



Serial Biography in Journalism: The Case of *Juan Belmonte, matador de toros*, by Manuel Chaves Nogales

La biografía seriada en el periodismo: El caso de *Juan Belmonte, matador de toros*, por Manuel Chaves Nogales

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Abstract: The Spanish journalist Manuel Chaves Nogales (Seville, 1897 - London, 1944) published the biography of bullfighter Juan Belmonte (Seville, 1892 - Utrera, 1962) in 1935 in the graphic magazine *Estampa*. This biography, considered one of the best-written ones in Castilian, was released in weekly chapters. Belmonte was already at that time one of the most famous bullfighters in Spain, but across his personal story, Chaves Nogales turned Belmonte into a legend. Through the content and formal text analysis, this research identifies the connexions between the external form of a biography, published episodically, and the scenes chosen by the journalist that helped to enlarge the legend of a character. Chaves Nogales wrote the work in the first-person, so the text reads like an autobiography. This paper studies the use of first-person narrative and shows the new pattern introduced in Journalism by Chaves Nogales. He contributes to the creation of the Belmonte myth through the storytelling.

Keywords: Biography; Myth; Juan Belmonte; Manuel Chaves Nogales; Bullfighting.

Resumen: El periodista español Manuel Chaves Nogales (Sevilla, 1897 - Londres, 1944) publicó en 1935 la biografía del torero Juan Belmonte (Sevilla, 1892 - Utrera, 1962) en la revista gráfica *Estampa*. Esta biografía, considerada una de las mejores en castellano, apareció por entregas semanales. Belmonte era ya entonces uno de los toreros más famosos de España, pero Chaves Nogales lo convirtió en una leyenda a través la historia de su vida. Esta investigación identifica las conexiones entre el género biográfico y el periodismo mediante un análisis formal y de contenido de los distintos capítulos de la biografía y de las escenas narrativas. Chaves Nogales escribió el texto en primera persona, por lo que se lee como una autobiografía y este trabajo estudia el uso que hace Chaves Nogales de esa persona gramatical y muestra algunos de los rasgos periodísticos introducidos por Chaves Nogales. A través del storytelling, Chaves Nogales contribuyó a crear el mito de Belmonte.

Palabras clave: biografía; mito; Juan Belmonte; Manuel Chaves Nogales; toreo.



Introduction

The journalist Manuel Chaves Nogales (Seville, 1897 - London, 1944) was one of the most disheartening victims that a war may claim: the moderate pursued by the extremists. His unequivocally democratic spirit did not satisfy the members of the radical left, and his staunch defense of the Spanish Second Republic provoked scorn from the right wing: “De mi pequeña experiencia personal, puedo decir que un hombre como yo, por insignificante que fuese, había contraído méritos bastantes para haber sido fusilado por los unos y por los otros” (Chaves Nogales, 2022: 11). As a result, he had to seek exile in France because of the Spanish Civil War, at the peak of his career, when he was deputy director of the most widely circulated daily at the time, *Ahora* (prior to that he had been chief editor of the *Heraldo de Madrid* and he collaborated with the graphic magazine *Estampa*). Later, after the Nazis came to Paris, he took refuge in London, where he died in a hospital of peritonitis. And wherever he went he was dedicated to doing what he did best: walking, and telling what he saw, to his last breath.

He did it through his aforementioned work in press, but also in several books, among them *El maestro Juan Martínez que estaba allí* or his essays on World War II compiled in *La agonía de Francia*, and Chaves Nogales' work has been investigated from a number of perspectives (Cintas, 1993, 2001 and 2009; Sánchez Zapatero, 2013; Martínez Illán & Pérez Álvarez, 2019; Pérez Álvarez, 2013 and 2021). But above all his work stands the biography of the bullfighter Juan Belmonte published in the graphic magazine *Estampa*, from 29 June 1935 until 14 December of that same year, in 25 installments corresponding to 25 chapters. All of the chapters were accompanied with portraits and illustrations of the bullfighter, as was usual in most literary biographies of the twenties and thirties in Spain (Pulido, 2009: 29).

