "la poesía de Llamazares abre el marco temático general, que a su vez está concretizado en algunos aspectos de sus novelas" (195). In novels and travel writings such as *Luna de lobos* from 1985, *La lluvia amarilla* from 1988, *El río del olvido* from 1990, and *Escenas de cine mudo* from 1994, Llamazares focuses in different ways on memory, on remembering the past in both individual and collective contexts and in both rural and urban environments, in addition to continuing his persistent usage of rich poetic language. Each one, in its own right, presents the reader with a lyrical treatise on remembering, history, and hybrid genres.

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<sup>6</sup> In her book *A Tradition of Subversion*, Margueritte S. Murphy further develops the linkage between hybrid literary genres and politics. There she writes that "the prose poem remained marginal, experimental, a minor genre for most major poets and critics" and that prose poems present "subversions of social order and hierarchy through subversions of genre" (2, 4).

*Luna de lobos*, for example, tells the story of four republican fugitives caught on the wrong side of the battlefield during the Spanish Civil War, and the ensuing horror of the Franco dictatorship. The soldiers are passively acted upon by nature and by exterior political forces and are subject to repression, isolation, and dehumanization. For Inge Beisel, *Luna de lobos* “[está] lleno de procedimientos poéticos, [y] resulta especialmente llamativa la riqueza de metáforas y comparaciones” (199). Llamazares re-orientes the writing of official history to focus on the memories and gaze of the marginalized, and his usage of lyrical language creates a wide variety of metaphorical associations related to identity, solidarity, courage, fear, and death, the most predominant being the comparison between the *lobos* and the dehumanized characters.

In *La lluvia amarilla*, Llamazares writes about the disappearance of the northern Spanish town of Ainielle and some have considered this work (and others of Llamazares’s) an example of the regional novel. Following what Llamazares has said about the moniker of the regional novel, however, Dorothée de Riele asserts that Llamazares’s usage of lyrical language in his novels suggests that the landscapes treated are not literal, but metaphorical and symbolic spaces of survival, fear, madness, decay, and death, thus pointing to their universality, rather than regionalism (207, 209, 211). The book follows the memories and confessions of Andrés de Casa Sosas, the last inhabitant of Ainielle, an abandoned village in the Aragon Pyrenees. Here, history and fiction meld as the appearance of distinct elements provoke a series of memories of the village. In line with the thinking on memory of French thinker Henri Bergson (or poetically in “Negra sombra” by Rosalía de Castro or the many impressionist memories evident in Antonio Machado’s poems), Llamazares declares in *La lluvia amarilla*, “basta un sonido, un olor, un tacto repentino e inesperado, para que, de repente, el aluvión del tiempo caiga sin compasión sobre nosotros y la memoria se ilumine con el brillo y la rabia de un relámpago” (30).

*El río del olvido* also treats the lyrically-infused landscapes of metaphorical regionalisms, memories more collective in nature that capture the cultural, social, and political forces of the past. The author’s memories of the Curueño River offer a glimpse into how local regions provide the backdrop for histories both intimate and universal. In the opening pages of that book, Llamazares writes: “Memoria de un paisaje que un buen día volví a ver con la sospecha de haber regresado a un río y a un mundo desconocidos y memoria de un camino que recorrí con la convicción cada vez más asentada de que los caminos más desconocidos son los que más cerca tenemos del corazón” (14). And in *Escenas de cine mudo*, a novel published by Llamazares in 1994, the writer states, “mientras la fotografía exista, ellos seguirán viviendo. Porque las fotografías son como estrellas: siguen brillando durante años aunque haga siglos que ya se han muerto” (206). In this novel, memory serves as the basis for metaphorical associations related to the past. Here, as we will see more centrally in *Las lágrimas de San Lorenzo*, the stars are compared to fleeting moments from the past, memories that appear only to disappear, and the fate of death that awaits once the final sparks of life pass by.

