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*University of Cincinnati*

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# CINCINNATI ROMANCE REVIEW

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## PREFACE

Every May the graduate students of the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures organize a three-day conference on Romance literatures, languages, and pedagogy; during the following year the students edit, with faculty assistance, a volume of selected papers from the conference. For Volume VIII, the editors of the *Cincinnati Romance Review* received over 80 papers, of which 11 were chosen for publication: four on French literature, five on Spanish and Latin American literatures, one each on Italian and Portuguese literatures. In addition, we are pleased to offer our readers the text of the Taft lecture given at the conference by Laurence M. Porter of the University of Michigan on "Redefining the Fantastic." We thank the Taft Fund and the Departments of German and Romance Languages for making possible this outstanding presentation.

These papers were chosen both for originality of approach and for the breadth of the topics they treat, which range from the medieval conception of the sin of maldecir to Perrault's fairy tales to Borges's futuristic story, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius." Many of the papers offer analyses of little-known works, such as Mme Riccoboni's eighteenth-century sentimental novel, Lettres de Mistress Fanni Butlerd, or lesser-known works by well-studied authors, such as Camus's lyrical essays, Malraux's Les Conquérants, and Gerardo Diego's Fabula de Equis Y Zeda. We believe that the papers presented here ask the kinds of questions of literary texts that concern scholars in all the Romance literatures, and that consequently the papers on French or Spanish literature, for example, have something to say to scholars and teachers working in another language. In the growth and development of the conference and the *Cincinnati Romance Review* we see evidence that the scholars of a particular Romance language are not isolated from their colleagues in other Romance fields and that our understanding of our literary specialty is enriched by reading the work of scholars in other Romance literatures.

One of the critical dialogues in which the papers in this volume engage concerns the levels of meaning in literary texts and the ways a literary text reinterprets certain generic conventions and assumptions. A number of scholars in this volume analyze a particular kind of generic discourse or system of signification, such as Laurence M. Porter, who describes the complex ways in which the fantastic functions in a literary text. How narration and commentary interact in the lyrical essays of Camus is described by Katherine Stephenson; how mythological symbols and archetypes work to give another level of meaning to a story is the subject of "Myth and

Feminine Symbolism in Vidas Secas," by Lynda Jentsch-Grooms. Brunella Bigi explores the language and structure of Dante's "Inferno" in terms of theater: although the Divina Comedia was not written for the stage, the poem incorporates techniques of dramatic presentation in its characterization, visual imagination, and use of spoken language.

Other papers consider the relation of literary discourse to cultural and intellectual history. We believe our readers will find new insight into Borges's fantastic tale of the planet Tlön through Kern L. Lunsford's analysis showing that the story is as much a response to the disturbing historical and political events at the beginning of World War II as it is a commentary on the power of language to create reality. At the other end of literary history, Dale Knickerbocker's perceptive analysis of the medieval Spanish attitude toward sins of the tongue contributes to our understanding of certain constants in medieval, and modern, Spanish culture. Mary Rice-De Fosse's paper, "Writing Revolution in Malraux's Les Conquérants," shows how the text encodes the dichotomy between words and actions through a fiction that uses the cultural context of the Chinese revolution of 1925. Several papers examine questions of literary rather than political or cultural history: Alberto Julián Pérez's "El Modernismo ante el Romanticismo y la Vanguardia" describes both the place of Modernismo in Spanish literature and how the Vanguardia changed our ways of reading and interpreting literature. In "Luis de Góngora en un Poema Fundamental de Gerardo Diego: La Fabula de Equis y Zeda," Reyes Lázaro Gurtubay argues that Diego was influenced by the earlier poet in a more profound way than he recognized in 1970, and that his conception of language owes much to Góngora.

Another theme common to a number of papers is the reconsideration of female voices in certain texts, such as Anne Widnell's perceptive reading of the "hidden sexual subtext" in the epistolary novel of Mme Riccoboni, Lettres de Mistress Fanni Butlerd. The author shows how the heroine establishes, in the eyes of her readers, her credibility as victim rather than sinner, but also how, through the "submerged levels of meaning" in her letters, she succeeds in suggesting the presence of female sexual desire. The conflict of modesty and sensuality that Anne Widnell describes in Lettres de Mistress Fanni Butlerd also figures in Lope de Vega's Comedia, according to Debra Collins Ames. She analyzes how the playwright uses allusions to Venus in order to suggest not only the personality traits of certain female characters but also their personal destiny. The paradoxical nature of Venus and her charms "evokes both harmony and strife" in the characters who seem to reembody the goddess. Thus

these papers present the female voice both from the point of view of a woman experiencing the conflict of pudor and curiditas and from that of a male writer portraying, and fearing, this conflict. Lewis C. Seifert, in "Disguising the Storyteller's 'Voice': Perrault's Recuperation of the Fairy Tale," examines the ways that a male writer recuperates the feminine for misogynistic purposes, ways that include the attribution of his tales to non-aristocratic women storytellers. The lesson that we learn from Perrault, he argues, can help male critics today to resist the exploitation of marginalized voices.

The time and effort of many people were necessary to create this collection of outstanding essays: the readers and members of the Editorial Board, who carefully evaluated the papers; the Executive Council, who advised and guided the editors; the Managing Editor, Sadek Anis, and Assistant Editor, Dale C. Hartkemeyer, who were always ready to put in time on the Review when their own time was so limited. Many thanks also go to our secretaries, Luan Mizer and Phyllis Oberacker, whose patience seemed unlimited. The Department of Romance Languages and Literatures recognizes and appreciates the contribution of everyone who made possible Volume VII.

# REDEFINING THE FANTASTIC

*Laurence M. Porter*

Is the fantastic an effect or a genre? Esthetic or text-centered critics of French Literature see it as a subset of the mid-nineteenth-century "art story," with a supernatural subject, lacking a narrative frame or subplots, and seen from the viewpoint of a non-omniscient protagonist. Several important groups of authors are excluded: women (George Sand and Claude Vignon), eighteenth-century figures (Cazotte, Beckford, Potocki), twentieth-century figures (Aymé, Céline, Robbe-Grillet, Supervielle, Tournier), and self-conscious authors (Nodier's Smarra, Gautier's Arria Marcella, Lautréamont's Chants de Maldoror). Pragmatic or reader-centered critics like Castex and Todorov see the fantastic as a transient effect of indeterminacy. Their examples are broadly inclusive, but their theory leads one to the awkward conclusion that a work ceases to be fantastic once the reader encounters a rational explanation in the conclusion--if not at the outset. Both groups of critics treat the fantastic as the subject (the raw materials for the story) or theme (interpretation and evaluation of the subject) of a narrative, but they do not explain why the fantastic is essentially narrative (rather than dramatic or lyric), and what effects if any it produces on the details of a work's style and structure. Todorov's Chapter 5, "Le Discours fantastique," constitutes the outstanding exception to my last remark, but it is brief, and after twenty years it needs to be redone.

The Literary Work as Sign. Taken as a whole, a literary text can be considered as a complex sign. To develop this notion, a convenient starting point is Ogden and Richards' classical distinction between symbol (i.e., signifier), thought (i.e., signified), and referent (9-12). Varying from context to context, the referent has no organic connection to the signifier. For example, the grapheme or sound-image "she" is a signifier whose signified is any of the following classes: human female, non-human female, or object or abstraction associated with the idea of a human female personality. The referent can be any member of any of these classes. What makes communication possible is the context of the message, and--to borrow a term from Charles Sanders Peirce--the interpretant (99-101). The latter is part of a code of "common knowledge" (socially, historically, and culturally relative). The referent of an entire literary work is its subject.

In non-fiction the referent is ostensibly part of the "real world"; in realistic fiction it is not part of the real world, but it still conforms to

"natural laws" (our intersubjective consensus concerning what is physically possible). In hypothetical fiction such as pastoral, science fiction, and utopias the referent may not conform to natural laws, but can be extrapolated from them. In fantasy literature, the referent violates such laws. Each subclass of fantasy explains these violations in different ways. The marvelous explains them by cultural conventions: saying "fairy-tale" has predisposed us to accept that witches' spells can alter nature, animals can talk, and fairy godmothers materialize to grant wishes. Fantasy proper presents violations as deriving from the arbitrary, unquestioned choice of the implied author. "Epiphany" (see Porter, 1987 [2]) justifies violations as personal and original religious visions vouchsafed to the narrator but pertinent to the spiritual life and destiny of us all. And the fantastic leaves them equivocal or unexplained. As one progresses through this taxonomy of fantasy literature, the increasingly tenuous status of key interpretants in the main narrative makes ever more likely the addition of a narrative frame offering supplementary interpretants characteristic of one of the other related subgenres. A heterogeneous composite narrative often results.

Obviously a "pure" fantastic is a theoretical construct, not a literary phenomenon. It would stand on the boundary between fantasy and incoherence. Real texts offer many partial clues to the interpretation of the fantastic. But the fantastic does not dramatize a controlling consciousness--unless it be in the narrative frame. Moreover, the fantastic plot does not motivate the intervention of the supernatural, and does not put forward either moralizing principles, or a program for reorganizing society. Epiphanies use the plot to motivate supernatural intervention, and they contain moralizing digressions. The marvelous uses conventions to motivate supernatural intervention, and may contain didactic elements.

Narrative Continuity and Disruption. Rhymed verse or theater may be fantastic, but the fantastic always involves a form of narration. And the primary illusion of narration is a metonymic chain of causes and effects. In its simplest form, such a chain describes one cause which produces an effect; this effect becomes in turn the cause of a second, and the second of a third. So, in the Garden of Eden the serpent tempts Eve; as a result, she falls; as a result she tempts Adam; as a result he falls; as a result Adam and Eve are expelled. Of course any narrative structure remains open on both ends. We never learn why the serpent tempted Eve nor why God created an animal capable of outwitting her. And at the termination of the chain in the Old Testament we never learn how Eve will achieve her revenge, how her offspring will bruise the serpent's head. But we take such initial or final

indeterminacy for granted--it is analogous to the lexical "unmarked choice" in linguistic theory--unless it is made explicit (examples: Genesis: "In the beginning, all was without form, and void"; end of Paradise Lost: "The world was all before them, where to choose / Their place of rest . . ."). A second way of "marking" narrative for indeterminacy--as in the fantastic and the detective story--is to dramatize (by which I mean personify) the perceiving consciousness that seeks to resolve it. The Book of Genesis does just that when after telling the story of the Fall "straight" from Adam and Eve's point of view, it retells it from God's point of view. He finds the humans hiding. By interrogating them to find out why, like a detective he retrospectively reconstructs the story of the Fall.

Both of these first two types of markedness involve a foregrounding of the hermeneutic code--textual riddles and the attempt to figure them out (Barthes 18-30). But a third way of marking a narrative, which occurs together with the first two in the fantastic, is to introduce overt disruption or discontinuity. Disruption and discontinuity shift the narrative axis from the metonymic or causal to the metaphoric, paradigmatic, or associational. By discontinuity I mean the abrupt change of setting, subject, and dramatis personae that characterizes, for example, authorial digressions and metalanguage in the "self-conscious tradition" of Cervantes, Rabelais, Diderot, Sterne, et al. By disruption I mean the intrusion of a new level of causality, such as interventions of the supernatural, that does not change the identity of the characters.

Classical dramatic theory calls such realignments of the plot "peripetias," but to describe narrative effects accurately, the definition of that term must be expanded to cover three major classes. Drama employs what I would call peripetias of situation, "reversals of fortune" dependent on changing material circumstances. In Racine's Phèdre, for example, the news that Theseus is missing in action transforms the situation: his Queen is emboldened to confess her desire for her stepson Hippolyte, thinking that sex with him would no longer be incest. A second peripety of situation, the news that Theseus actually has just returned, transforms Phèdre's avowal back into a crime. By multiplying such peripetias one can push tragedy into melodrama or even farther into farce. But they never generate cognitive dissonance because they can arise naturally from the known material world.

Peripetias of value correspond to the Archetype of Inversion as described in Jungian psychology and are commonplace in Romantic literature, whereby the negative becomes positive. Humiliation and defeat in the material order emerge as indispensable preludes to a spiritual triumph. The crucifixion makes the resurrection possible. The

reversed form, where the positive becomes negative, is the mainspring of satire. In either case, however, the transformations come pre-supplied with built-in rationalizations provided by conventional belief systems of politics, religion, and myth. Initiates do not experience Inversion as disruption.

It is, then, a third type, the peripety of category, that particularly characterizes fantasy and its subclass of the fantastic. Without effecting a transvaluation of values, such peripeties create context dislocation, a breakdown of the binary oppositions that allow us to structure and make sense of the world. Examples of such oppositions are self and other, divine and human, human and animal, innocence and experience, male and female, living and dead, animate and inanimate, past and future, here and elsewhere. Because such peripeties move the plot they can be distinguished from the analogous phenomenon of the incongruous juxtaposition in the lyric, in utterances such as Mallarmé's "the penult is dead."