That kind of publication was also common practice in the nineteenth century (Seoane & Saiz, 1988; Fuentes & Fernández Sebastián, 1997; Gómez Baceiredo, 2011) and during the Spanish Second Republic, when “*El objetivo estaba claro: interesar al público y vender el mayor número posible de ejemplares*” (Pérez Álvarez *et al.*, 2017: 1367). Moreover, since the Second Republic, the press has been a major contributor to the country's cultural development, and intellectuals have increasingly appeared in the media: “*El periódico, como cauce de la información cotidiana, y la revista, como marco más especializado, reúnen todo el desarrollo cultural de estos años*” (Palomo, 2000: 287).

Despite the success of sales at the time of its publication, to José María del Cossío, author of the reference work in the world of la Fiesta, *Los toros*, the work of Chaves Nogales, like the rest of biographies on Belmonte (those written by Gómez Hidalgo and Antonio de la Villa), are not entirely accurate. According to Cossío, “*La merecida popularidad del diestro y el justo entusiasmo por su arte ha condensado alrededor de su vida una atmósfera casi mítica, que tales biografías han confundido y fomentado más*” (2007: 674). We may agree or disagree with Cossío, but if Chaves Nogales contributes to creating the myth of Belmonte, the fact remains that he does so by showing the man. Cossío, faced with biographies like that of Chaves Nogales, proposed in his taurine encyclopedia a brief biography of Juan Belmonte “*following objective rules*”. However, the work of

Chaves Nogales does not forget these rules, it tells the story of Belmonte with rigor but using, that he does, journalistic resources. The shape of things also speaks to us of the people, and the extension of the story, the narrative mode that puts the author in the background and the protagonist of Belmonte shows that Chaves Nogales, above all, tried to enhance the life of the bullfighter. Arguably, in this sense, it could be said that what Cossío criticized Chaves Nogales is no more than just a technical issue: Cossío understood the biography in a "Victorian" way and Chaves Nogales rather adopted the ideas collected by Virginia Woolf in her essay "The New Biography". That is, as noted by Hyde, there are two ways of writing a biography. One, by analyzing the qualities that you assume the subject possesses. Another way, showing the character's way of being through ongoing actions. This is the most effective. The specific facts have a strength that is lacking in descriptions without facts to corroborate. It is not the same saying that Hemingway was fond of drink, to tell that his drinking was such that several hotels banned his entry (Hyde, 1926: XXII). It is precisely this second more effective formula that Chaves Nogales uses.

That is why Josefina Carabias distinguishes the Chaves's biography against a "very average" literature, as was, in his view, the taurine subject. For her, *Juan Belmonte, matador de toros* is an example of great literature: "Nunca hasta entonces la vida de un torero que todavía toreaba había sido tratada en forma tan original, es decir, contándola tal como era, sin exageraciones, ditirambos, tecnicismos ni latiguillos" (1969: 321). The myth was also a man, who suffered like everyone else and could be an example for many. A myth in its context, defined as "a particular kind of engagement with a world of concrete presences, intersubjective relations, and emotional participations" (Clifford, 1982: 7). In fact, even today, successful men in their field of work like former coach of FC Barcelona, Josep Guardiola, have recognized to have resorted to Chaves Nogales book for how to manage success (Suárez, 2009). Interestingly, football is a topic discussed in Belmonte's biography as a symbol of modernity, far from the values represented by bullfighting (Sánchez Jiménez, 2019).

The idea for the work came from the author, who while writing a story about how people lived in Spain in the early twentieth century, found in the responses and in the person of the bullfighter Juan Belmonte something more interesting than the anecdote for a social or historical reportage. As a result, he developed the idea that he carried out in a journalistic style similar to that used in his work *El maestro Juan Martínez que estaba allí*, also published in *Estampa* throughout 1934, which recounted the adventures of a flamenco dancer from Burgos during the Russian Revolution. This time, after several discussions with the bullfighter Belmonte, this biography series emerged, reprinted in a book format the same year that ended its diffusion through the graphic magazine. But the trajectory was greater, and it was translated into English in an edited version in the United States. In addition, some universities used this biography in an adapted version as a book to learn Spanish.

The Creation of the Myth

The idea of to what extent does the work of Chaves Nogales focus on the character is easily understood by going to the North American version of the work. The identification between biographer and biography is such that the principal English translation, by Leslie Chartiers, referred to the work as an “autobiography”: *Juan Belmonte: Killer of Bulls. The Autobiography of a Matador. As told to Manuel Chaves Nogales* (1937). It seems that Chartiers was not fair with Chaves Nogales work and defined him like a ghostwriter: “I chanced upon Juan Belmonte’s (ghosted) autobiography (*Juan Belmonte, Killer of Bulls*), loved it, bought the English language rights, and did my translation on the flat roof of the Orotava Hotel, which I rented a private sun deck” (Barer, 1993: 35).