The usage of lyrical imagery and devices throughout his works, both poetic and narrative, communicates intimacy and experience, and encourages contemplation and imagination. Inge Beisel has suggested that Llamazares’s narrative structures and poetic writing style heighten the awareness and imagination of the reader:

Las comparaciones extraordinarias “desautomatizan” el proceso de lectura quizás demasiado rápido y obligan al lector a visualizar interna y plásticamente lo leído. Por consiguiente se intensifica justamente la

imaginación del lector. [...] Se introducen campos de metáforas y de comparaciones que fomentan sistemáticamente en la imaginación del lector la correspondencia entre lo exterior y lo interior. Así el frío exterior corresponde al aislamiento interior y a la amargura. (203, 200)

This poetics of slowness, in the case of Llamazares's narrative texts, corresponds with what scholars since the 1960s, such as Ralph Freedman, have called the "lyrical novel." Freedman describes these types of narrative works as "graphic pictures" that "intensif[y] images" (5), novels that are "lyrical in imagery and language," that engage a "lyrical process" of "a controlled pattern of figures," and that are comprised of "a network of images" (15–16). He also characterizes lyrical novels as "[p]rose allegories, poetic idylls and picaresques, the use of fairy tale, dream, distortion and fantasy, of mental association and dithyrambs in prose—all these have subverted the novel since its beginnings, supplanting narrative with lyrical objectivity" (16–17). The inclination toward slowness through lyricism in Llamazares's works not only addresses a desire to provoke contemplation, but also seeks to highlight the processes of creative writing itself. For Silvia Cárcamo, who assesses the confluence of genres in Llamazares's writings,

[e]se ritmo lento de la prosa y su lirismo coinciden con la manera en que el autor concibe la escritura de las novelas. Al igual que muchos autores, Llamazares ha usado metáforas para describir su propio oficio: el escritor es un herrero, un artesano, un escultor y su trabajo se compara al lento y persistente trabajo de la piedra sobre el agua. Esas imágenes presuponen siempre otra lógica temporal ajena completamente a la lógica de la sociedad industrial y del consumo.

In the narrative works of Llamazares, the reader is continuously confronted with lyrical flashbacks and memories of the past that attempt to contemplate the passage of time, remember voices lost, and recuperate the fleeting realities of existence.

### *Las lágrimas de San Lorenzo* and Metaphor

The 2013 novel, *Las lágrimas de San Lorenzo*, relates the memories of an unnamed 52-year-old protagonist who grew up in Bilbao but who as a youth visited his grandparents each summer on the Mediterranean island of Ibiza. During those visits, the narrator, along with his father, grandfather, and many community members would retreat to the countryside during the night of San Lorenzo, August 10, to watch the shooting stars in the nighttime sky. The entirety of the novel, however, only covers about two hours of "real time," in the protagonist's present, as the narrator has taken his 12 year old son, Pedro, to Ibiza to experience the meteor shower for himself. Throughout the text, the events of the night with his son in the countryside in Ibiza evoke a series of memories that transport the reader through decades of the protagonist's life, from his youth in Bilbao, his vacations in Ibiza, and his friendships made there after he moved to the island as a young adult, to his experiences with love in Ibiza, Provence, and Naples. These flashbacks also detail the narrator's early career successes and failures as a Spanish professor in Romania, Sweden, and Portugal, in addition to calling to mind mid-life crises involving fear, unproductivity, and loneliness. The series of memories are recalled throughout

the novel with a disjointed narration as the reader is transported in each ensuing chapter non-chronologically through time and space, all while the protagonist spends an evening in the company of his son, Pedro, in Ibiza.

The readers of *Las lágrimas de San Lorenzo* are confronted with the rich metaphorical and metonymical thrust of the novel as each image evoked through analepsis builds successively on previous memories to create a chain of signs based on the passage of time, the act of remembering, and the experiences of love and loneliness. The central metaphor of the novel, the shooting star, appears alongside several others associated with it, such as the nighttime sky, the moon, and the landscape. Llamazares uses a wide variety of other signifiers in figurative ways that could warrant further attention in a more expanded study, such as the photograph, the falling leaf, the snowflake, the sculpture, the train, the satellite, the earth, topics of fear and freedom, and the book chapter itself. On the literal level, the protagonist and his son Pedro venture out on the evening of San Lorenzo to see the falling stars. This is shown in the titles of the short chapters, with chapter one titled “Una...” and the 31 chapters that follow each titled “Otra...”. The dialogue between father and son also addresses the shooting stars as we read the initial lines of chapters 2, 3, 4, 6, 11, and others, as follows:

- “¡Otra!... ¡Otra, papá!” (19),
- “¡Mírala!... ¿La ves allí?” (27),
- “¡Cuántas hay!” (35),
- “¿Has visto ésa?” (47)
- “¿Ves aquella luz de allí?” (89)

But these shooting stars are quickly mobilized through a layering of metaphorical meanings. The title of the book, *Las lágrimas de San Lorenzo*, serves as a metaphor itself that connects the meteor shower to a history of sadness, melancholy, and death. These tears of San Lorenzo refer to the annual occurrence of the month-long Perseids meteor showers, which in the Catholic tradition coincides with the martyrdom of the Spanish saint, San Lorenzo (Esteve). Each shooting star is a remembrance of the tears that he cried while roasted on a hot gridiron on August 10, 258 AD, according to one legend, and the crackling fire sparkles in the night sky suggestive of the large bonfire that burned the saint, according to another.<sup>7</sup> Also following tradition, those that view the shooting stars will be blessed with one wish granted per blazing meteor (Dore and Landers). The martyrdom and shooting stars have been memorialized in artwork, literature, music, and film from the renaissance to the present day.