In initial position peripeties of category characterize the non-disruptive modes of hypothetical fiction and fantasy. In medial position they characterize the fantastic. They result not in a reversal (as with Inversion) but in a blurring of binary oppositions (e.g., the "living dead" of ghost stories), resulting in what rhetoric would call "oxymoron." A mode of narrative intermediate between dislocation and discontinuity has posed special difficulties for critics, who tend to react by ignoring the works in question. I am referring to rationalized or "mimetic" discontinuity, wherein radical shifts in characters, subject, and setting result not from the ostensibly voluntary caprice of a self-conscious implied author but rather from the involuntary dream, vision, or madness of an "implied protagonist"--an overarching center of consciousness which can be inferred from the title or from allusions to unusual psychic states in a narrative or discursive frame, or from both. Such protagonists may or may not appear to be coextensive with the implied author. Examples of mimetic discontinuity would be Nodier's "Smarra," Gautier's "Arria Marcella," or Laucréamont's Chants de Maldoror.

Narrative Cohesion in the Fantastic. In all forms of narrative, the implied author--who stands in relation to a personified narrator as the historian stands in relation to the chronicler--palliates disruptions both with pervasive codes and also with localized transitional devices. I shall call such devices "embrayeurs," giving the linguistic term a new meaning of symbolic rationalizations (the oxymoron is intended) for a peripety of category. The major classes of such "objective correlatives" for ontological change are the costume, the magical object, and the threshold or its dynamic form of the journey.

The costume rationalizes a change of appearance; the magical object rationalizes a change of essence; the threshold or passage rationalizes a change of world. The disguise is the paradigmatic secondary rationalization for the change of appearance common throughout narrative and which usually amounts to a peripety of situation. Transformations in the fantastic appear uncontrollable and usually irrevocable, but donning a costume is voluntary and reversible. Thus such an action partakes of the marvelous rather than the fantastic, even if it combines with the motif of the magical object, for instance in the form of a costume that confers superpowers. Multiple changes of costume produce melodrama (cp. Balzac's La Dernière Incarnation de Vautrin); if they are hyperbolized to metamorphosis they can become parodic, as in Lautréamont's sixth Chant de Maldoror where the hero as master criminal can become a cricket or a cloud of mist at will.

The magical object is more characteristic of the marvelous rather than of the fantastic. A secondary rationalization for why it became available to or inflicted upon the hero or heroine often generates its own secondary narrative chain of causes and effects, the myth of the object's origins. These usually take the form of a story of ingestion (of a magical potion or spell, radiation, infection, etc.), accretion (how the hero acquires a garment, ring, weapon, or helper with supernatural powers), or expulsion (the soul or vital essence of a protagonist becomes lodged in an external object such as an animal, statue, crystal, egg, etc). Describing such objects and events and their origins provides a conventional or pseudo-explanation for the transformation, and the cohesion of the secondary metonymic chain that results can reinforce by juxtaposition the illusion of continuity in the disrupted primary chain. In Goethe's Faust, for example, the hero is rejuvenated by thirty years after sealing a pact with the Devil. But the Devil must seek help, for he cannot accomplish the peripety of category old/young by himself. Faust must quaff a potion prepared by witches. These are aided in turn by the technical equipment of their elaborately-depicted kitchen. And there a third level of personified transitional agents, simian familiars, work as scullions. Thus to over-rationalize an already-accepted myth, of course, amounts to undercutting it through tacit irony.

Finally, widespread in narrative but particularly characteristic of the fantastic is a change from one world to another with different physical laws. The underlying assumption is the reverse of the magical principle of contagion: departing from the hic et nunc familiar to the reader, shifting to an unfamiliar time or place, renders bizarre events more plausible. Such shifts can be accomplished in a phrase, by an

initial deictic gesture. When reinforced by a conventional system of beliefs, such a transposition may be convincing enough. In non-conventional fantasy, however, it usually is reinforced by a substantial initial and defamiliarizing description. The fantastic, being a disruptive genre, tends to avoid such description. But it shares with other fantasy an emphasis on liminality as a pseudo-explanation for a change of worlds. If the author evokes a literal or metaphorical threshold, the passage between two states of being is made more plausible; the threshold simultaneously suggests a boundary and the possibility of crossing it. In the objective mode one enters a new world through a gateway such as a ship, space ship, bridge, time machine, wardrobe, mirror, burrow, or door. The resulting shift is further reinforced metonymically when the passage or the journey to a distant place is described. Such a device has of course prevailed in literature since the Odyssey and the medieval Romance of Alexander. What strikes one is how common it remains in nineteenth-century writers of the fantastic and related genres: Cazotte's and Gautier's Italy, Nodier's Greece or Scotland, Mérimée's Southern France, Villiers' United States are cases in point. In contrast the realistic novel prefers to depict protagonists stuck in one place while dreaming of travel, or else uses travel to erase rather than to create difference. (Compare Baudelaire's "Le Voyage" and the terse "il voyagea" of Flaubert's Education sentimentale).

The subjective mode (La Fée aux Miettes, Aurélia, La Tentation de saint Antoine, Les Chants de Maldoror, "La Cafetière," "La Morte amoureuse" and many others) rationalizes disruption by shifting the protagonist's mode of perception from rational waking consciousness to a second state such as dreaming, vision, hallucination, or madness. The objective and subjective can be combined by a change of lighting or weather, as in Bulwer-Lytton's and Snoopy's notorious cliché, "It was a dark and stormy night," where the diurnal cycle and meteorological phenomena serve as equivocal metaphors for either altered perception or for the intervention of an alien power. To multiply such transitions can generate a Romantic irony (compare the example from Faust cited above) whereby the implied author both expresses and mocks his own longing for ontological change. In Nodier's La Fée aux Miettes, for example, the frame narrator makes four different moves in order to encounter the hero of the central visionary story: the sun sets; he falls asleep and dreams; he journeys from France to Scotland; and there he visits a madhouse whose inmate has himself reached Scotland via a fantastic voyage. "Refantasticizing" the rationalizing transitional device of course subverts it.

In addition to such localized transitions, all fiction may deploy

pervasive or supersegmental ones. These are implicit or explicit anticipations of what is to come. Within this domain, what is particularly typical of the fantastic (and of the detective story) is what I would call "metonymic debris": clues unrecognized as such at the time, apparently neutral descriptive details that come to be understood retrospectively as having announced the central disruptive transformation. It is as if the explosion of casuality in the latter threw shards of fragmented connectedness throughout the work. Thus in The Turn of the Screw, for example, the narrator hears a footfall and a child's distant cry during her first night in the isolated mansion, before she knows that her story will turn on the peripeties of category protector/violator, innocence/corruption, and living/dead--the former servants' ghosts seducing and abusing children.

The Hermeneutic Code. Mystery, suspense, and the fantastic all foreground the hermeneutic code (Barthes 75-89). On the quest for understanding hangs the story. The presence of a protagonist who persists in trying to figure things out creates a secondary effect of cohesion that compensates for the primary disruption characteristic of these genres. Whereas the hero of a fairy story never stops to wonder why it is that animals talk, good fairies grant wishes, and dragons breathe fire, the protagonists of the other genres spend most of their time puzzling over why things are happening as they do. Oedipus as hero of the marvelous, for example, may have to solve a riddle posed by the sphinx in order to advance the narrative, but the presence and purposes of that sphinx are not riddles in and of themselves. Oedipus as hero of a suspense narrative, in contrast, must drop everything else to try to learn why a mysterious plague is afflicting his city. In suspense the audience knows in advance the outcome, but not how the metonymic chain will lead there. The characters know the point of departure but not the point of arrival. In mystery (e.g., detective) stories the characters know the point of arrival--such as an accomplished murder or other crime--but not the point of departure, the primary agent and motive toward which they must proceed by reconstruction of the past.

In mysteries and in suspense stories the cultural code--tried and true methods of investigation and detection--work to resolve the hermeneutic problem. But in the fantastic the cultural code works against a solution, since everything that the protagonist already knows will prove useless. Mystery, suspense and the fantastic, however, all stress epistemological relativism. In mysteries the perpetrator knows how the crucial deed was done, but not how to evade detection; the detective knows how to find the perpetrator, but not how the deed was

done. Suspense maintains the possibility of dramatic irony which derives from contrasting the knowledge of an audience of initiates with the ignorance of the characters. And the fantastic preserves the indeterminacy that allows us to choose between two or several possible solutions. So often it becomes a Rohrschach test for critics. Does The Turn of the Screw involve homosexual child abuse by ghosts, or delusions fueled by the governess's frustrated heterosexual impulses? It depends on whom you read. And who was the killer in Mérimée's "La Vénus d'Ille"? One might think the possibilities were limited to the Spaniard or the statue, but readers have proposed the narrator and even the bride herself, depending on their psychic predisposition (see Porter, 1982). Much of the action in many fantastic tales consists in exploring--or even debating--various hypotheses, or as in Maupassant's "Le Horla," actually conducting physical experiments.

A helpful test case for sharpening the distinction between the fantastic and the mystery is stories of a master criminal. He may never be caught, but his powers differ only in degree and not in kind from those of the investigator. He frequently leaves an actual or metaphorical "signature"--such as a *modus operandi*--at the scene of the crime to confirm (so to speak) his responsibility. His action is iterative and can therefore become to a certain extent routinized, whereas the fantastic act remains a singulative act. One cannot therefore verify a theory about the cause of a fantastic act by looking for replication. And agency in the fantastic thereby remains equivocal: the possibility of the narrator's mental derangement or mythomania never can be entirely ruled out.

Must indeterminacy be preserved until the very end if we are to call a story "fantastic"? This query raises complex issues. Either rationalistic or superstitious explanations may remain equivocal. An example of the first is Nodier's "Inès de las Sierras"; of the second, "La Vénus d'Ille"; and of both at once, Nodier's "Jean-François les bas-bleus." A narrative may undermine its own authority by implying the unreliability of the narrator, as in "La Vénus d'Ille," The Turn of the Screw, or Diinn. The self-conscious device of the frame narrator enhances the equivocal character of the fantastic. On the one hand, the frame narrator reinforces the credibility of the fantastic by remaining behind to report the adventures of the central protagonist, who has been engulfed by the supernatural, as in Balzac's Louis Lambert, Nodier's La Fée aux Miettes, James's The Turn of the Screw, Thomas Mann's Doktor Faustus, Bulgakov's The Master and Margarita, and so forth. On the other hand, by staying in our world rather than accompanying the protagonist into the other one, the frame narrator

calls into question the reality either of that other world or of his status as eye-witness. A simple non-fantastic example with parallel consequences can be adduced from La Chanson de Roland. If everyone in the rearguard was killed, how can we know the details of the battle? Belatedly, Turoldus deals with that question by introducing an episodic witness who survived the massacre. But if he was alive, why did he not rally to the side of his vastly outnumbered friends? Finally, the need to create two narrators rather than one--the frame narrator and the protagonist--to tell the story emphasizes the relativity of our perceptions and the incompleteness of our knowledge.

In the twentieth century, film offers a privileged medium for the fantastic, because the simultaneous presentation of information on the visual and on the verbal channels can preserve indeterminacy. In the recent Argentine movie, "Hombre mirando al sudeste," for example, a man named Rantes mysteriously appears in an insane asylum. During the intake interview with a psychiatrist, he claims to have come from another planet to help rescue the oppressed and suffering peoples of the earth. Judging from his words alone, he appears a paranoid schizophrenic. At the same time, many visual effects could support either the hypothesis that he is a madman of genius, or that his story is true: the strange hieroglyphic language that he writes, or his great influence on others when the other inmates all line up quietly at night to talk with him, or when he takes over conducting a concert and sets everyone dancing for joy. Finally, two isolated visual effects demonstrate his telekinetic powers and thereby corroborate his story. Filmmakers' and audiences' recent fascination with high-budget special effects has pushed most films with supernatural referents frankly into the domain of the marvelous, but film still possesses extraordinary potentialities for realizing the fantastic.

The Periodization of the Fantastic. The critical factor in the rise of the fantastic appears to have been the influence of John Locke's Essay concerning Human Understanding (1690) which permeated French Enlightenment thought throughout the eighteenth century. By mid-century the notion of the relativity of our perceptions had become a commonplace. It merged with the anti-Enlightenment stance of Jacques Cazotte (during the latter part of his career) in his pioneering pre-fantastic work, Le Diable amoureux (see Porter, 1978). Cazotte no longer conceived of the human mind as active, as invading, dominating and controlling the environment, but rather as the passive recipient of revelation flowing from the supernatural or unconscious to the human subject. Indeed, the she-devil Biondetta's invitation to the hero Alvarez--"te soumettre avec moi, les hommes, les éléments, la nature entière"--seems a representation of the hubris of

Enlightenment scientism (Rieger 83-91). About the same time in England, the Gothic novel with its hidden and convoluted spaces created an objective correlative to the unconscious and therefore uncontrollable regions of the mind as the principal theater for events. In contrast to E.T.A. Hoffmann, an early creator of a "pure" fantastic, the French Romantics Nodier, Gautier, and Mérimée--the latter two only in the first part of their career--still suffered from what one might call "the bad conscience of the fantastic," the desire to create verisimilitude. Thus they introduce explanatory prefaces and epilogues or rely on spatial displacement to exotic foreign lands, on the assumption that the fantastic could not stand by itself in the here and now. Nodier's pioneering essay, "Du fantastique en littérature," erases its specificity by associating it with the ancient tradition of the marvelous from Homer on.