In fact, in the catalog of the New York Public Library, Juan Belmonte figures as the author of the work and not Manuel Chaves Nogales, and therefore is included in the final bibliography with Juan Belmonte as author, following the American cataloging. The aim of Chaves Nogales is to focus the work on the figure of the bullfighter and disappear from the story, the ideal aspiration in every biography, has been taken to the extreme. If, as Kendall says, “the object of art, Horace remind us, is to conceal art. The highest is the biographical art concealment of the biographer” (1965: 12), Chaves Nogales succeeds in this work.

The American translation is essentially similar, although Chartiers warns in the preface that he does not translate taurine terms. “For the rest, I have simply done the best I can, leaving out any technicalities that have nothing to do with the story, reducing the others as much as possible, and explaining some of them in the footnotes. This is the story of a man not a treatise on bullfighting” (Belmonte, 1937: 5).

The figure of the matador Belmonte was special. As explained by Chartiers in a note that precedes the translation:

Because Juan Belmonte is bullfighting, in a way that you could never have said that Jack Dempsey was boxing, or Tilden was tennis, or Babe Ruth was baseball. Bullfighting is not a sport, and you can’t compare it with one: the enthusiasm of any sport fan when his champion does well is on an utterly different plane from the emotion of bullfighting. Bullfighting, whether you like it or not, whether you approve it or not, is an art, like painting or music, and you can only judge it as an art: its emotion is spiritual, and it touches depths which can only be compared with the depths that are touched in a man who knows and understands and loves music by a symphony orchestra under a great conductor (Belmonte, 1937: 2-3).

Belmonte was a character who also fit the vision of the United States of America of Spain at that time, when Hemingway and Lorca were widely read in that country. As noted by Herlihy-Mera, referring to Eugenio Suárez-Galbán, “North American literary criticism has a similar tendency, often consigning Spain to the role of an exotic country” (2012: 85).

Chaves Nogales merely recounts the life of the bullfighter that is also an artist. And, at least in this sense, his work is comparable to the famous and essential *Life of Johnson*; if “what we know of Johnson is more vivid, real and true, it is the

man himself" (Mallory, 1912, p. 2), the same is true after reading the biography of Belmonte. As Chartiers noted in the introduction, "this is the story of a man not a treatise on bullfighting" (Belmonte, 1937, p. 5). The Spanish writer Felipe Benítez Reyes recreates hereby the making of the book:

No cuesta imaginar el proceso de composición de este libro: Belmonte le cuenta anécdotas a Chaves, éste toma notas y luego las reelabora con arreglo a su pulso estilístico, que era un pulso muy firme, de prosista certero que no renunciaba al adorno. La materia prima, de acuerdo, era excelente, pero esa excelencia no aseguraba la excelencia del resultado [...]. Las anécdotas, desde luego, vertebran el relato, pero el relato no se limita a las anécdotas, que suelen valer cuando son el germen de algo más. Frente a la posibilidad de una retahíla de historietas, Chaves opta, en fin, por componer una historia (2009: XII-XIII).

A story that is an example also of a Spain that is moderate, sensible, possible, and above all real. In this sense, Chaves Nogales saw in Belmonte more than the bullfighter that all admired, he saw an example for a society increasingly divided, tense and disenchanted with the political situation.

For Chaves, "El hombre Belmonte tenía la entidad suficiente como para despertar la curiosidad de un periodista que, en el cenit de su esplendor laboral, lo elige como modelo de ser humano capaz de enfrentarse a un destino adverso y superarlo, logrando con ello el gran cambio que necesitaba la España de 1935" (Cintas, 2009: 25).

In 1935, Spain was going through the so-called "black biennium" ("bienio negro"). The Second Republic held its first elections in June 1931, following the reform of the electoral system and the adoption of the new Constitution. Left and center republicans and socialists were winners and "en las Cortes van a estar presentes numerosos intelectuales de prestigio ya consolidado, como Cossío, Unamuno, Ortega y Gasset, Sánchez Albornoz, Marañón, y Pérez de Ayala, y, por primera vez, tres nombres femeninos [Clara Campoamor —Partido Radical—, Victoria Kent —Partido Radical Socialista—, Margarita Nelken —PSOE—]" (Rodríguez Jiménez, 2008: 203). Not in vain, the Second Republic was not only a change of regime, but, in Sánchez Illán's words, "sobre todo, la culminación de un cuarto de siglo de incorporación intelectual española a la cultura europea contemporánea" (Sánchez Illán, 2000: 55). The new political system was born, therefore, with great popular and intellectual support.

