Autobiography is intriguingly complex and dependent on the autobiographer’s access to memory. This access, however, becomes increasingly selective and susceptible with the passing of time. It is within the context of this frailty, that I will attempt to look at the construction of memory and detect its use in two autobiographies from the Spanish-speaking world. Although the autobiographies of Luis Buñuel and Rubén Darío were written nearly a century apart, their common use of memory as a constitutive element in autobiography reveals how memory is never fixed or static, thus showing its expected transformative capacity and inherent dynamics. In fact, a reader of both texts is exposed to the act of remembering as a significant theme within the narratives, which functions as both an authenticator and destabilizer of the past. My main question then is how these two authors construct what they call their lives through the use of memory. Moreover, I presume that it is memory’s ephemeral and fallible nature that allows these two authors to construct their narrative. Any reading about memory in autobiography entails a closer look at the remembering process. Smith and Watson have argued that memory researchers from several fields see this process as a “reinterpretation of the past in the present” (22). This is confirmed by Darío who claims, “A mist is produced here in my mind that refrains me from any memory” (34), thus suggesting that remembering entails a creative act that takes place in the present (Pike 338). However, both narratives are filled with what Susan Bluck identifies as a necessary charac-

"Life without memory is no life at all, just as intelligence without the possibility of expression is not really an intelligence. Our memory is our coherence, our reason, our feeling, even our action. Without it, we are nothing."

Luis Buñuel, My Last Sigh

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1 I am deeply indebted to Luísa Flora for her review of this essay. Many thanks also go out to Natalia Aristizabal for translating all of the passages from Darío’s autobiography into English.

In the original, “Aquí se produce en mi memoria una bruma que me impide todo recuerdo.”
teristic for autobiographical memories, which is a sense of presence in a past event—‘We were there’—and personal involvement in that same event—‘We did this,’ ‘We did that’ (21). In other words, the authors believe that these are memories of events that happened to them, in which they participated and about which they have carried certain feelings, ideas, and reflections (21). Holding certain feelings about the past is precisely how Buñuel recalls Calanda, the village where he was born, as he doesn’t “remember a single moment of boredom” (9). This feeling, nonetheless, is supplanted by many others that involve a series of “firsts” such as: his first encounter with death, the awakening of his sexuality, and his profound religious faith as a child.

Dario himself begins his autobiography with a set of his first memories—that of a village called San Marcos de Colón in the mountainous country of Honduras along with fireworks in his native city, León, Nicaragua. He also relives unforgettable moments in his autobiography through a series of firsts, such as the first time he spoke in public, as well as the impressions he holds of different events, as in his first encounter with the president of El Salvador. In this case, the memories seem to be personal and specific and reflect a sense of self. Nonetheless, the aspect I would like to emphasize is how these memories are maintained and recollected. In this sense, these authors’ memory requires a discussion about truth and falsity. Put differently, many of the past memories that both authors revert to are fabricated depending on the images they hold in their mind. This is given the belief that when an image enters memory it is reshaped and as James Olney argues, this image is “subject to continual reshaping while it is held in memory” (92). Buñuel affirms to this at the end of his first chapter titled “Memory” when he sustains memory’s capacity to steadily change. As he states, “… the portrait I’ve drawn is wholly mine — with my affirmations, my hesitations, my repetitions and lapses, my truths, and my lies. Such is my memory.” (6). This particular passage also alludes to how the image or portrait he draws of himself is reshaped as it is recalled from memory.

It seems, therefore, that it is by recovering and reminiscing about a somewhat foggy and disordered past that Buñuel and Dario are capable of capturing glimpses of their fragmented memory and ultimately construct their narrative. This past, however, also shows the true nature of memory’s unreliability which is also expressed by Dario when he says, “Having reached this point in my memory, I am aware that I can make mistakes every now and then and in terms of dates or the order of events, which may come before or after. It does not matter. I might place a memory in another time when it did not correspond, or vice versa. It is easy since I only count with the effort of my memory” (42-3).

