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## Book Review | *The Discourse of Tragedy: What Cromagnon Represents*

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***The Discourse of Tragedy: What Cromagnon Represents.* (La Tragedia segun el discurso: así se siente Cromagnon). Andrea Estrada; Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2010; 227 pages; \$30.85 paperback; 978-987574404-2**

During my field-work in Cromagnon, I was embedded in a deep sadness. Let me explain to readers the evolution of this “made-man” disaster in the threshold of time. On December 30, 2004, thousands of teenagers congregated in the stadium “Republica of Cromagnon” (Republic of Cromagnon) to celebrate a new year’s eve as well as to hear their favorite rock and roll band, Callejeros; but something came out wrong. One of attendants started an intense fire killing 194 people and injuring more than 700. The fire was begun thanks to a pyrotechnic flare which promptly ignited the entire ceiling involving thousand of attendants in one of most crippling made-man disasters in Buenos Aires. In addition, Animal Ibarra, former Mayor and Omar Chaban the owner of this nightclub were pointed as the primary responsible for this disaster. The case of Chaban, originally jailed and condemned to 20 years of prison seemed to be quite different than for Anibal Ibarra who was dismissed because of negligence. The fact was that four of the six doors were shut at time of blaze resulting in victims dying by inhaling poisoning gases and monoxide of carbon. After this tragedy the officials decreed three days of national mourning. To some extent, The Republic of Cromagnon, situated physically at Once borough, represented more than a quest for justice, a new sense for the life of thousands of parents and survivors who witnessed a traumatic event.

The present review explores the discourse formed surrounding Cromagnon from the perspective of an Argentine socio-linguist, Andrea Estrada, who authored a more than interesting work entitled *La Tragedia Segun el discurso (The Discourse of Tragedy)*. This

insightful book, structured initially in six chapters, not only exhibits the chronicles and speech of survivors and their sufferings, but also evidences how psychological resilience works post-disasters. In the introductory chapters, Estrada explores the connection between the discourse and emotions, articulating a new theoretical perspective in the analysis of content in discovering what Cromagnon represents for the involved actors. To be more precise, the process of enunciation is one of primary forms of mediation between the subject and its realm. The act of enouncing not only should be determined by the logic, but by a complex convergence between expression, emotions and perception; this is exactly what Estrada examines in her interesting book. In so doing, she collates a bunch of documents, works, books and judgments to articulate a diagnosis framed on Cromagnon's discourse.

One might clarify that this speech is often based on the vivid experience of who were just there as witnesses. Unlike other discourses, Cromagnon allows a much broader codification and de-codification wherein the boundaries between the witness and the victim are certainly blurred. Andrade, in this vein, is convinced that the existent studies based on the analysis of discourse, born in the midst of the 1950s, over-valorize the instrumentality in detriment of emotions. These theories have historically rejected the possibility to orchestrate the emotionality with scientific understanding simply because the impassibility and impersonality should be two key factors to find the truth. Rather, the emotions and sentiment play a pervasive role in the life of ordinary people. This old stoic prejudice is being placed under the lens of scrutiny in Estrada's development.

Taking her cue from Ch. Plantin, Andrade argues that the discourse can be structured on three socio-linguistic senses, a) the psychological places, b) designed-emotions and c) emotions conferred to certain psychological states that author calls 'places'. While the psychological places are potential instruments to determine the route of emotions throughout the different psychological states (for example, when we see the word 'deeper'), the designed-emotions refer to the need of identifying the degree of emotions (verbs that denote sentiments) to certain events. There are certain statements where dissociation between emotions and rationale emerge. In these circumstances, the psychological places are reconstructed on the basis of a list of defined emotions to give the actors a set of alternatives (emotions) to be linked according to the role of subject. In addition, a literary *topos* can be defined as a set of rules that give sense to the argument as a reason. The function of *toposes* are often associated to the need of captivating the type and intensity of emotions in the narrative (happiness, hate, love, anger, fear in specific questions such as who?, how?, how much?, where?, why? etc). Sentiments and their degrees vary on the affected person and its context. Similarly, the death of children shocks much more than the death of an elderly person.

Throughout the second and third chapter, Estrada dwells on a wider diversity of documents, texts and discourses that makes Cromagnon a vivid portrayal of suffering

which can be framed from some way or another depending on the interests of stakeholders. Still, the lexical and grammatical resources seem to be of paramount importance to denote the direct experience of events or at least their symbolized causality. It is important not to lose the sight that in a process of communication, the announcer judges an object from a view that comes across directly with such an impression, but to some extent this encounter reflects a subjective response. After further examination in documents and text related to Cromagnon, Estrada realizes there is a predominance of verbs inextricably intertwined to vision as to see and to watch in all chronicles. This is the case, for example, of the letter written by Liliana Garafalo, one of the mothers who lost her son in this disaster, to Estela de Carlotto where the former puts forward a polished argument respecting to the pervasive role played by A. Ibarra in this tragedy. To put this in brutally, far from being emotional, Garafalo wove a discourse based on rationality and instrumentality. The main thesis is that the argumentative strategies in this letter are aimed at bestowing to the discourse a sense of objectivity with the end of legitimating the main argument against Carlotto. In doing so, Garafalo attempts to cover her emotions by means of the ongoing exacerbation of her experiences. She, and nobody else, has timely been “there” witnessing and feeling Cromagnon in first person. This privileged semantic position situates victims as speakers in a new role respecting to other local peripheral actors. The rest of this fascinating book invites readers to re-consider the role played by the sentiments as mechanisms of manipulation which range from one to another pole depending on the person’s interests. Last but not least, Estrada’s approach was widely intended to describe and explain what survivors have certainly felt, heard, and smelt this crippling night using the socio-linguistic theories of Graimas, Fontanille, Ducrot and Plantin as primary sources.

One of the aspects that more attention deserves is the dichotomy between rationale and emotionality. *The Discourse of the Tragedy* showed how those social actors who lived the tragedy or lost a relative have a more rational stance than others as journalists, officials or lawyers who appeals to Cromagnon and its emotionality as a form of dissuasion and politic indoctrination. Estrada found convincingly that the relatives, friends, survivors and families of victims made of Cromagnon a claim for justice. Unless otherwise resolved, instrumentality and rationale are the only possible steps these actors can take whereas other groups as journalists perform the emotions that trigger Cromagnon not as a genuine act of sensibility but as a tool for dissuasion. This finding not only opens the door for a new channel in the scientific-research of Cromagnon but also in the discourse of victims and survivors who have certainly experienced a disaster in their skins.

Undoubtedly, this book represents one of the best endeavours to describe the cultural landscapes surrounding Cromagnon. Personally, Cromagnon has taught many things to society and to me. The sanctuary was initially erected a couple days after the disaster, precisely in the site where the first corpses have fallen. As the previous argument has noted, Cromagnon should be understood as something else than a reminder. Typically,

the presence of mass-death proper of disasters evokes a wider necessity of sublimation in order for survivors to claim for the protection of Gods. What makes Cromagnon impossible to digest is not the death of 194 teenagers, but that an event of this nature can happen again, anytime and anywhere. Of course, the lines of responsibilities in this process are countless, ranging from Chaban and Ibarra towards Callejeros band, but at some extent, the culprit exonerates emotionally to the rest of the involved subjects. From this perspective, Cromagnon was, is, and will be a sign of unpredictability in the core of instrumentality, a fragile reminder of our vulnerability.