According to Casanova, "durante los tres primeros años [de la II República], la violencia fue menor y de ninguna manera amenazaba con desestabilizar el sistema. La verdadera violencia, sin embargo, comenzó en 1934" (2007: 182). The elections of September 1933 had given victory to the conservatives of the Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas (CEDA) of Gil Robles and the centrist Partido Radical of Lerroux. Much of the left-wing party did not accept the electoral results because they did not conceive of a republic governed by the right. So much so that, after the elections of 1933, the President of the Republic, Alcalá Zamora, entrusted the formation of the government to the "radicales" of Lerroux and not to the most-voted party, the CEDA, because he understood that the intentions of this formation were not democratic. Left-wing parties like the PSOE and unions like the UGT were radicalized in response to the election results. The discomfort of the left crystallized in the revolutionary events of October 1934, in which Cata-

lonia came to declare, again, “*República Catalana dentro de una hipotética República Federal Española*” (Rodríguez Jiménez, 2008: 226) and in which the Asturian miners took control of Oviedo, making necessary the intervention of the Army, which acted harshly: there were about 1 500 dead (more than 1 000 revolutionaries and some 324 civil guards, in addition to civilian casualties) during the clashes and, “*una vez que los militares se hacen con el control, todos los cuadros sindicales son detenidos, una parte de éstos torturados y unos 200 obreros son ejecutados de forma clandestina*” (Rodríguez Jiménez, 2008: 224).

All this resulted in political instability, which led to continuous government changes (up to seven in two years) until, finally, early elections were called for February 1936. In this context, Chaves Nogales used to tell about the life of a man born like him in Seville, using the first person to disappear from the story, and highlighting the example of a man made through their profession, but also spoke of an necessary attitude for a Spain in continuous political and social tension: a moderate attitude similar to the author, because “*el narrador está más ‘naturalmente’ autorizado a hablar en su propio nombre que el narrador de un relato en ‘tercera persona’ por el hecho mismo de su identidad con el protagonista*” (Genette, 1989: 252). Besides, “*el hecho de ser los dos de Sevilla y de que la ciudad natal hubiera influido tan notablemente en la manera de ser de aquellos dos hombres, hizo que se entendieran mejor*” (Carabias, 1969: 323).

As Carabias highlighted, there is nothing in the book that does not correspond with what Belmonte could have told Chaves Nogales, yet “*distinguimos fácilmente en la lectura todo lo que el periodista buscó y encontró en su interlocutor, adivinamos todas las vueltas y revueltas que tuvo que dar para que adquirieran ese sentido profundo y esa brillantez de exposición que nos fascina, muchos episodios que, en poder de otro escritor, habrían pasado inadvertidos*” (1969: 323). And this is precisely the greatest contribution of Chaves Nogales to the work. Through writing, committing to journalism, and disappearing from the history to exalt it, the author brings out his self without needing to appear in the story.

Given the complexity of the work, it is hard to put a generic label. Not even the magazine that published managed to define it in a concrete way. As Benítez Reyes explained, the work “*se anunció como ‘biografía novelada’, como ‘novela de la realidad’ y como ‘novela vivida’*. Y era todo eso, sin duda: la novela sobre Juan Belmonte que Juan Belmonte no podía escribir y que se encargó de idear –y de inventar como tal novela– su paisano Manuel Chaves Nogales” (2009: XI). Gil speaks of the book as a news story that became an independent book (2009: 53). Cintas calls it “*biografía novelada*” (1993: XXV) and also “*reportaje biográfico*” (Cintas, 2001: 98) and further refined: “*Tiene las características del reportaje puro y los elementos de una biografía literaria. Es, pues, un alto reportaje o gran reportaje, que nosotros llamamos reportaje biográfico. Tiene por tanto un punto de arranque periodístico y un cauce de realización literario*” (2001: 124). Chaves Nogales's work is, in any case, a great exercise in literary journalism and what is definitely without doubt for any of the people who have approached it, is its biographical approach.