From the later Mérimée, Villiers, and Maupassant on, the "high fantastic" liberated itself from authorial commentary and metalanguage. Authors of the mid-nineteenth century often studied medical treatises on psychopathology (see Gordon), but they "erased" these sources when they wrote their tales. Huysmans in A rebours and Maupassant in "Le Horla" (the 1886 version takes place in a madhouse; this telltale setting vanishes in 1887) are obvious cases in point (see Porter, 1987-2). The advent of the New New Novel in 1965, with its increased emphasis on text production, led to the parodic pastiche of the fantastic in Robbe-Grillet's Djinn of 1981. There the excessive accumulation of stock devices for creating category confusion undercuts the dramatic force of indeterminacy.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, rapid technological progress has eroded the range of possibilities for the marvelous; mass literacy has turned superstitions like vampirism into familiar jokes (e.g., "Love at First Bite"); and psychoanalysis has transformed the visionary narrator of fantasy into the unreliable narrator suffering from mental illness in such constructions of "la folie raisonneuse" as Michel Tournier's Le Roi des Aulnes or "Le Fétichiste." Domains of the traditional fantastic have become increasingly routinized as popular subgenres analogous to dead metaphors (e.g., the drugstore Gothic). Meanwhile the bomb, the concentration camp, genocide, the population explosion and rapid ecological decay have preoccupied authors with the result that the individual disasters of fantastic literature have been increasingly superseded by the collective disasters of the apocalyptic literature predominant since World War II.<sup>2</sup>

Conclusion. I would define the fantastic, in France at least, as a literary genre characterized by a specific cause, effect, and outcome. The cause is a peripety of category that creates a medial disruption of

the narrative chain. The effect is a sustained hermeneutic act by the main character--an attempt to figure things out. And the outcome is a blocked, multiple, or equivocal solution that preserves indeterminacy for both character and reader. The addition of a rationalizing explanatory frame often creates a hybrid genre. In the face of disruption, the character tries to regain verbal control with a characteristic rhetoric (which limitations of space do not permit me to examine here--for an outstanding example see The Turn of the Screw) that compensates for the ungovernable character of reality. Such rhetoric includes explicit reticence (to suppress at least verbally what is fearsome); explicit assertions of helplessness (if emotions and events cannot be controlled, they can at least be understood), retrospective cognition (I know too late but at least I know), and hyperbole plus judgmental polarization that impose a moralizing structure on what is physically overwhelming (in the domain of the esthetic, compare the cliché, "I don't know much about art, but I know what I like"). On the level of narrative cohesion, the disruption created by the intrusion of a supernatural causal principle is compensated by a proliferation of transitional devices and of subplots (explaining, for example, where the magical potion or ring came from). Thus you could say that although the fantastic is a local effect, it has pervasive causes like an infection that gives rise to a fever and antibodies, or a frontier battle which diverts the energies of the remainder of the country toward creating training camps, munitions factories, intelligence operations, and supply lines.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>For example, Djinn in her first appearance is both human and inanimate, French and foreign, male and female, natural and supernatural.

<sup>2</sup>Examples of such literature are Slaughterhouse-5, The Tin Drum, Le Roi des Aulnes, La Route des Flandres, Doktor Faustus, La Peste, and so forth.

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## DISGUISED THE STORYTELLER'S "VOICE": PERRAULT'S RECUPERATION OF THE FAIRY TALE

*Lewis C. Seifert*

From the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, bourgeois and aristocratic writers throughout Europe composed "literary" fairy tales extrapolated from folktales transmitted orally by peasants.<sup>1</sup> After Straparola, Basile, and Sarnelli in Italy, Perrault was among the first writers in seventeenth-century France to (re)write fairy tales based on popular folklore sources.<sup>2</sup> In his *Contes en Vers* (1695) and his *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* (1697), he creates a female origin for these tales by attributing them to non-aristocratic women storytellers--*grand-mères*, *gouvernantes*, *nourrices*, and *mies*. Although historical research has shown that peasant *men* also told folktales (Robert 7), Perrault's reference to the oral tradition restricts the tales' larger "reality" of transmission to a female origin, which he then openly recuperates.<sup>3</sup> Existing work on Perrault has largely ignored the question of this gender-inscribed recuperation, concentrating instead on his reworking of "literary" and folklore sources.<sup>4</sup> In considering the storyteller's recuperation in these tales, then, I will examine the textual strategies that undergird Perrault's disguised "voice," that is, his appropriation of a storytelling tradition that he himself posits as belonging to women. Moreover, in spite of (or, perhaps, because of) Perrault's distance from our own historical moment, I will explore what the storyteller's recuperation tells us about the problems inherent in literary critics' appropriation of marginal "voices," different from their own, in order to subvert dominant ideologies. More specifically, considering the position from which I am writing, I would like to consider why I and other men reading texts as "feminists" must problematize the position from which we speak about women.<sup>5</sup>

### 1. Perrault's Oppositional Tales

In the preface to the *Contes en vers*, Perrault presents a defense of the fairy tale for those readers ". . . qui ne se payent pas de raisons et qui ne peuvent être touchés que par l'autorité et par l'exemple des Anciens . . ." (3). Indeed, in this discourse on the genre and throughout the two collections of tales, there are many indications that these texts are an extension of the "Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes." As a "modernist" genre, Perrault's fairy tales present themselves as a polemical rewriting of the fable, a

"classical" genre valorized by the Anciens. Rather than adhering to a (written) model from Greek or Roman antiquity, his tales are the honnête versions of the peasants' Contes faits à plaisir, the Contes de vieille, which, according to the "je," are told ". . . tous les jours à des Enfants par leurs Gouvernantes et par leurs Grand-mères" (4).<sup>6</sup> In this preface, Perrault even defends the pedagogical superiority of these fairy tales over the ancient fable. By subversively inverting the terms conte and fable as they are used in the seventeenth century (as well as the connotations which the Anciens attach to them), he undercuts the instructional raison d'être of the Anciens' fables:

Je prétends même que mes Fables méritent mieux d'être racontées que la plupart des Contes anciens, et particulièrement celui de la Matrone d'Ephèse et celui de Psyché, si l'on les regarde du côté de la Morale, chose principale dans toute sorte de Fables, et pour laquelle elles doivent avoir été faites. (4; emphasis added)

The indigenous French fables are morally superior to the Anciens' contes because the peasant storytellers [nos aïeux]

. . . ont toujours eu un très grand soin que leurs contes renfermassent une moralité louable et instructive. Partout la vertu y est récompensée, et partout le vice y est puni. Ils tendent tous à faire voir l'avantage qu'il y a d'être honnête, patient, avisé, laborieux, obéissant, et le mal qui arrive à ceux qui ne le sont pas. (5)

The nascent bourgeois work ethic in this quote can be found in the moralités at the end of many of the eleven tales,<sup>7</sup> and it is part of the general moralizing stance that likens them structurally to La Fontaine's Fables. Both Perrault's and La Fontaine's petits genres show the illusory grandeur of what many seventeenth-century theorists considered to be the grands genres (tragédies, épopées, etc.). Yet, not only does the moralité express maxims critical of the "false" heroic ideal in the grands genres, but it often contradicts the narrative and relocates the tale's allegorical "meaning" in the dialectical tension between the fable--that is, the narrative--and the moralité at the end. In Les Fées, for instance, the two moralités at the end of the tale posit a contradictory meaning for the narrative:

### MORALITÉ

Les Diamants et les Pistoles  
 Peuvent beaucoup sur les Esprits;  
 Cependant les douces paroles  
 Ont encor plus de force, et sont d'un plus grand prix.

### AUTRE MORALITÉ

L'Honnêteté coûte des soins,  
 Et veut un peu de complaisance,  
 Mais tôt ou tard elle a sa récompense,  
 Et souvent dans le temps qu'on y pense le moins. (149-150)

These two moralités constitute an ironic reversal of the narrative: in the end, the heroine is not rewarded for her "douces paroles," but rather for the wealth that the prince finds in her gift of being able to "speak" flowers and jewels (which the fairy had given her ". . . pour voir jusqu'où irait l'honnêteté de cette fille" [148]). The narrative bears this out quite explicitly:

Le fils du Roi, qui vit sortir de sa bouche cinq ou six Perles, et autant de Diamants, la pria de lui dire d'où cela lui venait. Elle lui conta toute son aventure. Le fils du Roi en devint amoureux, et considérant qu'un tel don valait mieux que tout ce qu'on pouvait donner en mariage à un autre, l'emmena au Palais du Roi son père, où il l'épousa.

There is an undecidability between the valorization of the "douces paroles" and "l'honnêteté" in the moralités and the prince's obedience to economic advantage (instead of the aristocratic code) in the narrative. Thus, this contradictory tale gives its readers the opportunity to question the moral and political authority of the "fils" and the "Roi." This dialectic, however, is just one example of the tales' ambiguous relationship to power, for, as Louis Marin's work has shown, other self-subversive textual strategies call into question the legitimacy of "literary" and political power.<sup>8</sup>

Just as the dialectic between the moralité and the fable, among other means, can serve to question the authority of political power, so too Perrault's (re)writing of the conte de fées as a genre questions the Anciens' authority to determine "literary" and philosophical Truth and power. While the Anciens maintain the immutable superiority of

"classical" literature, these tales assert that their own moral value comes from being transmutations of a contemporary popular tradition. Drawing on the "modernist" idea of the progress of morals through time, Perrault's fables,\* in distinction to La Fontaine's, rely on a merveilleux of indigenous sources and not on pagan mythology. In addition, this Gallic merveilleux is constructed in Perrault's tales as the creation of women storytellers. As Elizabeth Berg has shown, the Modernes saw in women a new criterion for judgment (which paralleled their powerful new force as readers in late seventeenth-century France) whereby (their) innate "good taste"--and not erudition--was conceived as the basis for the recognition of Truth (138-139).<sup>9</sup> As Perrault points out in his Parallèles des Anciens et des Modernes, the Anciens' insistence on erudition is a form of exclusion, a self-interest in the control of "literary" judgments, whereas the "naturally sensitive woman's" recognition of "literary" quality allows Truth to be grasped by all who have "good taste" (le bon goût) (Berg 139-140). Thus, by taking the disguise of a peasant woman's "voice," the tale-teller engages in a debate that extends beyond the "moral" value of the conte de fées. The women storytellers whom Perrault's tales give as their "source" assure the subversion of the Anciens' authority over "literary" and philosophical judgments.

## 2. The Limits of Perrault's Recuperation

Post-structuralist theory teaches us that every text contains blind spots that reproduce aspects of the dominant ideologies within which it signifies. In Perrault's tales, while certain oppositional discourses contest political and philosophical authority, these are nonetheless limited by the construction of women as supposed readers and as heroines.

Like all the "literary" fairy tales written at the end of the seventeenth century in France, Perrault's tales were the written version of a jeu d'esprit played in the salons, of which women were the major participants (Robert 83-84; Baader 226). In keeping with this aristocratic and/or bourgeois female origin (which, unlike his reference to the peasant-woman "source," remains unnamed), Perrault inscribes a consciousness of his texts' lectrices that gives them a privileged position. The only dédicaces found in the two recueils are addressed to women (the dédicaces introducing Grisélidis and the Histoires ou contes du temps passé) and that the preface to the Contes en vers strategically concludes its defense of the conte de fées with a "madrigal" composed by Perrault's niece, Marie-Jeanne Lhéritier--textual indications that the storyteller's disguise of a peasant woman's "voice" may be a strategy to seduce the lectrices. As

the explicit and implicit destinataires of the tales, the lectrices are drawn into the storytelling while regarding the disguised male narrator as belonging to the aristocratic "female community of tale-tellers"<sup>10</sup> (which the conteuses themselves created from a tradition attributed to peasant women). Furthermore, when this disguise--especially as found in the Contes en vers--is contrasted with the explicit recuperation of the female "voice" in the preface to the Histoires ou contes du temps passé, the peasant and salon female storytellers become the "natural," oral sources for the "cultivated" male conteur's written tales. Woman is reified in the stereotypical position of physis--orality and Nature--while Man, the conteur in this case, assumes the role of technè--writing and Culture.

Perrault's appropriation of the peasant and the salon "female communities" in his tales does not affirm the status of women in society, then, but serves rather to create a homosocial bonding<sup>11</sup> between lecteurs--and this at the expense of represented women. The lectrices must adhere to a male "gaze"<sup>12</sup> that constitutes an "ideal" Woman and uses her as the object of (men's) joking.<sup>13</sup> This is especially apparent in the moralités at the end of many of these tales where the heroine's "morally" illustrious example is used as a means of pointing out the "immoral" behavior of contemporary women. At the end of La Belle au bois dormant, for instance, Sleeping Beauty's hundred-year sleep is the occasion for a masculinist crack about women's impatience, if not their promiscuity:

Attendre quelque temps pour avoir un Epoux,  
 Riche, bien fait, galant et doux,  
 La chose est assez naturelle,  
 Mais l'attendre cent ans, et toujours en dormant,  
 On ne trouve plus de femelle,  
 Qui dort si tranquillement. (107)

Similarly, the second moralité at the end of La Barbe bleue comically insists that husbands are more likely to be henpecked than to be wife-killers resembling Bluebeard:

Pour peu qu'on ait l'esprit sensé,  
 Et que du Monde on sache le grimoire,  
 On voit bientôt que cette histoire  
 Est un conte du temps passé;  
 Il n'est plus d'Epoux si terrible,  
 Ni qui demande l'impossible,  
 Fût-il malcontent et jaloux.