This reliance on memory, which as the passage shows is fragile since it entails looking at a past that is not completely retrievable, allows the author to explore what James Olney has claimed is the processual model for memory (19-20). This specific model in Olney’s analysis of St. Augustine’s Confessions refers to temporal as opposed to spatial metaphors and “brings forth ever different memorial configurations and an ever newly shaped self” (20). This can also be applied to Dario and Buñuel because their act of remembering, as Olney suggests, is much like the process of weaving where the “weaver’s shuttle and loom constantly produce new and different patterns, designs, and forms” (20). This implies that Buñuel’s and Dario’s juxtaposition of present and past time frames allows them to recall and continuously reconstruct their memory.

Related to this is the manner in which these authors deal with time and, as previously stated, how memories are capable of reordering events in these autobiographies. Although Dario’s “notes” (15) and Buñuel’s “semiautobiography” (5) have their personal...
Each of us creates a life narrative embedded in sociocultural frameworks that define what is appropriate to remember, how to remember it, and what it means to be a self with an autobiographical past. Fivush and Haden

pathways as the main recurring theme, each text deals with the issue of memory loss and in this fashion the autobiographies are almost mirror reflections of each other. In both works, however, there is a consciousness about time and what is real or fictive in the construction of these narratives through memory. This is made clear when Darío states “...I cannot confirm it surely... but this is how I see it in my vague and foggy memory...” (15). As this passage attests, memory is a process of personal reconstruction and the move from any conglomeration of memories (both imagined and real) to a coherent sense of self is possible. In fact, both writers are capable of keeping track of who they are through time and space, as these fragments of memory are organized into the complex construction of a narrative.

A more detailed view of autobiographical memory will also show that in spite of being unstable, it is continuous. In fact, memories in both autobiographies appear to be accumulated unconsciously (Buñuel 4; Darío 22), as if they had been put away and kept for safekeeping in one of memory’s compartments. This unconscious collection of memories is also related to identity because, as Eakin put it, “our practice of self-construction is largely unconscious” (22). However, I would like to stress an observation made by Fivush and Haden which claims that “each of us creates a life narrative embedded in sociocultural frameworks that define what is appropriate to remember, how to remember it, and what it means to be a self with an autobiographical past.”

In fact, when thinking about memory and its formation, we need to reflect on its private and public spheres or individual vs. collective activity.

1 In the original text, “… no lo puedo afirmar seguramente...” is translated as “I cannot affirm it surely...” (15). “I cannot confirm it surely...” is translated as “...I cannot confirm it surely...” (15). Another perspective sees the self as “a mental model that we unconsciously and unintentionally construe through the stories we tell to others and to ourselves” (Sani 2).
what it means to be a self with an autobiographical past” (vii). This means that the mere process of remembering has been conditioned by the societies where Buñuel and Darío grew up along with their traditions and customs. If both authors began their autobiographies by asking themselves how they remembered their lives (past or present) or how they wanted to be remembered (future), then the actual process of remembering and speaking about themselves means that they are abiding by the local conventions of their culture, which is one of the characteristics of autobiography (Pike 328). This could perhaps explain why Darío consciously refrains from speaking about specific events from his life that might have been considered inappropriate to discuss during his time (65–66).

It has also been argued that when we recall ourselves through memory, we are automatically thrown into a past that is both individual and collective (Lowenthal 194). In fact, when thinking about memory and its formation, we need to reflect on its private and public spheres or individual vs. collective activity. This because according to Fivush and Haden, “autobiographical memories are private and uniquely our own, but they are simultaneously public property because they usually involve other people” (29). Thus, memory should be understood as presenting a continual dialogue between an inner and outer world. It cannot be fixed or constant because it changes according to our own personal reflection on our experiences as well as our external surroundings. Further to the point, it involves a dialogue between what we remember and the people we speak to along with the stories we hear and tell. This dualistic aspect of memory is confirmed by Darío when he claims, “This last part of my narration mixes long days that belong strictly to my personal life” (105), near the end of this autobiography. However, this does not remove all of the memories he has of the more public accounts of encounters with politicians, friends and many other representatives from the artistic world in the previous sections in his narrative. In fact, a large part of the autobiography is centered on his life as a diplomat and his experiences in the literary world, both as a journalist and a writer. In other words, in the early sections of his narrative Darío is intent on looking for memories that could be of an intellectual interest to the reader as opposed to a more intimate remembrance of events that would interest him personally (39). Buñuel himself attributes the reason for writing his autobiography not to a private need but to others when he writes, “... all I can say is that had I been alone, I’d never have done it” (231).