And this biography, already in its title, leaves it perfectly clear who is the main character: a man defined by his profession, for his art. In the caption/subtitle, *Su vida y sus hazañas*, two aspects are emphasized: the story of his life, and above all its uniqueness: a moderate bullfighter, in whom Chaves, “*un*

hombre de temperamento triste, responsable con su trabajo, consciente de la gravedad de lo que está viviendo, apesarado y fatalista" (Trapiello, 2003: 209), found, as already mentioned, a man who could also be an exemplary character for the Spain of the Second Republic. Indeed, a myth can make sense to a society that needs to define its identity (Martínez Illán, 2010: 125). Moreover, the importance of the life of the bullfighter, his humble origins and his life messy at times refer to the picaresque. As Woolf proposed in her essay on the state of the biography, the object of the art of the new biography is the man himself, and not a series of preconceived moral criteria, but the attitude of human beings. The biographer speaks of the tone of voice, how he nods his head, of the little anecdotes that dot the passage. The character no longer represents the nobility or the heroic attitude but appears as a real human being (1958: 153-154).

García Pelayo suggests that *"las representaciones míticas pueden tener también su punto de partida en personajes, acontecimientos o estructuras históricas a las que, sin embargo, se imagina de modo que no corresponden a la realidad o, al menos, que no satisfacen la prueba de coincidencia entre lo proclamado y la realidad"* (1981: 20). In the case of Belmonte, he is an atypical character, not because he is unreal, but because he is an example of balance in troubled times. Thus, the myth *"no tiene por propósito satisfacer una necesidad de conocimiento y de conductas racionales, sino que una necesidad existencial de instalación y de orientación ante las cosas, fundamentada en la emoción y en el sentimiento y, en algunos casos, en profundas intuiciones"*. (García Pelayo, 1981: 23). Chaves Nogales describes Belmonte's life as "orientation", and it's in this sense that he transforms him into a myth, a close one, and, consequently, something that's both real and possible. A myth that shows him as humble, comparable to the humble origins of so many other Spaniards of that time.

The beginning of *Juan Belmonte, matador de toros* tells of the infant Juan, his father, his grandfather, and his earliest memory: the death of a bullfighter, Manuel García Cuesta, "Espartero", that presided over his childhood. Chaves Nogales begins narrating the life of Belmonte in the third person: *"Juan es un niño atónito"* (2009: 41). But, very soon, and coinciding with the age at which the bullfighter started going to school, and therefore to have the use of reason, Belmonte takes control of the narrative, which is held in the first person until the end of the work. We face a canonical biography in the sense of strictly respecting the chronological order, and it is the temporal context that carries vital reflections: from professional success to his relations with the intelligentsia, going through love. The "I" of Chaves Nogales, no doubt, is eclipsed by the greatness of the bullfighter.

Chaves Nogales doesn't highlight his ego, nor does he pretend to, as he understands his story as a series of journalistic pieces without any pretensions more than to tell what he sees. Therefore, the analysis of this work, like the story, focuses more on Belmonte and only in a second reading is Chaves Nogales's hallmark understood. For Chaves, showing who a man is can sometimes also mean interpreting his words without making them lose their meaning. The adventures of childhood and youth of Belmonte, in which Chaves Nogales insisted and detailed: *"Desembarcábamos todos y avanzábamos por el cerrado salvando la cerca de alambre de espino. Los cardos y las jaras nos tapaban. Caminábamos cautelosamente por la dehesa, cuando de improviso escandalizaba la noche el esquilón abaritonado de un*

cabestro" (2009: 111); their comings and goings, "*¿Dónde nos refugiaríamos para dormir? No debíamos acercarnos a lugar poblado para no ser descubiertos, pero también era imprudente echarse a dormir en el suelo. En aquel país que atravesábamos podía muy bien haber serpientes venenosas*" (2009: 75); his aphorisms on life: "*Mi ciudad, mi barrio, mi calle, mi tertulia y yo. Lo demás, para los ingleses*" (2009: 148), bring the work, as already noted, to the picaresque. From this point of view, Cintas mentions the use of the first person, the lower social class of the main character, his scattered life, the judgmental character of the protagonist (2001: 152-153), to which we must add the hunger or orphanhood of the character.