Près de sa femme on le voit filer doux;  
 Et de quelque couleur que sa harbe puisse être,  
 On a peine à juger qui des deux est le maître. (129)

While both of these moralités humorously overturn the narrative structures for which they are conventionally supposed to give maxims, the position of the Woman in the conjugal paradigm is nonetheless exploited for the comic potential it carries for the lecteurs. The Woman in these moralités mediates the bonding between the narrator and the lecteurs while the lectrices are required to adopt the position of the misogynistic reader.

Beyond the misogyny of the moralités, however, the heroines in the tales' narratives are almost always passive, submissive, and sometimes even masochistic. Yet it is through their examples that the narrator constructs his "ideal" Woman. Among other "qualities" such as graciousness (la bonne grâce) and unquestioning love, one of the most obsessive themes throughout these tales is the impatience of real women compared with the patience of the narrator's Woman. In Le Petit chaperon rouge and La Barbe bleue, the heroine is punished for her impatience (which, in a psychoanalytic perspective, can be interpreted as sexual "impatience").<sup>14</sup> In Les Fées, Peau d'Âne, Cendrillon, La Belle au bois dormant, and Griselidis, however, the heroine's patience is valorized by the narrative as a virtue of the "ideal" Woman, even if this "quality" on her part results in her being objectified by the hero. Griselidis's patience, for instance, which the despotic and sadistic Prince tests--by separating her from their daughter, repudiating her, and then asking her to bless his incestuous marriage with their daughter--ultimately allows her to conform to his ideal of ". . . une jeune Beauté / Sans orgueil et sans vanité, / D'une obéissance achevée, / D'une patience éprouvée, / Et qui n'ait point de volonté" (20). Although the storyteller goes to great lengths to invite interpretation of this text<sup>15</sup>--that is, to incite a questioning of the validity of power being held by the despotic few--it is nevertheless true that this contestation is produced at the expense of Griselidis and her patience. Since power is, textually, on the side of the Prince, she has no option but to be patient. Yet, the opposition to despotic power is also mediated by the lectrice to whom the narrator dedicates the tale in the letter "A Mademoiselle \*\*." It is to her that the narrating "je" addresses his jokes about the impatience of Parisian women compared with Griselidis's exemplary behavior, while admitting the outdated nature of his tale:

Ainsi je vois que de toutes façons,

Griselidis y [à Paris] sera peu prisée,  
 Et qu'elle y donnera matière de risée,  
 Par ses trop antiques leçons.

Ce n'est pas que la Patience  
 Ne soit une vertu des Dames de Paris,  
 Mais par un long usage elles ont la science  
 De la faire exercer par leurs propres maris. (16)

The narrator gives the privileged *lectrice* a tale in which he subverts the narrative's "moral" efficacy and pokes fun at Parisian women. But the situation of this *lectrice* is also endemic of the general representation of women in Perrault's tales. The oppositional discourse that these tales constitute finds its limits in the status they imply for their *lectrices* and heroines. Their sexual and intellectual difference allows the "modernist" storyteller to keep the questioning of political and "literary" authority among men.<sup>16</sup>

The storyteller in Perrault's tales maintains an ambivalent relationship with the "originary" women tale-tellers: he both posits them as the "source" for his disguise, his (re)writing of "their" tales, and uses them as mediator of a homosocial bond by which men retain their intellectual authority at the expense of women. Similar to most "literary" fairy tales, these *contes* reduce the utopian "time that never was" of their *il était une fois* . . . time-frame to a "time that ever was/is" of the dominant patriarchy. But while Perrault's tales are not unusual in their limiting of the utopian function of the *conte de fées*, their recuperation of marginalized "voices" can nonetheless cause us to reflect on the consequences of such an appropriation. Do we not risk repeating implicitly what Perrault does explicitly with his disguise? By not problematizing the position from which we as critics speak on behalf of "voices" different from our own because of gender, sexual preference, economic status, or race, are we not objectifying and recuperating them for our own ends? Since I am a man reading *as* a woman, my recuperation of the Other is a question: how can I problematize the position from which I speak about women so as not to reduce them to the elusive trope of "woman" for the subversion of dominant ideologies? My recuperation is in danger of being all too similar to Perrault's, so I must resist this exploitation of the Other by constantly questioning and highlighting the difference of my own "voice."<sup>17</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>See Apel for an historical survey of this "genre" throughout Europe.

<sup>2</sup>However, he was not the first conteur to publish fairy tales during this period. M<sup>me</sup> d'Aulnoy's "L'île de la félicité" (1690), M<sup>lle</sup> Bernard's "Le Prince Rosier" and "Riquet à la Houppe" (1695), and M<sup>lle</sup> Lhéritier's "Les Enchantements de l'éloquence" and "L'Adroite Princesse" (1695), were the first published prose fairy tales, which are part of the larger mode des contes de fées analyzed by, among others, Storer and Barchilon. It is important to note that, of the twelve conteuses, seven were women: M<sup>me</sup> d'Aulnoy, M<sup>me</sup> d'Auneuil, M<sup>lle</sup> Bernard, M<sup>me</sup> Durand, M<sup>lle</sup> de La Force, M<sup>lle</sup> Lhéritier, M<sup>me</sup> de Murat. (The male conteurs were Le Noble, Mailly, Nodot, Perrault, and Préchac.) In addition, more than two-thirds of all the fairy tales published from 1690 to 1710 were written by women.

<sup>3</sup>This is especially evident in the preface to the Histoires ou contes du temps passé where the "je" identifies himself as Perrault's son, P. Darmaucour. This "signature" has been at the center of the debate over this volume's authorship which has preoccupied readers ever since its publication. See Soriano, the introduction in Rouger's edition of the tales, and, more recently, Morgan, for various summaries and viewpoints on this question. My concern here, however, is not to argue for one or the other position, but rather to point out that the "je" in this "paratext" constructs an identity which is (and, at the end of the seventeenth-century, was) readily recognizable as that of Perrault's son. Given the gender of this "signature," the storytelling in this recueil then becomes an explicit appropriation of a narration that is assumed by a "genderless," universal "I" in the Contes en vers.

<sup>4</sup>This is especially true for Barchilon, Di Scanno, Morgan, and Storer. While Loskoutoff, Marin (La Parole mangée), and Robert make note of this recuperation, they do not consider its consequences for the representation of women in these texts.

<sup>5</sup>The question of male critics' recuperation of feminism has been widely debated, most recently in the anthology of essays edited by Jardine and Smith.

<sup>6</sup>Loskoutoff analyzes what he calls the "surenchère enfantine" of Perrault's tales as being a "literary" game among adults, but he does not speculate about the significance of this reinfantilization.

<sup>7</sup>See, for example, the moralité that concludes Les Souhaits ridicules:

Bien est donc vrai qu'aux hommes misérables,  
 Aveugles, imprudents, inquiets, variables,  
 Pas n'appartient de faire des souhaits,  
 Et que peu d'entre eux sont capables  
 De bien user des dons que le Ciel leur a faits. (85-86)

<sup>8</sup>See Marin's work on specific tales in Le Récit est un piège and La Parole mangée.

<sup>9</sup>According to Fumaroli, the Modernes' valorization of women's "good taste" was based in part on what was perceived to be their "natural" link to language: "Parmi ces 'ignorans', héritiers spirituels d'un Age d'or de la langue et des moeurs françaises, il faut compter les femmes, en principe peu ou pas savantes, mais qui justement, indemnes de latin, sont tenues dans les rangs de la société polie pour plus proches des sources de la langue et de son 'génie' particulier" (158-59). Yet, as Berg shows, the Modernes used this construction of women's "natural" language to further their own cause in the querelle and neglected to include the concerns of real women in their "deconstruction" of the Anciens' position. This use of the figure of woman by the Modernes resembles the practices of certain strains of post-structuralism when making Woman a trope for the excess that can subvert dominant hegemonic systems.

<sup>10</sup>I adopt the term "female community of tale-tellers" from Rowe's "community of female storytellers" (61). She posits this notion as an intertextual precondition for male writers' (including male fairy tale writers') ability to create narrative fictions.

<sup>11</sup>This concept, which is widely discussed in feminist criticism and theory, is often used to describe a sublimated homosexuality prevalent in all patriarchal institutions. See especially Sedgwick, Irigaray and Gallop (62-68) on this notion.

<sup>12</sup>I borrow this term from feminist work in film theory. See especially Mulvey.

<sup>13</sup>This concept emerges from Freud's work on Witz, in which the absent female predicates the production of sexual jokes.

<sup>14</sup>See, for example, Zipes' (28-30) and Lewis' readings of these tales.

<sup>15</sup>The letter "A Monsieur \*\*\* en lui envoyant Grisélidis" which follows the tale includes such an interpretation. See Farrell for an analysis of the questioning of power relations in Grisélidis.

<sup>16</sup>Of course, Perrault's recuperation of a female "voice" is not the only limit to the oppositionality of his tales. For instance, his questioning of power is tempered in the dedication letter of the Histoires ou contes du temps passé when the "je" presents the tales as a means of legitimizing the established social order:

Il est vrai que ces Contes donnent une image de ce qui se passe dans les moindres Familles, où la louable impatience d'instruire les enfants fait imaginer des Histoires dépourvues de raison, pour s'accommoder à ces mêmes enfants qui n'en ont pas encore; mais à qui convient-il mieux de connaître comment vivent les Peuples, qu'aux Personnes que le Ciel destine à les conduire? Le désir de cette connaissance a poussé des Héros, et même des Héros de votre Race, jusque dans des huttes et des cabanes, pour y voir de près et par eux-même ce qui s'y passait de plus particulier: cette connaissance leur ayant paru nécessaire pour leur parfaite instruction (90).

<sup>17</sup>I am grateful to Lynne Huffer, Cynthia Skenzai, and Domna Stanton for their comments on an earlier version of this essay.

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# THE HIDDEN SEXUAL SUBTEXT IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FEMININE DISCOURSE: MME RICCOBONI'S LETTRES DE MISTRESS FANNI BUTLERD

*Anne Widnell*

In 1757 an epistolary novel, Lettres de Mistress Fanni Butlerd à Milord Charles Alfred, Comte d'Erford, was published. It was the first novel of Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni, then forty-four years old and an actress at the Comédie Italienne, who was to become one of the most widely read novelists of her time. The Lettres were an immediate success, as is indicated by the rapid sale of the first edition (Crosby 175-83) and the fifteen or so reprintings which followed (Martin 388). It was widely translated and even, surprisingly, turned up in American editions in North Carolina (Nicholls 285-88).

The Lettres de Fanni Butlerd belong to the epistolary genre that was increasingly in vogue around the middle of the eighteenth century. The simplicity of the plot is striking; there are no tirades or stories within stories. Instead, the structure of the novel is linear and chronological. The novel consists of 116 letters written over a period of approximately eight months by a young Englishwoman, Fanni, to her lover, Lord Alfred, a peer of the realm. The first 43 letters cover a period of nine weeks and describe Fanni's increasing involvement with Lord Alfred. At first she struggles to overcome her feelings, but Lord Alfred's persistence and repeated protestations of love wear down her resistance and she gives in. Less than two weeks after their liaison has begun, Lord Alfred leaves on a military expedition, and the next 46 letters from Fanni are written during his six weeks of absence. These letters overflow at first with her all-consuming love for Lord Alfred; gradually, however, Fanni notices a lessening response in Lord Alfred's answers and she begins to suffer doubts and misgivings. The final part of the novel consists of the 27 letters Fanni writes to Lord Alfred after his return. Her happiness on being reunited with her lover is fleeting, for Lord Alfred soon confirms her worst fears: he informs her he is making a "mariage de convenance" to a young noblewoman. He wishes to keep Fanni as his mistress, but she breaks off with him, bitterly conscious that she has let herself be used and deceived. Her last letter ends with a harsh tirade against men in general and Lord Alfred in particular.

The Lettres de Fanni Butlerd provide an interesting illustration of the harsh dilemma facing the eighteenth-century upper-class woman. She was denied an education or access to any real occupation and told

to lead "une vie obscure mais tranquille" (Lambert 74; see also 43-45). Small wonder then that lively young women such as Fanni, left with long days to fill with inessentials, were given, in the words of the critic Ruth Perry, to "illusory brooding about romance when they had so little to give their lives stability or meaning . . . . The only appropriate ambition of a lady of quality was to bend all efforts to the art of pleasing" (146-49). But although the lady's chief duty was to please and to attract, she herself was not supposed to feel attraction or to become involved either emotionally or sexually. Fanni herself lucidly describes the stringent sexual double standard of the times, which allowed a man full license but demanded chastity of a woman. Before she succumbs to Lord Alfred, she writes to him as follows:

Vous risquez, dites-vous, autant que moi. Vous, Mylord! Eh quels dangers, quels périls votre sexe peut-il redouter en se livrant à ses désirs? Le ridicule préjugé qui vous permet tout, vous affranchit de la peine la plus vive qui soit attachée aux foiblesses de l'amour [ . . . . ] Mais nous, qui nous croyons méprisées, dès que nous cessons de nous croire aimées; nous, qui joignons au regret de perdre notre bonheur, la honte de l'avoir goûté; nous, dont le front se couvre de rougeur, quand nous nous rappelons les momens les plus doux de notre vie, pouvons-nous sans frémir, écouter un sentiment aimable, séduisant, il est vrai, mais dont les suites peuvent être si cruelles?<sup>1</sup>

On the face of it, Fanni's dilemma is insoluble: life without loving Lord Alfred seems empty and meaningless, but if she allows herself to "live fully" she will be despised by society and, ultimately, by Lord Alfred himself.