Llamazares further elaborates the metaphor of the shooting star to signify the passage of time, the fleeting nature of life and love, and the disillusionment of dreams not fulfilled, all the while maintaining the melancholy associated with the original context of San Lorenzo’s tears. These metaphors are developed over the course of the entire book, initially as the friends of the protagonist (while a young adult) discuss the stars as they enjoy an evening on the beach: “Cada estrella que pasa —dijo Otto— es un verano de nuestra vida. —No —le corrigió Nadia, su novia, sin dejar de mirar el cielo—. Cada estrella es una vida” (57). That the stars are representative of a summertime or an entire life connects the meteors to the temporality of existence. This is emphasized later as the narrator looks at the stars with his son, who states, “¡Qué rápido pasan todas! —exclama con admiración [Pedro]” (73). Throughout the text the narrator reflects on this passage of time by way of the quickly passing stars, and he connects, further,

the way in which, as a child, he believed that those individuals who passed on “se convirtieron en estrellas que brillaban en el cielo” (48), and that when he was younger, “creía que la vida era una estrella que no se apagaba nunca, como ahora debe de pensar Pedro” (25). This is the source of great uneasiness, though, since the stars, like life, and like love, continually appear only to disappear.

Years later, on a train to Romania for a work assignment, the protagonist sees his reflection in the train window. Thinking about the passing landscape and the passing time, he is struck by “la verdad más insoportable: que la vida pasa y se desvanece como una estrella...” (86). Subsequently, when reflecting on Carolina, Nicole, Marie, and Tanja (133), the principle lovers of years past, these individuals reappear “[c]omo estrellas fugaces [que] pasaron por mi existencia y como tales las veo brillar ahora esta noche entre las constelaciones de mi memoria mientras las de verdad se apagan” (136). These individuals pass through the narrator’s life quickly, and now they remain suspended in time and space far removed from the protagonist’s present reality. Llamazares summarizes the harsh realities of time and memory in the final chapters of the novel when he states:

Cambian las lenguas y las ciudades, pasan los años y las personas, pero las lágrimas de San Lorenzo siguen conmigo acompañándome a todas partes, iluminando mis decepciones y mis recuerdos, convirtiendo mis deseos en arena y mi melancolía en nostalgia. Porque las lágrimas de San Lorenzo son una metáfora del tiempo. Son sobre todo la prueba de que la vida es apenas una luz en las tinieblas de un universo infinito, pero a la vez fugaz como los deseos del hombre. (169)

These shooting stars, the tears of San Lorenzo, the fleeting time, and love, and lives that pass one by are surely the lyrical and metaphorical backbone of the book. What is more, Llamazares’s usage of the star metaphor shows that each image builds upon another, continually elaborating and re-formulating the significance and depth of the initial metaphor of the star as a tear or a life. The metaphor of the shooting star, however, is variable and dependent upon experience. For example, for the father it is rooted in its connection with the past, with life, with experience, with loss, and with the passage of time. For his son, Pedro, it is suggestive of the future, of the fulfilment of dreams to come. Along these lines, Ángel Basanta writes that “esta noche de verano ibicenco en la que ambos se acercan y comunican viendo estrellas fugaces, que para el padre, con sus 52 años, simbolizan efímeros momentos del pasado, episodios y personas conocidas y amadas, deseos cumplidos o no, mientras que para su hijo, de 12 años, iluminan el asombro ante su futuro todavía pleno de ilusiones.” This lyrically-infused narrative corroborates what Ralph Freedman discusses in terms of the lyrical process and progression of the lyrical novel: “[A]s a lyrical poem moves from image to image, it also follows its own inimitable progression, acting through variations and expansions of themes, changes in rhythm, and elaborations of images to reach a point of greater intensity at which the poet’s vision is realized. [...] [I]n lyrical novels such a progression exists in conjunction with narrative” (6–7).