With one remark, Belmonte's life was presided by the success of his bullfighting career. The consequences of this, after triumphing in Valencia or being carried on shoulders from the train station in Seville to Triana, marked him:

El Juan Belmonte de aquel tiempo era una creación mítica de sus paisanos. [...] Lo que después ha ganado mi popularidad en extensión lo ha perdido en intensidad. Entonces yo era no sólo yo, sino también algo de cada sevillano. Se hizo de mí una figura patética en la que cada cual veía el atributo de su propio patetismo (2009: 240).

In this sense "a real life is wonderfully prolific; it passes through such strange places and draws along with in a train of adventure that no novelist can better them, if only he can deal with them as with his own inventions" (Woolf, 1958: 168).

Belmonte, a pessimist, a bullfighter who acknowledged being afraid the days of bullfight, yet would send messages within normality that exalted him: "The enterprise was too big for our imagination, and we were on the point of surrendering — not for lack of money, but for lack of fantasy, which is the only reason why one ever does surrender" (Belmonte, 1937: 49).

Belmonte was a myth for his countrymen because they saw him and in his story a way to make sense of a world that does not. As Cassirer explains, "*el mito, el arte, el lenguaje y la ciencia aparecen como símbolos [...] considerándolos como fuerzas que crean y establecen, cada una de ellas, su propio mundo significativo*" (1959: 13). And Belmonte was conscious of it:

The case of Juan Belmonte is to the point, the Belmonte who removed his natural coleta so that he might move in society not as a torero but like any other man, who cultivated the company of writers, but who, according to Montherland, pretended knowledge of Valéry, even though he knew no French (McCormick, 1998: 209).

The management of his triumph, for unexpected and oversized, was not easy. Belmonte did not cope well with that overnight success. In his own words found in the biography: "*Empezó a fatigarme aquella presencia constante de la multitud. Me desazonaba aquella muchedumbre que anulaba mi propia personalidad, grande o pequeña*" (2009: 241). After all, at a very young, with the death of his mother, Belmonte had experienced the sensation of being nothing (2009: 56).

A Close Myth

With the advent of modern Western thought, there is an enlargement of the human figure. In fact, modernity is defined as the period of self-discovery in which man affirms itself as the benchmark of all reality (Amengual, 1998: 36). Modernity also came to the biography. With the advent of the twentieth century, the volume of work declined. Strachey compressed four volumes on the Victorians in a fine book; Maurois turned the usual two volumes on the life of Shelley in a book the size of a novel, but this change went further: it focused on the relationship of the biographer with the character. No longer are they biographers who defend and admire their heroes. Now no matter whether or not admire them, and not everything is important. Now choose specific passages rather than tell everything. They synthesize, and are not mere chroniclers of a life, but are now also artists (Woolf, 1958: 151-152). Fantasy heroes are no longer needed, now heroes are human, and as such, are happy, dream, suffer, struggle, doubt, fall in love, gamble, but also at the same time are unique. We are all men, each different but with similar problems. Perhaps, because of that normality, or that humanity, so far from elitism, but not without its peculiarity, Chaves Nogales manages that the figure of Belmonte transcends his profession:

Juan Belmonte, cual Quevedo taurino, ha sabido ser barroco y clásico a la vez, ha sabido ser un torero lírico y un torero dramático, un poeta y un prosista infinito. 'Su espíritu sin nombre, su indefinible esencia', como diría Bécquer, es lo que ha rasgado las coordenadas espacio-temporales y lo que se ha grabado en la memoria colectiva y popular de esta poliédrica historia de España (Gil, 2009: 62).

Nevertheless, if Juan Belmonte was able to develop himself as a person it was through his work, through his art, which was bullfighting, just as Chaves Nogales did by writing or through journalism. As Belmonte assured, *"el toreo es, ante todo, un ejercicio de orden espiritual. En una actividad predominantemente física jamás ha podido triunfar un hombre físicamente arruinado, como yo lo estaba entonces. Si en el toreo lo fundamental fuesen las facultades, y no el espíritu, yo no habría triunfado nunca"* (Chaves Nogales, 2009: 259), hence its aesthetic character. Bullfighting for Belmonte was an emotion, something that came from within, something more than just a craft, it was an art, *"tengo la convicción de que el arte de torear es, ante todo, y sobre todo la versión olímpica de un estado de ánimo, y creo, además, que el torero sólo cuando está hondamente emocionado —cuando sale a la plaza con un nudo en la garganta— es capaz de transmitir al público su íntima emoción"* (2009: 359). According to McCormick, *"when Juan Belmonte said 'el toreo es, ante todo, un ejercicio de orden espiritual' (above all, toreo is an exercise of a spiritual order), he established a necessary antidote to the vulgar, romantic conception"* (1998: 69). Belmonte represents an art defended as such, among other intellectuals, by Pérez de Ayala (1918), Laín Entralgo (2012) and Ortega y Gasset, who considers it *"una metáfora de la razón vital"* (Ruiz, 2010: 419).