For Fanni to be excused her behavior (and for Mme Riccoboni's novel not to be rejected as immoral), Fanni must justify her conduct not merely to the internal reader, Lord Alfred, but also to the external eighteenth-century reader. A true heroine of the eighteenth-century novel was expected to be chaste and sexless. Such a heroine (particularly of a novel written by a woman) never openly admitted to sexual desire, for well-bred females no more had sexual urges than vulgar maternal ones in the mid-eighteenth century. In her letters, therefore, Fanni must present an image of herself which will deflect criticism of her liaison with Alfred and define her as victim rather than sinner. She achieves this by first establishing her absolute honesty and sincerity: she is no femme du monde indulging in casual conquests. She writes to Lord Alfred that "vous me trouverez vraie dans tous mes

procédés. Je ne connois point l'art, ou, pour mieux dire, je le méprise; toute feinte me paroît basse" (Letter VI). When Lord Alfred questions her love, she responds: "Vous ignorez combien je suis sincère" (Letter XVI). Fanni's much vaunted sincerity allows her to admit to her love for Lord Alfred without losing face or appearing forward. As Mme de Lafayette's Princesse de Clèves before her, she uses sincerity to justify conduct which could otherwise have been judged unseemly. Once Fanni has openly confessed her love for Lord Alfred, the theme of sincerity is dropped, for it has served its purpose: to be an excuse for admitting to love and the first step in surrendering to a seducer.

Having established and justified her sincerity, Fanni explains at length that her actions are motivated purely by her desire to please her lover, not herself. She passively places her destiny in Lord Alfred's hands: "Le soin de mon bonheur ne me regardera plus, je ne le chercherai qu'en vous" (Letter VII). Lord Alfred is worthy of her self-sacrifice:

Je cesse de penser à moi, pour ne penser qu'à vous [ . . . ]  
je remets entre vos mains ma tranquillité, mon bonheur;  
soyez-en l'arbitre. Vous méritez bien qu'en se donnant à  
vous, on borne tous ses soins à vous aimer, tous ses vœux à  
vous plaire, tous ses désirs à vous rendre heureux. (Letter  
XI)

Fanni has only one goal: "Vous aimer, vous plaire, voilà mon bonheur; je n'en veux point d'autre: je n'en goûterois point d'autre" (Letter LIX). His happiness is hers: "Votre bonheur m'a rendue si heureuse qu'en vérité vous ne m'en devez point de reconnaissance" (Letter LXXII). She derives her glory from his great qualities: "Vous êtes, mon cher Alfred, le plus aimable de tous les hommes; qu'il m'est doux de vous le dire! Que cette vérité me flatte! Elle fait ma gloire et mon bonheur" (Letter LXXXIV). Her whole existence depends on him: "Oui, tous mes mouvemens, tous mes désirs tiennent à vous. Votre absence me fait connoître combien vous êtes devenu nécessaire à mon repos, à mon bonheur, à mon existence même" (Letter LXVIII).

Fanni is careful to establish that any passion she may show Lord Alfred comes "from the heart." She demonstrates a suitably ladylike lack of enthusiasm for the sexual act itself, refers to "le sacrifice que vous exigez" (Letter XV), and valiantly prepares to immolate herself for his happiness, despite her revulsion: "Je voudrois céder; je hais le préjugé qui m'arrête, je désire le bonheur d'un amant si cher, j'y veux tout immoler; je me promets de vaincre ma répugnance" (Letter

XXX). Needless to say, Fanni has no physical yearnings herself but wants only her lover's satisfaction. "Ce n'est pas dans mes sens que j'en trouve la source [des désirs]; c'est dans mon coeur, c'est dans le vôtre; c'est dans l'idée flatteuse de vous rendre heureux. Le plaisir que j'attends d'un moment si doux n'a pour objet que vous-même" (Letter XX). Fanni underlines the difference between coarse male and delicate female concepts of love: "L'attachement d'une femme délicate est au-dessus des idées de votre sexe: vous ne connoissez qu'une preuve de notre amour; mais vous ignorez combien est fort le sentiment qui nous conduit à vous la donner. Non, vous n'aimez pas comme nous" (Letter XCVII).

Fanni must also persuade her internal reader, Lord Alfred (and, indirectly, her external reader), that she is no easy conquest nor ordinary woman. Like the Princesse de Clèves, she insists on her superiority over common women: "Ne me jugez point sur le commun des femmes; jugez-moi sur mon caractère, sur mes principes, sur la suite de mes idées" (Letter XV). On the surface, then, Fanni appears to be a suitably sexless and deserving heroine, led astray by sincerity and an acceptable desire to please her lover, regardless of personal cost. Indeed, most critics, both past and present, have tended to take Fanni at face value: she acts out of sensibilité, not sensualité.

But does she? Behind the main body of the text there are submerged levels of meaning with a very different message.

The first of these submerged levels is, in fact, a nontext, in that it does not exist for the external reader. This "nontext" is of course Lord Alfred's part in the correspondence, to which the external reader has no access, apart from sparse quotes by Fanni and descriptions of her reactions to his letters. Despite Fanni's ecstatic eulogies, the external reader can have little doubt about Lord Alfred's motivation. Indeed, from the very start of the affair, his behavior seems more akin to that of a hero of a libertine novel than to that of Abelard, the committed lover, although Fanni does her best to present him as such.<sup>2</sup> Once he has obtained a confession of love from her, he moves swiftly into action and is not above using a little blackmail to expedite her seduction. If she really loved him, she would be more generous with her favors, he insinuates, to which Fanni responds: "M'écire que je ne vous aime point, ou que je vous aime foiblement, c'est être ingrat" (Letter XV). He accuses Fanni, who prides herself on her sensibilité, of "une cruelle insensibilité" (Letter XXXIII) and threatens to break off their relationship. Impartial external readers have by now guessed that Lord Alfred will seduce and abandon Fanni and can only shake their heads over her apparent blindness. (All in all their sexual relationship as such will have endured less than six weeks, about the

time Charles Duclos's libertine Count usually devoted to each of his innumerable mistresses in Les Confessions du Comte de \* \* \*)

But Fanni is not blind. She knew from the start what would happen. In Letter VI, she writes: "Je vous aime, mais je crains les suites d'une passion dont je sens que je ferais ma seule affaire." In Letter VII, she predicts exactly what Lord Alfred will do: he will abandon her. The question then arises why Fanni, by all accounts--including her own--a moral, intelligent young woman, lets herself be deluded. She is a commoner, he an aristocrat, and there could be no question of a mésalliance. (At no point does Fanni even hint at the possibility of marriage.) Fanni's much vaunted sensibilité is used as excuse for her actions but provides no real motivation. A more interesting explanation can perhaps be found in a submerged level of the text, termed "subtext" for the purposes of this discussion.

In the main body of the text, Fanni repeatedly denies that there is any sensual element in her love for Lord Alfred and even expresses fear and abhorrence of the physical act itself. But Fanni's text is not always consistent. There is a subtext in which she displays a mixture of sensuality cloaked in badinerie toward Lord Alfred which contradicts her main thesis. Before she becomes his mistress, she writes of herself: "Ah l'ingrate, qui va songer à des bouquets! Et ces lettres charmantes, ces tendres assurances, ces caresses si douces? . . . Mais les lettres, j'y réponds. Il dit qu'il aime, moi je le prouve. Les caresses à la vérité . . . est-ce donc que je n'en rends jamais? . . . ." (Letter XX). Fanni betrays her physical attraction to Lord Alfred in letters usually written, suggestively enough, late at night "dans mon lit": "Qu'il étoit joli ce soir! quels yeux! comme l'amour l'embellit! qu'il répand de charmes sur ses traits!" (Letter XXXI). On another occasion, again late at night, she writes: "Mon dieu, qu'il étoit bien! comme cet habit lui sied! que de goût dans sa parure! que de grâce dans son air!" (Letter XXXVIII). Because Fanni coyly uses the third person, as if confiding in her diary, the reader dismisses these outpourings as little more than expressions of her sensibilité and forgets she is writing directly to a young man.

Other letters are more overt. In Letter XXI (written at midnight!), she writes provocatively: "Ah que je vous aime! Je vous aime tant, que si vous étiez là . . . je vous aimerois trop" (Letter XXI). In yet another midnight letter, she dreams she has a magic ring and can visit Lord Alfred late at night in his room: "Je suis invisible, je pars, j'arrive . . . où? devinez . . . dans votre chambre: j'attends votre retour, j'assiste à votre toilette de nuit, même à votre coucher. Cela n'est pas dans l'exacte décence; mais je suppose que mylord est modeste" (Letter XXV). Lord Alfred wakes up, takes hold of her: "On

n'a point de force quand on rit; et puis le silence, la nuit, l'amour . . . . Haye, haye, vite, vite, qu'on m'ôte l'anneau; je craindrois d'en faire trop d'usage" (Letter XXV). As the critic Joan Hinde Stewart remarks, Lord Alfred "can hardly ignore the factors which are operating in his favor" when he reads such a letter (63). What critics, including Stewart, have not examined is how a moralistic eighteenth-century public could ignore or tacitly condone Mme Riccoboni's heroine indulging in sexual fantasy. It is hardly reading out of context to interpret Fanni's words, "You have no strength when you're laughing; then silence, darkness, love . . ." as an erotic daydream of intercourse with Alfred. In this daydream, Fanni has no strength to resist Alfred's desired advances, and banter and laughter give way to silent love-making.

This sexual subtext is so heavily masked by the badinerie and coyness of Fanni's style and hidden behind her elaborately built-up persona of self-immolating, sensitive, sexless heroine, that it has largely escaped notice. (Even Restif de la Bretonne, well-known for his misogynist views on women writers and female conduct, praised the novel!) Fanni's few declamatory outbursts on the unfairness of the double standard are in no way threatening to the established order at a time when la question des femmes was being discussed in every salon on a more or less superficial level. On the surface, Fanni observes all the canons of Ruth Perry's lady of quality; her main aim is to please (see above, p. 2). Her male reading public could enjoy her story, lulled by the complacent feeling that Fanni "knew her place" in the patriarchal society of the time. True, she transgressed the moral code, but she could be forgiven by these male readers, since she paid a heavy price for this transgression and would certainly never love again, in accordance with the tenet that a "true" heroine can only love once.

Fanni's love seems less pure and selfless seen from the vantage of the subtext. The reader may even wonder if her grand amour is more than a passionate infatuation for a handsome, unattainable young man, once Mme Riccoboni's careful, self-protective build-up is put aside. Obviously this subtext should not be over-estimated: Fanni is no Mme de Merteuil seeking pleasure under a hypocritical mask, and the erotic element is only there en sourdine. But, as in many eighteenth-century novels by women, there is a disquieting undercurrent running against the main stream of the text, which--at least in the opinion of this modern reader--should be taken into account in any reading of the work.

It cannot be proven, but it can certainly be surmised, that the majority of Mme Riccoboni's devoted readers were women. For all the freedom of a few salonnières, most upper-class eighteenth-century

women, especially unmarried women, lived under the pervasive constraints of the sexual double standard, according to which Fanni's behavior could only have been condemned in real life. Such lectrices must surely have identified with Fanni's hidden subtext, perhaps unwittingly, and rejoiced in a heroine who was not totally desexed by her author, yet managed by subtle means to remain a heroine.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Madame Riccoboni, Lettres, Letter XV. Subsequent quotations from this work will be from this edition and the spelling and punctuation of this edition will be followed. To distinguish between Mme Riccoboni's frequent use of points de suspension and my ellipses, my ellipses will be placed between square brackets.

<sup>2</sup>Fanni writes in Letter LXVII: "Vous me demandez si je veux faire de vous un autre Abaillard. Jamais, peut-être, on ne rappella cette histoire avec plus d'esprit et plus de sentiment. Non, ce n'est pas mon dessein, je suis de l'avis de Pope: tout est bien comme il est." But in spite of Fanni's disclaimer and quotation from Pope, the external reader knows that that is exactly what Fanni would like to do!

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## WRITING REVOLUTION IN MALRAUX'S LES CONQUÉRANTS

Mary Rice-De Fosse

André Malraux's *Les Conquérants*, a novel about the 1925 Chinese revolution as it took place in Hong Kong and Canton, addresses a multiplicity of problems involved in the writing of revolution. First published in 1928, the work focuses on a group of international revolutionaries sent by the Communist Party to aid and direct the Chinese in their struggle to overthrow the colonial powers that oppress them. However, because these revolutionaries are trying to impose an essentially Western ideology on a culture foreign to it, the revolutionaries' own project, in some sense as imperialist as that of their enemies, becomes problematic. At the crux of the dilemma is Garine, the Swiss<sup>1</sup> chief of propaganda who is fully aware of the contradictions inherent in his task: writing his own version of events as they unfold, then having them translated into Chinese. We see in Garine's manipulation of words the fundamental tension that exists between the representation of events and events themselves, especially when writing comes to be seen as an act itself rather than the mere translation of acts. Garine's role thus illuminates the process of writing as a dynamic or even revolutionary activity.