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7 The Perseids meteor showers, first observed by Greek and Chinese astronomers millennia ago (Dore and Landers), are visible from July 17 to August 24 as glowing particles originating from the Perseus constellation enter the earth’s atmosphere.

The moon and the nighttime constitute related metaphors that permeate the text. Along with the melancholy brought on by the fugitive nature of time, the narrator of Llamazares's text notes a similarity between himself and the comforting counter-balance offered by the maternal moon: "Sólo la luna sabe con cuánto esfuerzo he caminado hasta este momento, [...] cuánta pasión he puesto en esta novela que es la vida de los hombres, en este caso de la mía. Como la luna he luchado contra todo: la soledad, el paso del tiempo, los desengaños, el desamor..., y como ella, aquí permanezco reemprendiendo cada día el camino de mi vida" (123). Similar to his own loneliness and existence in bleak obscurity, the self-conscious writer recognizes the moon's inability to freeze time and overcome the darkness. The metaphorical nature of the dark night connects further to memory in a way akin to Rosalía de Castro's poem "Negra sombra," where, like "á estrela que brila" or "ò vento que zoa" (7-8), the ever-present shadow of memory will never depart. In Llamazares's novel, the meta-literary narrator reflects on the connection between the nighttime, memory, and oblivion, and suggests that the darkness led him to write his novel:

Pero era la otra noche la que a mí más me pesaba. Era la noche de la memoria, esa que de pronto cae sin que sepamos por qué razón o, conociéndola, como en mi caso en aquellos días [de la separación], cómo liberarnos de ella, la que me esperaba en casa [...] y por eso empecé a escribir aquella novela. [...] *Las lágrimas de San Lorenzo*, la titulé en homenaje a la noche en la que mi padre me llevó cuando era niño a ver la lluvia de estrellas [...] Pero fue en vano. La escritura no me sirvió para iluminar mi vida, ni la oscuridad del mundo, ni la noche eterna que pronosticó Catulo [en su verso "no habrá más que una noche eterna"]. (139-40, 136)

The dark night here evokes both the current existential anguish experienced by the self, as well as the impetus for a resurgence of prior memories that persistently torment the narrator.

### Memory and Metonymy

Each of these metaphors—tears, stars, lives gone, loves lost, dark sky, and moon—metonymically links the present to the past by way of memory. That is to say, each shooting star, while it metaphorically signifies something else through the transference of meaning, also contiguously connects to other moments associated with other stars, other nights, other moons, other landscapes—, other moments from the past through a recourse to memory. The narrator suggests this when he says that "[d]e repente, todo el cielo se había llenado de rostros, [...] se convertían en lluvia, una lluvia de recuerdos" (67). Embedded within the metaphor of the star as a life or a fleeting moment, we see that the stars of the present moments with Pedro evoke the memories associated with the stars of the past. The gaze toward the stars of the sky, each one representative of a lost loved one, now elicits the flood of memories associated with each one—grandparents, aunt Carmen, uncle Pedro lost in war, and the protagonist's brother Ángel, who died in a motorcycle accident in his youth. These metonymical chains are demonstrated further in the reappearance of the moon across the ages. While in Coimbra, the protagonist recognizes: "No en vano la luna ha sido desde hace tiempo prácticamente mi única referencia y mi único asidero a mi pasado. Así que la luna de Coimbra me transporta a

otras lunas y a otras noches [...] En cada una de ellas pervive una persona, o una ciudad, o una época, pero también la melancolía de su pérdida; esa melancolía que ahora se mezcla en mi corazón” (120). In turn, each metonymical connection to a past moonlight also serves as the connection to a series of metaphorical relationships in the recesses of memory, in this case, other nights, people, cities, time periods, and perhaps most persistently, the melancholy associated with loss.

Further, this chain of connected signs is manifest in the smells of the landscape—the wheat fields, the fig trees, the reeds, the beach, the sea (23)—, which appear from the opening pages of the novel and continue throughout the text as a medium that transports the protagonist from present to past: “veranos después, [...] recordé [...] con emoción y melancolía, la noche en la que mi padre me acompañó a ver las lágrimas de San Lorenzo del mismo modo que ahora recuerdo aquel olor [del campo] [...] que todavía hoy puedo olerlo, a pesar del tiempo pasado” (17). The protagonist internally invokes his son and suggests that the same smells will transport him through time to different moments and experiences of the past as well: “Algún día [...], cuando pase mucho tiempo, [...] aquí o en otro lugar volverás a sentir ese mismo olor y te acordarás de mí como yo me acuerdo siempre de mi padre cuando, dondequiera que me encuentre, me llega un olor a trigo, o a lúpulo, o a gasolina” (152). In her essay on the role of memory in experimental writing, Linda Voris writes about the connection between the present and the past as communicated through metaphor: “When the past is ‘reconstructed as metaphor’ it is never fully past, or not on a linear trajectory in which we can imagine the past located safely at a distance behind the present. If it is structured as metaphor the past persists in active exchanges, and so the present is always potentially punctured by the past” (74). Yet in *Las lágrimas de San Lorenzo* this linkage between present and past by way of memory is negotiated more precisely as metonymy, as the continual re-associations with the repetition of similar (or contiguous) occurrences through time, seen in the novel through the mobilization of the stars, the moon, the dark night, and the smells.