What leads to the creation of our inner and outer worlds, according to Evelyne Ender, begins with the verbalization of our memories (16) – an idea that is also supported by Bluck (27–8). Oliver Sacks attests to this by saying that “each of us constructs and lives a ‘narrative,’ and that this narrative is us, our identities” (quoted in Eakin 1, emphasis in original). In this sense, the self-narrative capacity in autobiography is a (lifelong) process that is capable of structuring lives. Notwithstanding, one must remember that it is our memory that creates a self narrativable, and it is this narration that is the sine qua non of identity. As Brockmeier and Carbaugh have pointed out, “The stories we tell ourselves about ourselves and others organize our senses of who we are, who others are, and how we are to be related” (10). This is why Buñuel, in particular, fears not remembering any stories about himself and his life and even dedicates a chapter to his sister’s (Conchita) memories about him. At this juncture, it is pertinent to bring up another important point that links these two autobiographies and memory – that of travel and belonging.
periódico Gringoire (¿o Candido?), en un editorial que ocupaba toda la parte inferior de una página, recordó que yo había ido a París pocos años antes para intentar «corromper a la juventud francesa».

Yo seguí viendo a mis amigos surrealistas. Breton me llamó un día a la Embajada y me dijo:

—Querido amigo, corre un rumor bastante desagradable, según el cual los republicanos españoles habrían fusilado a Péret porque formaba parte del P.O.U.M.

El P.O.U.M., teóricamente de tendencias trotskistas, suscitaba ciertas simpatías entre los surrealistas. Benjamin Péret había ido, en efecto, a Barcelona, donde se le veía todos los días en la Plaza de Cataluña, rodeado de gentes del P.O.U.M. A petición de Breton, traté de informarme. Supe que había ido al frente de Aragón, a Rúesca, y también que criticaba tan áspera y abiertamente el comportamiento de los miembros del P.O.U.M. que algunos de ellos habían manifestado su intención de fusilarle. Pude garantizar a Breton que Péret no había sido ejecutado por los republicanos. Y, en efecto, regresó a Francia.

De vez en cuando, yo almorzaba con Dalí en la «Rôtisserie Perigourdine», en la plaza Saint-Michel. Un día, me hizo participar de una proposición harto curiosa.

—Quiero presentarte a un inglés riquísimo, muy amigo de la República española, que deseaba ofrecerte un bombardero. Acepté entrevistarme con ese inglés, Edward Janes, gran amigo de Leonora Carrington. Acababa de comprar toda la producción de Dalí para el año 1938, y me dijo que, en efecto, tenía a nuestra disposición, en un aeropuerto cheskoslovaco, un avión de bombardero ultramoderno. Sabiendo que la República necesitaba desesperadamente aviones, nos lo daba, a cambio de varias obras maestras del Museo del Prado, con las que tenía la intención de organizar una exposición en París y en otras ciudades. Estos cuadros serían puestos bajo la garantía del Tribunal Internacional de La Haya. Al terminar la guerra, dos posibilidades: si ganaban los republicanos, los cuadros volverían al Prado. En caso contrario, quedarían en propiedad de la República en el exilio.

Comunicé esta original propuesta a Álvarez del Vayo, nuestro ministro de Asuntos Exteriores. Confesó que la posibilidad del bombardero sería para él una gran alegría, pero que por nada del mundo se desahogaría de los cuadros del Prado. «¿Qué se dirá de nosotros? ¿Qué escribiría la Prensa? ¿Qué malbaratamos nuestro patrimonio para procurarnos armamentos? No se hable más de ello.» No se llevó a efecto la transacción.