Both his rivalry with fellow bullfighter Joselito, who became his friend before his death in the bullring, as his peculiar style, widened his legend of bullfighter. Belmonte's "Theory of bullfighting" is covered in the biography by Chaves Nogales (2009: 499); Gil thus explains what Belmonte meant for bullfighting:

Juan Belmonte, en tanto que figura esencial de un arte tan sui generis a la vez que universal, aparece en estos veinticinco capítulos con los mismos atributos, inteligencia y aportaciones a la humanidad que Paul Gauguin, Vincent Van Gogh, Baudelaire o Dostoyevsky, es decir, puede compararse en pie de igualdad al resto de próceres de otras manifestaciones artísticas que con sus nuevas concepciones del arte han transformado al mundo (2009: 61).

Despite these successes, despite the money, despite having a country estate (pinnacle of success and happiness for the Andalusian peasant, as the popular song goes), Belmonte talks about his fear of being happy. Not in vain, Belmonte was a well-read man who had rubbed shoulders with the intellectuals of Madrid of the early decades of the last century. From his reading the bullfighter said they even mad him consider suicide, which is committed years later, at the age of 70; from his dealings with the writers and artists at the time the anecdote which is mostly remembered is the one collected by Chaves Nogales, which recounts a conversation between the bullfighter and the writer of the Generation of '98, Ramón María del Valle-Inclán:

- ¡Juanito, no te falta más que morir en la plaza!
- Se hará lo que se pueda, don Ramón —contestaba yo modestamente (2009: 359).

The story is structured by Chaves Nogales in a precise but understandable language, elaborate but simple. What Trapiello explained when discussing *El maestro Juan Martínez que estaba allí*, also applies to the biography of Juan Belmonte: “Chaves le da a Martínez una literatura sin énfasis, la suya propia de periodista obligado a llegar a miles de lectores de toda clase” (2007: XIX).

That brusqueness and little exuberance may well have to do with the journalistic style of narration of Chaves Nogales. The feeling of reading a reportage, or a chronicle about the life of Belmonte, remains and it is also driven by the pace of the story and possibly also by the fact that it was serialized with the formal presentation of each chapter that it entails: all of them can be read as an independent story. In fact, Chaves Nogales may be considered a precedent of the New Journalism (Pérez Álvarez, 2013). What is certain is that, “Con este libro sobre Juan Belmonte, Chaves Nogales dio una lección de literatura y una lección de periodismo: el periodismo que logra ascender al ámbito de la gran literatura. Porque no estamos ante un libro curioso, sino ante un libro prodigioso” (Benitez Reyes, 2009: XVI). In this book prodigious,

Chaves Nogales y Belmonte quedaron unidos para la historia. Periodista y torero, autor y personaje, parecen unir sus voces para proclamar al unísono las palabras con las que el libro concluye y que evidencian el estado de ánimo con que cada uno de ellos afrontaba cada día el reto de vivir: “La verdad, la verdad es que yo he nacido esta mañana” (Cintas, 2009: 35).

The key is the union of their visions, of the biography and of the author. Chaves Nogales chose Belmonte, without being taurine; he was interested in more than just his half passes of the cape, but interested in his view of life, his attachment to reality. As narration, the construction of scenes matters, but their dramatic structure does not alter the essence of the main character. This may be due perhaps to the journalistic intuition of Chaves, who knew how to see the

essence of the character in each milestone of his life, or, perhaps, to the urgency of journalistic writing and the need to adapt to an extension, due to the limits that the publication demanded. Be that as it may, each of the chapters of the biography can be seen as a finished portrait of Belmonte that does not alter the previous one, only reaffirms it.