An anonymous French narrator who will soon function as Garine's chief translator--the narrator, although Francophone, is bilingual--introduces the scene on his voyage through Ceylon to Saigon, Hong Kong and finally Canton. His images of the Orient emphasize its silence and oppressively still air, an atmosphere which seems to mirror the effects of this particular revolution. Reports of action in Hong Kong and Canton underscore a stagnation which appears to be at once the revolution's principal means and its end, for the revolt consists largely of acts of resistance, strikes and boycotts. Yet even more dynamic efforts, such as the sabotage of machinery, are aimed at the same final result, a paralysis of the British attained through a revolution tellingly described as "cette guerre latente contre l'Angleterre immobile, incapable d'agir" (13). While this latent revolution may undermine traditional Western notions of action, for the refusal to work or to buy goods is clearly the negative of working or buying goods, the text opposes revolutionary activity in even its most negative forms to the inability to act at all, which the narrator, restless to begin his own part in the struggle, himself feels: "Tristesse, ennui, énervement de ne savoir que faire dans cette ville [Hong Kong] où je suis

obligé d'attendre que le bateau reparte, alors que je voudrais tant être à Canton" (23).

In opposition to acts, words, when they are first mentioned in Malraux's text, themselves appear inert: "Jusqu'ici, l'hostilité du Gouvernement de Canton s'était manifestée par des paroles: voici que, tout à coup, les télégrammes traduisent les actes" (9). Here, the image of the telegram makes it apparent that while words can represent or translate acts, the two belong to separate and distinct domains. Moreover, words seem devalORIZED when compared to even the most passive of actions.

In this context, it is not surprising that men are defined in terms of action, as when Borodine, a major Communist organizer and advisor, is compared to Garine: "Borodine est un homme d'action. Garine . . . C'est un homme capable d'action. A l'occasion" (16). Borodine is a known quantity, while Garine, whose task as chief of propaganda is to raise Chinese national consciousness by means of words and images, has yet to prove himself in the field of action. Although he is judged capable of it, he seems never to have had occasion to demonstrate this potential in his present position; it therefore remains untested. This same dichotomy resurfaces much later in the novel when, as the revolutionary forces anticipate battle with Tcheng-Tioung-Ming's troops, the members of the propaganda bureau prepare to leave town: "Seules, les sections de propagande, qui peuvent préparer la victoire, mais non l'obtenir, quitteront la ville demain" (117-18). Although words possess a certain effective or perlocutionary<sup>2</sup> power, they exist outside the space of action with its direct, tangible results.

The Chinese terrorist, Hong, has learned a similar lesson from his mentor, the one-time anarchist, Rebecci, who has taught him:

. . . que si tu fous une bombe dessous le magistrat, comprends-tu, il en crève, et c'est bien. Mais que si tu fais un journal pour que la doctrine elle soit connue, tout le monde, il s'en fout. (25)

As a terrorist, the enigmatic Hong believes he can best use the unique life he possesses in direct action, yet ironically enough, he is also one of Garine's secretaries, mostly in order to produce anti-Christian, and therefore anti-Western, tracts. Moreover, although he is unlettered in his native tongue, his readings in French and in English are what have convinced him of the inherent value of his own existence, demonstrating once more the power of the written word. Yet it is his experience of childhood poverty and the image of the world that this

experience creates ("l'image du monde qu'elle fait apparaître" [104]), on the other hand, that has made him violent and full of hatred. In Hong, the ostensibly contradictory powers of words and lived experience mix, as do the influences of East and West, this despite the terrorist's anti-Western sentiments. It is not surprising, then, that the effective power of words appears most immediate when Hong gives a speech in Chinese in a union hall, urging the crowd to throw off the influence of the foreign advisors sent by the Communist party and in so doing nearly inciting a riot. Only the power of a second, pro-Comintern orator can counteract the effect his words have produced.

The conflict between the Orient and the Occident<sup>3</sup> is more pronounced in the encounter between Garine and Tcheng-Dai, the mandarin leader who favors passive resistance to the imperialist nations rather than direct provocation and who takes Gandhi as his model: "Si Gandhi n'était pas intervenu, monsieur Garine, l'Inde, qui donne au monde la plus haute leçon que nous puissions entendre aujourd'hui, ne serait qu'une contrée d'Asie en révolte . . ." (79). Tcheng-Dai's vision of China's future includes both active and passive roles for the Chinese, but as if remaining true to his philosophy of non-aggression, he expresses this vision largely in the passive voice:

Je veux--je souhaite--que les Chinois soient jugés partout en Chine par des tribunaux chinois, protégés réellement par des gendarmes chinois, qu'ils possèdent en vérité, et non pas en principe, une terre dont ils sont les maîtres légitimes (79).

Later that evening, Garine interprets what Tcheng-Dai has said to him, using the term "conquerors," a term more active than those which the Chinese leader employed: "Ils se voient vainqueurs, et vainqueurs sans avoir à supporter les images guerrières auxquelles ils répugnent parce qu'elles ne rappellent que des défaites" (82). While Tcheng-Dai refers only to the Western powers in China as conquerors, Garine envisions the Chinese themselves in the roles of the subject. This distinction, however, may reveal the propagandist's own Western bias.

The Oriental leader's revolution consists of the passive or negative acts noted above, which have already proven successful: "la ténacité des Anglais, qui a su conquérir cette ville sur le roc et sur la Chine, maison par maison, est sans force contre la passivité hostile de trois mille Chinois décidés à ne plus être vaincus" (31). It is the Asian context that seemingly causes the slippage between "active" and "passive," for passive resistance no longer appears as the contrary of action, but exists within the same space, producing like results. This decentering of Western notions of action at the same time opens the

text to a further displacement, the revalorization of written and spoken words.

Tcheng-Dai is opposed to Garine's particular strategy for wresting China from her conquerors because it involves the signing and issuance of a decree which will prohibit ships in transit to or from Hong Kong from docking on the mainland, thus crippling British shipping from that port. Tcheng-Dai's opposition to the decree is rooted in the fear that such a promulgation by the Cantonese government will provoke British military intervention and he is against any threat of violence that puts Chinese lives at risk, but his objection also serves to reveal a more fundamental difference from Garine. The decree is an act of the Cantonese government, but unlike other kinds of action, it is a linguistic act comprised entirely of words. In it words do not merely represent or translate, they themselves prohibit specific ships from landing, and in so doing fit Austin's definition of performative language.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, because the foreign revolutionaries cannot issue the decree themselves but must depend on what Malraux depicts as the recognized Cantonese government, this particular linguistic act also satisfies Benveniste's modification of Austin's theory requiring that the source of the performative language have the legitimate authority to take such an action (267-85).<sup>5</sup> It is only natural that Garine be preoccupied with such a decree, for it effaces the distinction between words and acts; it is thus critical to the definition of his own role in the revolution. Although as a prohibition the decree certainly possesses a negative quality, since it is active, rather than an example of the kind of passive resistance Tcheng-Dai advocates, the Chinese pacifist will not endorse it.

While their opposite attitudes towards this linguistic act reveal the fundamental difference between Tcheng-Dai and Garine, this is by no means a simple polarity, as a memory deeper than memory ("un souvenir plus fort que la mémoire" [142]) recounted by Garine just prior to promulgation of the decree indicates, for it suggests the interchangeability of active and passive roles, especially when words take their place in the domain of action. The incident whose memory haunts Garine is the homosexual gang rape of a young Legionnaire in a mock wedding ceremony. The victim of the rape, a fresh recruit, had threatened to bayonet the first man who attempted such a thing, but his words act instead as a challenge or even a perverse form of seduction, producing the antithesis of their intended effect. As a parody of the marriage ceremony, a rite grounded in the performative function of language, the rape undermines the intentionality of the speech act, while the recurrence of this memory suggests Garine's own doubts as to the decree, which as an interdiction is a clear parallel to the recruit's

declaration. It seems that the victim has provoked his own victimization, at least in the form the memory takes as it emerges from the unconscious; it is no longer possible to determine who is responsible for this sequence of events, nor who "conquers" whom as these terms slip.

In a further breakdown of the opposition between Tcheng-Dai and Garine, the head of propaganda describes the pacifist in exactly the same way that he himself had been described, as "capable d'action" (67), although this characterization is qualified differently in Tcheng-Dai's case: "mais il n'est capable que d'une sorte d'action particulière, de celle qui exige la victoire de l'homme sur lui-même" (67). Once again, Tcheng-Dai's strategy is one which puts a man in the double role of conqueror and conquered, at once subject and object, a duality which his final act of self-abnegation, suicide, will also display.

However, Tcheng-Dai's suicide is in fact problematic, since it is never verified whether the leader takes his own life in a final gesture denouncing the foreign advisors--a note is found to that effect--or whether he has been assassinated by terrorists who forge the suicide note so that his death will carry this message. His death becomes more important for the way in which it can be manipulated for the purposes of propaganda rather than as an expression of Tcheng-Dai's actual thoughts and feelings. The point about the real manner in which the old Chinese meets his end appears moot, in fact, since two separate groups use the event of their own advantage, with little regard for the truth. When posters bearing the words of the purported last testament go up all over the city, Garine immediately has them covered over with his own posters proclaiming the old man's assassination at the hands of British agents, clearly the propagandist's own version of what has happened. His re-creation of the story is so crucial to the outcome of the revolution that men risk their lives attempting to hang one or the other of the two posters, but the bureau of propaganda manages to nullify the damaging effects of the first set of words and images, "[c]es affiches qui peuvent à elles seules [nous] nuire plus que toute la prédication de Tcheng-Dai" (118). In this particular matter, the event itself has far less impact than the language and images that represent and even transmute it.

Gradually the interpretation of events comes to seem more important than events themselves as the text inscribes the propagandist's function in increasingly active terms, while events depend much more on their translation into propaganda. After the nationalists win an early victory over pro-British troops, a similar barrage of posters appears, once again translating events: "sur les murs, nos affiches, et sur les toits d'immenses pancartes hâtivement

peintes traduisent la victoire en images" (146). The use of the verb "translate" underscores the transition from the domain of actions to that of words, which are here perceived as separate and distinct. Later, when the city is attacked, Malraux undercuts the drama of the actual battle with a focus on the scene at the propaganda office. The battle's progress is portrayed through a series of reports to Garine, a series punctuated by periods of waiting, speculative dialogue, and activity at the office itself as Garine organizes from behind the lines. The text once more encodes the dichotomy between words and actions when the reports that come in from the field, in contrast to live battle, are described as dead: "Une activité furieuse apparaît à travers tous ces rapports que nous mettons en ordre comme des choses mortes" (94). Nevertheless, the frantic pace of certain moments at the office belies this initial reaction to the propagandist's work. In fact, Garine's rush to cover the original posters about Tcheng-Dai's suicide is presented in a swift diegetic movement which stands in contrast to the more static, second-hand accounts of military maneuvers at the front lines, especially since the news is sporadic, interspersed with long periods of waiting which tend to slow it down.

In effect, Malraux's text signals the transition to a new kind of warfare in which the battlefield is sometimes superseded by other sectors, a change that the narrator himself eventually notes:

Je comprends mieux peut-être que lorsque j'étais à Hongkong même, ce qu'est cette guerre nouvelle où les canons sont remplacés par des mots d'ordre, où la ville battue n'est pas livrée aux flammes, mais à ce grand silence des grèves d'Asie, à ce vide inquiétant des villes abandonnées où quelque silhouette furtive disparaît avec un claquement assourdi de socques solitaires... La victoire n'est plus dans un nom de bataille, mais dans ces graphiques, dans ces rapports, dans la baisse des prix des maisons, dans les demandes de subventions, dans la floraison des plaques blanches qui remplacent peu à peu, à l'entrée des buildings de Hongkong, les raisons sociales des Compagnies . . . . (95)

The narrator realizes that the line between actions and words has become blurred as he associates written reports, graphs, and even the changes in placards on buildings with the other indications of resistance, revolution, and change already acknowledged: strikes, silence, deserted cities. The narrator's new-found consciousness calls for a reevaluation of terms even more substantial than that required by

the transposition of revolutionary strategies from Occident to Orient. In this new kind of warfare, the sign is preeminent.

At the moment Garine finally proves himself capable of action, his act takes on a much more highly charged meaning than the proof that he is once and for all a man of action like Borodine--although such proof functions as a sign like the ones noted above. As the novel nears its end, Garine interrogates two enemy agents caught poisoning the Red Army's wells, demanding the identity of a third, double agent who has worked with them. Since he can get no information from the two men, he threatens to shoot one if he will not talk. When the agent refuses, Garine pulls the trigger; the second agent soon reveals what he knows. Obviously Garine does not kill the first man because he wants him dead, even as punishment for his actions or for his refusal to divulge the identity of the double agent. This, his most ruthless "act," quick and violent, serves as a sign directed at the second agent, a means of expressing to the man that he, Garine, is serious. The act itself does not produce the desired result but only works to convince the second agent that his interrogator is willing to do anything to make him reveal the identity of the accomplice. The act functions as a signifier distinct from its signified;<sup>7</sup> it works as words do, and even possesses the same sort of effective power that they have been seen to possess. Moreover, since the message of this killing is immediately evident, it is an even stronger, less ambiguous sign than Tcheng-Dai's suicide might have been. Nonetheless the two events are obviously related, for in them acts are transformed into a kind of language which must be "read" or "decoded," much like any other message.