Edward Janes vive todavía. Posee castillos casi por todas partes e, incluso, un rancho en México.
"Escribo con espíritu sincero, sin pretensiones, sin sobredosis de publicidad, el libro de Buñuel es un libro de mi vida, de mi lucha, de mi lucha, de mi lucha. Buñuel evoca con precisión y autenticidad la obra de arte y el humanismo. Las memorias de Buñuel, las memorias de Buñuel, las memorias de Buñuel..."

José Luis Robles (Cambio 16)

"¿Qué más? Buñuel... Su obra... sus películas... sus libros... sus escritos... sus palabras..." Llano Llano (La Vanguardia)
Both authors travelled (in/voluntarily) extensively during their lives and their narratives show them belonging to several worlds. And so what effect, if any, did this division between different countries and cultures have on their memory? In other words, how does the process of immigration fuse into the formation of their autobiographical memory? It has been suggested by Hart that “leaving one’s place is losing that story” (500) and Fivush and Haden have also argued that “from the perspective of autobiographical memory, immigration occasions profound changes” (121). This has to do with the fact that our memory is tied to a sense of who we are and what we have done in the past to a specific place (Fivush and Haden 122). But the move to another country and its culture, and the acquisition of a new language within this culture forces us to replace or substitute parts of our mother culture and tongue by the adopted one. The result, for this bilingual or bicultural person is then the establishment of two “sets”, or “two networks of memories” (Fivush and Haden 141). In the case of Darío, and given that he travelled and lived in so many different countries in Central and South America as well as in Europe, he could be afforded multiple sets of recollections, once again showing memory’s capacity to be continuously imprinted by life experiences.

This “interdependence between memory recall and the continuously evolving self” (Neisser and Fivush 105) leads to one final issue which is how the recollection of memories is achieved in Buñuel’s and Darío’s autobiographies. Bluck’s poignant suggestion is partly based on the use of visual imagery (28). In fact, the fragmentary images we obtain from both authors seem to have been captured by a cinematographer’s filtered lens. Despite Buñuel’s fragile, false or forgetful memory, he provides the reader with a long string of images that include: family, wealth, religion, school, war, various landscapes (Spain, France, US, Mexico), film making, bars (drinking and smoking), strengths and weaknesses, desires and feelings, impressions, love, dreams and imagination, politics, the Ultraists, a countless list of friends, Surrealism and deafness, among others. It is therefore by resorting to these several modes of remembering, that he digresses through all of these cluttered images and memories and reveals himself to his readers.

If Buñuel did not think that a life could be confused with a person’s profession (198), Dario’s autobiography exemplifies the opposite belief by incorporating poems and long discussions on his literary production. This “interdependence between memory recall and the continuously evolving self” (Neisser and Fivush 105) leads to one final issue which is how the recollection of memories is achieved in Buñuel’s and Darío’s autobiographies. Bluck’s poignant suggestion is partly based on the use of visual imagery (28). In fact, the fragmentary images we obtain from both authors seem to have been captured by a cinematographer’s filtered lens. Despite Buñuel’s fragile, false or forgetful memory, he provides the reader with a long string of images that include: family, wealth, religion, school, war, various landscapes (Spain, France, US, Mexico), film making, bars (drinking and smoking), strengths and weaknesses, desires and feelings, impressions, love, dreams and imagination, politics, the Ultraists, a countless list of friends, Surrealism and deafness, among others. It is therefore by resorting to these several modes of remembering, that he digresses through all of these cluttered images and memories and reveals himself to his readers.

10 Buñuel affirms belonging to different worlds when he identifies himself as a métèque in Paris, a type of “half-breeder foreigner” (78).

11 The original version reads, “Fui algo niño prodigio. A los tres años sabía leer, según se me ha contado” and “¿A qué edad escribí los primeros versos? No lo recuerdo precisamente, pero sí de que es temprano.”
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