At the end, Chaves Nogales intended, ultimately, to show a national "hero". The Sevillian journalist put it this way:

Pudiera ocurrir, pongámonos a soñar ambiciosamente, que este libro de Belmonte subsista durante algún tiempo y pasados unos años conserve un cierto valor como testimonio de lo que fue la vida de un hombre representativo de nuestro tiempo. Si esto fuese así, ya podíamos darnos todos por contentos. ¡Cuántos héroes no se nos han perdido en España sin dejar un rastro ni bueno ni malo de sus vidas! (Sin firma, 1935).

Conclusions

Ultimately, Belmonte's biography is current, the validity and contemporaneity of the bullfighter are clear: it was about a living character. Chaves Nogales approached Belmonte attracted by his personality, recognizing at all times the interest of the protagonist. The fact that they were both alive allowed the journalist to know, deal with and look into the eyes of the bullfighter. He could do with him 'what they so often did with the protagonists of the reportages, chronicles and articles they wrote. Using his journalistic skills, he offered his view of a bullfighter, a man, just like everyone else.

Chaves Nogales does not do a preface to the work. Firstly, because of the very format of his biography: at first, remember, it was serialized in the graphic magazine *Estampa* in which it did not fit any prologue. What we know of how the work was conceived is from other sources (mainly articles in which Chaves Nogales tells the idea of writing a report on Spain in the early twentieth century, and when encountering the figure of Juan Belmonte, he commits to a biography in the form of autobiography). Neither does he introduce any sort of epilogue to the work. Although, that yes, the final sentence of Belmonte, as has been said above, is a declaration of principles of the lifestyle and character of the journalist: "*La verdad, la verdad, es que yo he nacido esta mañana*" (2009: 517). Chaves Nogales is more journalist than writer, he seeks to disappear from the story, and narrates the facts, he does not appear in the work; his "I", although present like that of any author for the mere sake of writing, is more hidden, intentionally, to leave the weight of the account to the bullfighter.

As for the narrative form of the biography, Chaves Nogales goes for the first-person, giving voice to the protagonist of the story. Thus, the biography takes the form of an autobiography in which the protagonist describes his own life. The "I" viewpoint makes the author assimilate, in a way, the views and opinions of the biography. Chaves Nogales begins the narration in the third person, but early on, since Juan Belmonte starts going to school, and coinciding, intentionally or not, with the time when Belmonte acquires his "use of reason," gives voice to the bullfighter, who recounts his life to the very end of the book. The style of this book refers, as already mentioned, to the picaresque. Chaves Nogales suspends

judgment and lets the character speak, who becomes the absolute protagonist of the story.

In addition, *Juan Belmonte, matador de toros* shows the journalistic style of Chaves Nogales, that is, it contains elements of the reportage or of travel chronicles, quite common in Chaves Nogales. Chaves Nogales gives each chapter of his book the unit of a reportage, with its main theme, the beginning, middle and end, maintaining the journalistic tension in the story, as after all the work was originally published in installments. We agree with Carabias when she said that, "*Sin la pluma de Manuel Chaves Nogales la vida de Juan Belmonte, aun siendo la misma, no habría tenido el interés que tiene, sobre todo para el lector no taurino*" (1969: 323).

Belmonte's biography came at a time when publishing biographies in Spain was on the rise. Chaves Nogales outlined the lives of a living man, illustrious, prominent in his field. Also, his work shows traces of the journalistic style of the author: the "report" story of Chaves Nogales. It falls, therefore, within the scope of literary journalism, in a historic moment in which the life of Juan Belmonte also wanted to be symptom of a possible Spain, a real Spain, an intellectual Spain, that existed albeit devoured by the reality of political radicalism. Chaves Nogales contributes to the creation of the Belmonte myth through the storytelling of a man who has reached the pinnacle in his profession, but has problems like everyone else: insecurities, fears, anxieties... Chaves Nogales does not use aggrandising adjectives to describe large Belmonte, he simply portrays it in action, to create a real myth, that of a humble, small and physically frail man, who reached the top professionally and was for years a reference for the Spanish working class.

Finally, the biography of the bullfighter Belmonte is still relevant today because it is not a work that is limited to a historical moment. Chaves' writing is capable of creating characters that survive in the imagination due to the mastery of his art in characterizing and recreating the scenes he told. We could say that the literary quality of the work made the great bullfighter Juan Belmonte also a myth that endures because of who he was.

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