Not only does Malraux's text show that words can become acts and that acts, too, can signify in the same manner as words, it also underscores how new technologies make it harder to distinguish between an act and its representation in words and images. Because recordings and films appear closer to the actions they represent, they make better pieces of propaganda, as Garine observes:

Garine dit que l'on conteste un article de journal mais non une image ou un son, et qu'à la propagande par le phono ou le cinéma, on ne peut d'abord répondre que par le phono ou le cinéma; ce dont la propagande ennemie, et même anglaise sont encore incapables. (149)

Recorded sounds and filmed images may seem more immediate, closer to the domain of action, which is perceived as real. They are therefore accepted as more credible than a written account, for the space of writing is considered imaginary or fictive. Nonetheless,

records and films are representations which reconstruct the space of actions; despite their apparent veracity, they are just as open to interpretive or manipulative moves as is a written piece or a poster. Furthermore, once "pure" acts take their place alongside words and images as signifiers, they too share the same properties as other artistic constructions.

Thus, for Malraux, the creative process structures all human life, making sense of an absurd world:

Vies murées. Le monde se reflète en elles grimaçant, comme dans une glace tordue. Peut-être montre-t-il là son véritable aspect; peu importe: cet aspect-là, personne, personne, entends-tu! ne peut la supporter. On peut vivre en acceptant l'absurde, on ne peut pas vivre dans l'absurde . . . . On ne se défend qu'en créant. Borodine dit que ce qu'édifient seuls les hommes comme moi ne peut durer. Comme si ce qu'édifient les hommes comme lui . . . . (153)

The absurdity of human existence, all the more apparent to a dying Garine, cannot be immediately perceived or understood, for this would be unbearable.<sup>8</sup> On the contrary, human beings must experience "reality" through their own constructions, including their actions. In a sense all human action becomes a kind of "writing" that translates human existence by infusing it with meaning. Both Borodine and Garine are involved in the principal human activity, the creative process that structures all human life. For this reason Garine has as much right as Borodine to call himself a man of action.

When he does so, the propagandist stresses the notion of play that is essential to his task, referring to himself as a gambler, or more literally, as a player:

Mon action me rend aboulique à l'égard de tout ce qui n'est pas elle, à commencer par ses résultats. Si je me suis lié si facilement à la Révolution, c'est que ses résultats sont lointains et toujours en changement. Au fond, je suis un joueur. Comme tous les joueurs, je ne pense qu'à mon jeu, avec entêtement et avec force. (143)

While his disclaimer about results seems odd given the success of his propoganda, Garine's statement becomes clearer if one considers the revolution itself as an embodiment of the creative process par excellence. Because he emphasizes change in and of itself rather than

the ideological systems to be imposed upon it or to be implemented once the period of transition is over, Garine, who detests systems and refuses to adhere to the party line, poor Communist that he is, may in effect be a better revolutionary, for he allows the free play of individual creativity. Above all, his notion of play reaffirms man's ability to create and interpret for himself the games he plays.<sup>9</sup>

Malraux's first novel is not as polished a work as La Condition humaine, which also deals with the Chinese revolution, nor does it present a particularly coherent philosophy. However, it does prefigure the writer's later works, including Les Voix du silence, which focuses more exclusively on humankind's creative acts. Indeed, it is precisely the novel's inconsistencies, permutations and shifting terms that suggest a possible reconciliation between the two seemingly antithetical poles of action and language. Les Conquérants revalorizes writing, placing it at the center of human activity, where it serves as a model of how human beings give meaning to their world.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Garine is actually half-Swiss, half-Russian, but as a former member of the French Foreign Legion he may in fact be a French citizen; in any case, this slippage in identity may be key to his shifting role in the novel.

<sup>2</sup>Austin (101-32) uses this term to distinguish language which has an effect on an interlocutor, which I extend to include written language as well as speech.

<sup>3</sup>This opposition of course lies at the heart of Malraux's La Tentation de l'Occident.

<sup>4</sup>I refer here especially to Austin's "Preliminary Isolation of the Performative" (4-11), although he further elaborates and modifies the concept.

<sup>5</sup>For a further discussion of Benveniste's critique and modifications of Austin's theory, see Felman (9-22).

<sup>6</sup>The verb "traduire" comes from the latin traducere, meaning "faire passer" in French, a root which emphasizes the movement or displacement from the domain of action to that of language (Dictionnaire encyclopédique Larousse [Paris: Larousse, 1979]).

<sup>7</sup>In order to encompass the non-linguistic phenomena in question, I have greatly expanded Saussure's definition of the sign (158-62).

<sup>8</sup>Although Malraux's ideas and language here suggest existentialist philosophy, Les Conquérants predates existentialism by a decade or more.

<sup>9</sup>For an essay on play as the essential underpinning of human culture, and Western culture in particular, see Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture.

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# NARRATION IN THE LYRICAL ESSAYS OF CAMUS

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Traditionally critics have distinguished the lyrical essays of Albert Camus--collected in *L'Envers et l'endroit*, *Noces*, and *L'Été*--from his ordinary essays--*Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and *L'Homme révolté*--because of their inclusion of a considerable amount of what is usually called symbolic description. Since the ordinary essay is seen as foregrounding its rhetorical over its poetic nature, the lyrical essay, as its name suggests, is seen as somehow negating this foregrounding through the simple inclusion of poetic elements. To date, critics have been content to view these extra-philosophical referents--usually categorized as sensuous language and imagery, symbolic landscape description, and the recounting of symbolic personal experience--as poetic embellishments of the prose of these essays. Their role has been considered purely supportive of, and therefore subordinate to, argumentation. Critical focus has thus been maintained on the lyrical nature of these elements themselves rather than on their function in establishing the lyrical essay as a distinctive discourse-type.

It is hardly satisfactory to describe the specificity of the lyrical essay's discourse on a purely quantitative basis, because of the large amount of non-philosophical referents it contains. I propose instead to approach the lyrical essay as a discourse-type and to focus, as Jonathan Culler states in the Introduction to *On Deconstruction*, "not on a thematic content that the work aesthetically presents but on the conditions of signification, the different sorts of structures and processes involved in the production of meaning" (20). Production of meaning in literary discourse evolves through a reciprocal process involving text and reader: the text provides indications of systems of signification underlying the literal meaning of the words on the page which guide the reader in developing her competence to recognize and integrate them in interpretation, the final step in literary communication. I will describe both the synchronic and diachronic "conditions of signification" of the lyrical essay: the systems of signification underlying the production of meaning, and the manner in which they participate in its production which constitutes the process of communication.

I contend that the principal distinction between Camus's ordinary essays and the lyrical ones of *Noces* and *L'Été* is a function of the role of concrete elements--decors, images, deixis--in the process of literary signification. Let me illustrate by first taking an example from

traditional criticism, that of symbolic landscape description in Camus's lyrical essays, which tend to be grouped under his own term "essais solaires." This categorization implies a unity based on the continuous presence of the Mediterranean decor which is traditionally accepted as a fundamental aspect of the lyricism of these essays. The frequent appearance of key elements of this decor--sun, water, desert, etc.--and their use in images is usually interpreted as symbolic reinforcement of the ideas of argumentation, wherein the symbolism is described in a one-to-one relationship between symbol and thought (for example, the sun represents absolute power). While those landscapes are the most prevalent, they are by no means the only ones evoked. Especially in the later, more analytical (that is, the least obviously lyrical) essays, European decors predominate, representing modern civilization and its problems. In fact, throughout the lyrical essays European and Mediterranean decors are opposed. Rather than being simple conglomerations of associated symbols the meaning of which is localized to their immediate context, these decors, along with all the other non-philosophical referents, are elements of systems of signification which transcend the context of individual elements and assure the stability of the textual processes of signification and communication, functions usually dominated by argumentation in the essay. These concrete elements are not limited to a static role illustrative of abstraction and commentary but are part of an analogous narrative discourse, a descriptive rather than explicative system, based on the concrete, which is juxtaposed to the abstract discourse of the commentary. Therefore, I propose that the first distinctive element of the lyrical essay is the juxtaposition of two complementary discourses, the concrete one of narration and the abstract one of commentary, which are governed, respectively, by the narrative and critical voices.

Narration and narrative elements may be described as composing a discourse because they function both synchronically and diachronically, as a code of signification and a process of communication. As a code, or system of signification, the narrative elements form a metonymic network which relates a concrete, geographical construct to an abstract world-view of power-structures and value-systems. The European and Mediterranean landscapes are concrete representations of, respectively, the realms of the abstract and the concrete. As a code, these landscapes signify, that is, contain a message for those who contemplate and experience them; I shall use the terms talking landscapes or signifying decors when referring to them as a code. The code, however, is not the message. The code is an autonomous structure of narration, an intra-narrative structure reconstructed by extraction from its context within the text as discourse. The

participation of narrative elements in the production of meaning or process of communication is a function of their reception, that is, of the contemplation of the talking landscapes by the narrative and critical voices, and by the reader.

Narration and commentary share another structure in the establishment of the code and message. The process of signification is actualized by the reader who knows how to recognize textual indicators of further signification, that is, to see relationships first between narrative elements as they constitute the code of talking landscapes, and then between the two discourses of narration and commentary. The basic structure delineating the process of signification--what might be called the macrostructure of the lyrical essay--is that of the voyage. This structure is first introduced as the topic of the narrative discourse in the majority of the lyrical essays. Narration's delineation of a voyage through a physical landscape posits a concrete voyage-experience of contemplation and revelation. This is then complemented by commentary's meditation and reevaluation of ideas in light of the revelations of the concrete voyage-experience, a process which may be described as an inner journey through an intellectual landscape of abstraction. Thus, far from operating as a simple decorative adjunct to commentary, the narrative elements of these essays participate in an organizing principle and manner of presentation based on the concrete--that of the voyage--which actually displace the abstract ones of argumentation. By encompassing the geographical constructs of the Mediterranean and European landscapes, which stand for the opposing lucid and historical world-views that subtend all argumentation of the lyrical essays, the voyage-structure first serves to develop the code of signifying decors, both concrete and abstract, then to direct the reception of commentary as an abstract voyage-experience in response to the concrete one of narration from which it evolves and draws its substance.

The lyrical essay, then, juxtaposes two complementary discourses--the concrete one of narration and the abstract one of commentary--which relate two complementary voyage-experiences--also concrete and abstract. The most distinctive feature of the lyrical essay is the ontological status given to the concrete in relation to the abstract, for the abstract discourse and voyage-experience evolve from and continually refer back to the concrete ones of narration. Once the concrete voyage-experience has been established as the fundamental experience of truth, as the source from which abstraction emanates and the ground upon which its argumentation and conclusions rest, the landscapes and the experience of them undergo a transformation which corresponds to an assumed development of competence on the

part of the reader. That is, while in some essays narration and the Mediterranean landscapes seem to give way to commentary and European landscapes, the concrete voyage-experience's status as the fundamental truth-condition and value-system for all subsequent abstraction is maintained by the progressive contextualization of its signification into single narrative elements incorporated into the rhetorical context of commentary. This general movement towards the referentialization of narration's signification accounts for the seemingly disparate nature of the lyrical essays and directs the assessment of their lyricism as a function of the autoreferentiality of the discourse. There are, in fact, three stages in this development, and I have identified three corresponding categories of the lyrical essay, all of which are bound together by the presence of the code of talking landscapes and the experience of the voyage through them: the voyage-essays, the tour-essays, and the meditation-essays.

The voyage-essays--"Noces à Tipasa" and "Le Vent à Djémila" of Noces, "Retour à Tipasa" and "La Mer au plus près" of L'Eté--establish and reaffirm the code of the talking landscapes as the reader accompanies the narrator on his trips through uninhabited Mediterranean landscapes. This concrete voyage-experience is one of identification and union with the natural elements of the site and recognition of the essential "concrete truths" it has to offer: that the fundamental condition of human existence is in one's concrete reality as another manifestation of the living forces so evident in nature, and that this condition, as opposed to the eternal one of the forces of nature, is mortal. The outward, concrete voyage leads to an inner journey of meditation and reevaluation of beliefs in light of the revelations of the concrete voyage-experience: that man's concrete reality must not be vitiated by modern man's valorization of the abstractions and absolutes of reason, and that life achieves its fullest meaning when, rather than having recourse to absolutes or gods that shield us from death, we live fully cognizant of the very meaning death gives to life.

The tour-essays--"L'Eté à Alger" of Noces, "Petit Guide pour des villes sans passé" and "Le Minotaure" of L'Eté--develop and refine the code of the talking landscapes as the reader is given a tour of inhabited Mediterranean landscapes--the cities of Oran, Algiers, and Constantinople. As cities, these settings have certain negative characteristics of the European landscapes introduced in preceding essays, but the Mediterranean sun and sea still dominate the lives and attitudes of their people. The previous experience of the voyage and the "concrete truths" of these settings are presupposed or contextualized in the descriptions of these places; that is, the narrator

is no longer the naive traveler of the voyage-essay and the reader is expected to recognize references to the already established code of the signifying decors--by means of metaphorization, deixis, anaphora, etc.--and the development of new ones. Thus the voyage-structure itself is condensed into a tour which clarifies and offers as a model the lucid world-view and values of a people whose lives are directed fundamentally by the "concrete truths" revealed in the voyage-essays.