In this sense, in its linkage to memory, the images of the present serve as both metaphor and metonymy, much like we see in Henri Bergson’s conceptualization of the cone of associations inherent to remembering. In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson frames it this way:

[B]etween the sensori-motor mechanisms figured by the point S [ie., the plane of the present] and the totality of the memories disposed in AB [which represents the cone of memory] there is room, as we indicated in the preceding chapter, for a thousand repetitions of our psychical life, figured by as many sections A’ B’, A” B”, etc., of the same cone. We tend to scatter ourselves over AB in the measure that we detach ourselves from our sensory and motor state to live in the life of dreams; we tend to concentrate ourselves in S [ie., the present] in the measure that we attach ourselves more firmly to the present reality, [...] [but] the normal self never stays in either of these extreme positions; it moves between them, adopts in turn the positions corresponding to the intermediate sections, or, in other words, gives to its representations just enough image and just enough idea for them to be able to lend useful aid to the present action. (162–63)

The contention for Bergson is that there is constant flux between the present and the variety

of levels of the past conjured from the recesses of one's memory, and elicited through a visual image, a sound, or a smell. Hence, Bergson's cone labels the re-iterations of the remembered occurrence as memories A' B', A" B", etc., suggesting that a moment in the present can trigger a series of innumerable memories of the past in a metonymic chain of associations, taking one further and further into the layers of memory and experience. In *Las lágrimas de San Lorenzo*, this happens through the repetitions of the shooting stars, the dark nights, the moonlights, and the smells.

## Conclusion

In its de-stabilization of both genre and time, and through the narrator and his son, Pedro, Llamazares's novel confirms in lyrical fashion Bergson's assumption that, "what I call 'my present' has one foot in my past and another in my future" (138). Different from Llamazares's other poems and novels, which also rely heavily on landscapes and memory, *Las lágrimas de San Lorenzo* paints an increasingly intimate portrait as the father grapples with the passage of time, his disillusionment with reality, his loss of love and purpose, and the future that awaits his young son. This level of intimacy also moves this novel more into the realm of the lyrical as the text focuses on experience and immediacy. Ralph Freedman suggests that "[i]n the lyrical novel, narrator and protagonist combine to create a self in which experience is fashioned as imagery" (31). We see this in *Las lágrimas de San Lorenzo* as subjectivity revolves wholly around the imagery, metaphors, and metonymies associated with the night of San Lorenzo, in what critic Ángel Basanta calls Llamazares's "mejor territorio literario, la novela lírica."

The digressions in the novel challenge temporal and spatial chronology; the lyrical mobilizations question the pace of both time and the act of reading; and the persistent nature of memory ruptures any notion of a stable present. Perhaps it is precisely memory that provides some sort of redemption in Llamazares's novel, to recuperate what is lost or fleeting. This is demonstrated through a poetics of slowness, for throughout the text little temporal progress is made since only two hours of "real time" pass within the novel. In the final chapters of the book, Pedro finally succumbs to sleep in the late hours of the night, still lying on his back with his gaze toward the heavens. With Pedro peacefully dreaming, the narrator continues in his contemplations of present and past experiences:

[L]a noche de San Lorenzo está llena de fantasmas y de sombras, de murmullos que vienen del otro mundo y que reclaman su recuerdo éste. Y no es una fantasía. Mientras las estrellas vuelan, los rostros [...] van pidiendo una última mirada que los salve, un recuerdo que los deje seguir viviendo en el firmamento, [...] las personas siguen viviendo en el cielo mientras los que las conocieron miren su estrella todas las noches. (189–90)

Time may pass by and opportunities may be lost, but memory will immortalize us, Llamazares's text tells its readers. The tears of San Lorenzo will reappear in the coming year (as they always have) and the remembrance of those of times passed will continue to resurface, ever vivified in the memories of those still living.

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