The meditation-essays--"Le Désert" of *Noçes*, "Les Amandiers," "Prométhée aux enfers," "L'Exil d'Hélène," and "L'Enigme" of *L'Eté*--are dominated by European landscapes described as "tombeaux criards" of so-called civilized societies the historical world-view of which is diametrically opposed to that of the Mediterranean landscapes. This historical world-view which condones unnatural death in the name of supposedly higher abstract truths and goals would have us regard history as a progression, but when reduced to its fundamental disregard for life and man's concrete reality in its overvalorization of reason and abstraction, it is revealed as a regression from the "concrete truths" of the lucid world-view. The narrator's demystification of the grounds, logic, and processes of abstraction rest on his nostalgic return to the landscapes at the origin of these truths--the Mediterranean landscapes from which he, like modern man, is now exiled. Commentary predominates in these essays because narration has been condensed for the most part into a referential, value-loaded vocabulary, that is, the occasional mention of single narrative elements which refer back in a metonymic extension to the code of talking landscapes and the signification of the concrete voyage-experience. The latter is thus relegated to contextualization: its presence in the discourse is immanent, and must be actualized by the competent reader who recognizes references to it. The voyage-structure remains operative as a meditative journey through a collective intellectual landscape, that is, within the context of civilization as an abstract landscape. In these essays protesting the dominion of abstraction, the return to the lessons of the Mediterranean landscapes is offered as man's only hope for continued existence.

Thus the voyage-structure, manifested in the concrete and abstract voyage-experiences present in all three categories of the lyrical essay, operates as the macrostructure organizing its discourse, the two juxtaposed sub-discourses of which--narration and commentary--are ultimately demonstrated to be a single philosophical discourse achieving the alliance of the concrete and the abstract. The concrete and abstract voyage-experiences replicate the search for truth at the foundation of all philosophical discourse in their description of the

contemplative and meditative acts that are fused into an ultimately singular and fundamental experience of discovery and illumination of man's position in the world, a process of revelation that re-allies the abstraction of truth with the concrete referent. The signification of narration's concrete voyage-experience reveals that truth is not an abstract absolute determined by the logic of explicative discourse; truth is equatable only with reality, with the concrete world in which the eternity of the natural living forces and the mortality of man are the only absolutes. In this sense the signifying system of narrative elements serves as a process of referentialization which fuses abstraction--a linguistic phenomenon--in the concrete referent and in descriptive discourse as evocation of concrete experience. The narrative elements signify only themselves, but as members of a textual system of signification they have a function in the competence-building of the reader-receptor whose performance in actualizing the message is to recognize the process of referentialization signaled by their embedding within a rhetorical context. Thus the lyrical essay achieves the re-anchoring of abstraction and the reasoning process in the concrete through its particular stylistic alliance of narration and commentary in a descriptive rather than explicative philosophical discourse. The lyricism of these essays, then, is a function of the autoreferentiality of a predominately descriptive, highly monothematic discourse which reaffirms, rather than asserts or explains, a return to the concrete as the basis for all signification.

I have not included the essays of *L'Envers et l'endroit*--Camus's first and most stylistically unsophisticated published work--because, although they contain both narrative and commentarial discourses, their predominate use of first- and third-person anecdotal material and their reliance on characterization and linear plot development in the presentation of allegorical vignettes does not allow for the successful alliance of the concrete and the abstract achieved in the later essays. Rather than operating in immanent systems of signification which participate in the production of meaning, narrative elements function in a more simplistic, symbolic representation of the idea or lesson rendered explicit by the short commentary following narration.

The principal interest of these essays lies in the fact that, as a first, although unsuccessful, attempt at working out a descriptive philosophical discourse, they attest to a fundamental urge, need, or desire from the beginning on the part of Camus to express himself in a discourse-type that reflected his basic world-view of the alliance of the abstract (world of intellectual man) with the concrete (world of sensate man). No doubt he was initially influenced in this choice by *Les Iles*, the lyrical essays of his teacher and mentor, Jean Grenier, but the very fact

that Camus faithfully returned to this genre--or perhaps, more correctly, anti-genre--throughout his career (the essays of *L'Été* spanning a period from 1939-1953), attests to the status he attributed to this mode of expression. In fact, Camus himself stated his predilection for this stylistic choice at the end of his career: in a 1959 interview with Jean-Claude Brisville, who asked, "Du récit, de l'essai ou du théâtre, quelle est celle de ces techniques, en tant que créateur, qui vous donne le plus de satisfaction?", Camus answered: "L'alliance de toutes ces techniques au service d'une même oeuvre" (*Essais* 1922).

The description of the lyrical essay as a discourse-type further reveals that it presents in microcosm the basic tendency of Camus's entire *oeuvre*--that of stylistic variations on a theme. From the perspective of his corpus in general, Camus attempts to expose the relevance to the complexities of modern times of a relatively simple, cohesive world-view which he explores, from various angles through different situations and contexts, by using all the traditional genres except poetry. The lyrical essay, in its own fashion, combines elements of all the traditional genres in the corpus's most explicit representation of this world-view. In its integration of the poetic language of narration and its processes of metaphorization, contextualization, and referentialization into the rhetorical one of commentary, it presents the most comprehensive and efficient stylistic response to the philosophical question of the conciliation of the abstract and the concrete. The nature of its response, moreover, permits a further assessment of the status of the lyrical essay in his *oeuvre* as the poetic solution for Camus. However, rather than exploiting the pluri-isotopic feature of language imbuing discourse with an evocative ambiguity leading to open-ended interpretation--which traditional criticism's description of these essays' lyricism as predominantly symbolic would presuppose--the lyrical essay shifts the poetic focus to the indeterminacy of the text in the discourse's potential for sending out and back in by initiating a constant movement between literal and figurative, concrete and abstract, particular and universal. The lyrical essay deserves critical recognition of its unique contribution to the corpus of a writer acknowledged primarily for his impressive mastery of style. In its response to both stylistic and philosophical considerations as a descriptive philosophical discourse, Camus's lyrical essay takes on a privileged status as the form which most specifically addresses the possibility of the communication of truth by language.

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## ASPETTI TEATRALI NELL' INFERNO DI DANTE

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Sappiamo che la *Divina Commedia*, nonostante il titolo non fu ideata e scritta con un' ispirazione drammatica in senso teatrale. Comedia, come la chiama lo stesso Dante, significava poema dal tono medio-basso e con conclusione positiva in contrapposizione al tono elevato della tragedia. Nell'Epistola a Cangrande della Scala, Dante spiega che lo scopo della sua opera è quello di allontanare coloro che vivono in questa vita da uno stato di miseria e condurrli ad uno stato di felicità. Nella stessa Lettera troviamo riferimenti a Terenzio, Seneca e Plauto, ma nessuna fonte sino ad ora gli attribuisce una effettiva reminiscenza teatrale, intesa come rappresentazione.

L'ampia struttura del poema dantesco si riallaccia alla vasta tradizione Due-Trecentesca delle visioni e dei misteri e delle rappresentazioni religiose, ma, da sola, l'astrattezza allegorica e poetica delle sacre rappresentazioni non sarebbe stata in grado di sostenere l'ampia simbologia dell'opera; non si può dire perciò che esse ne costituiscano la base, ma piuttosto l'ambiente che fece da cornice al proposito assai più preciso di Dante.

Date queste brevi premesse storiche e culturali, ci si rende conto che la grandezza di Dante non sta solo nell'aver dato "vita" ad un'opera di incomparabile poesia con un linguaggio assolutamente nuovo, ma anche di aver creato dal nulla (e senza saperlo) una struttura drammatica senza precedenti nella letteratura europea.

Il primo "ingrediente" drammatico dell'*Inferno* è la lingua, o meglio, il linguaggio del suo divenire poesia, e come dice il DeSanctis esso è prima di tutto azione (75). Ciò che si verifica in Dante è una sinergia fra ritmo, visione e sentimento, la quale ha come effetto verbale una condensazione mimetica che ad ogni verso ci dà la sensazione di avanzare contemporaneamente sia nel viaggio col pellegrino che nella mente di Dante. Un po' come la sensazione che si prova al cinema quando si percepisce la posizione e il movimento della macchina da presa e l'intenzione implicita del regista, semplicemente seguendo una scena. Non a caso lo stesso Sergei Eisenstein in *Film Form*, cita proprio Dante come esempio di materializzazione dinamica dell'inecontro tra organizzazione logica del pensiero e staticità dell'oggetto rappresentato.

Leggendo l'*Inferno* dobbiamo fare uno sforzo per ricordare che tutto quello che vi succede non fa parte di una vera storia in progresso, in quanto le anime non hanno corpo e soprattutto non hanno

possibilità di fare e di volere, ma solo di reagire agli stimoli delle parole di Dante. Tutto rimane nella logica e nella fissità infernale, tutto è immobile perenne ed eterno senza alcuna possibilità di sviluppo; tutto è irreal e nello stesso tempo ci giunge, grazie alla plasticità della lingua, con un realismo e con una violenza che ci scuotono. Senza dubbio dobbiamo riconoscere in Dante un poeta capace di dare movimento al più statico dei mondi.

In genere l'effetto corto-circuito della versificazione è dato dalla genialità di Dante nel saper caricare alcuni versi chiave di un forte marchio connotativo e inoltre nel saper organizzare ad una velocità fulminante l'economia della sintassi con la combinazione altrettanto efficace degli elementi lessicali, che ricordano di più la struttura del linguaggio parlato che quello della narrazione scritta. Gli esempi a questo proposito sono innumerevoli e basterebbe aprire l'*Inferno* a caso per trovarne uno: pensiamo al girone dei suicidi, in cui un peccato tanto complesso nelle sue implicazioni psicologiche è reso drammaticamente vivo oltre che dalla implacabile pena del contrappasso, dall'azione stessa di Dante che la acuisce anche attraverso la forte espressività dei versi: "Uomini fummo or siam fatti sterpi . . ." (XIII 37). Pensiamo alle parole di Francesca "Amor ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende" (V 100), che in così breve spazio focalizza il movimento, la qualità e la quantità stessa del sentimento dolce e nello stesso tempo tenace e violento.

In *Dante's Drama of the Mind*, Francis Fergusson individua in Dante/Pellegrino l'unico vero personaggio del Dramma, distinguendo il processo di conoscenza che l'autore sta mettendo in vita e la rivoluzione morale che il pellegrino sta compiendo. Per fare questo Dante anziché descrivere la psicologia drammatizza la sua acquisizione interiore (9). Questa puntualizzazione è importante soprattutto rispetto agli altri "personaggi" dell'*Inferno* che da questo punto di vista non possono essere infatti considerati tali. Nessuno di loro può essere detto in senso drammatico-aristotelico un personaggio. Di solito essi vengono considerati come tali rispetto allo spessore tragico della loro passata esistenza e alla pena a cui sono sottoposti, ma qui non interagiscono se non in virtù della presenza di Dante che dà loro voce; soprattutto essi non hanno sviluppo verso un futuro, cioè non esiste una peripezia; l'unica agnizione possibile è quella del Pellegrino, che man mano che avanza nel suo viaggio ultraterreno, progredisce nella conoscenza. Nemmeno Virgilio che pure viaggia di girone in girone e che mostra di avere un suo carattere di saper mutare sentimenti ed atteggiamenti in accordo con le necessità del suo protetto, può dirsi completamente un personaggio. Anche Virgilio non ha futuro, inoltre conosce già sia il suo destino, che il percorso che sta facendo passo per

passo e non si trova nemmeno in quella posizione per sua scelta nè per quella di Dante/Pellegrino, ma per volere divino. Virgilio è un metapersonaggio che mette in grado Dante di venire a contatto con tutti quei caratteri che trascendono il tempo reale ed il tempo storico rispetto al Poeta. Essi possono infatti interagire con Dante grazie alla mediazione di Virgilio, ma una volta esaurita questa funzione egli ritornerà inesorabilmente da dove è venuto, senza aver cambiato minimamente la sua condizione. Potremmo anche congetturare che Dante avrebbe potuto fare il viaggio senza Virgilio, certo con molta più fatica, magari facendo tre passi indietro e uno avanti, ma potenzialmente avrebbe potuto farcela, perchè la sua natura di essere umano, di essere-agente, glielo avrebbe permesso. Il dramma avrebbe avuto un senso anche se al primo incontro coi diavoli il Pellegrino avesse deciso di tornarsene indietro a gambe levate. Al contrario non sarebbe stato possibile un dramma senza una *dramatis persona*, e quindi senza di lui l'intero Inferno sarebbe rimasto nel buio del nostro inconscio collettivo per sempre, le figure che incontriamo nel cammino di Dante non avrebbero potuto nè muoversi nè dire una parola senza di lui.

Dante/Poeta avrebbe potuto anche semplicemente narrare la sua visione dell'al di là così come gli era apparsa, senza interagire, ma i caratteri che incontriamo sarebbero usciti come delle statue di un museo delle cere; senza un occhio che li guarda, una bocca che li provoca, e un orecchio che li ascolta, sarebbero rimasti delle astrazioni cristallizzate in personaggi storici come accadeva nelle sacre rappresentazioni con le figure dei santi e dei martiri. Ciò che rende i caratteri vivi per un attimo nell'*Inferno* è appunto l'incontro con Dante.

Quando si parla dei personaggi drammatici della *Divina Commedia* e dell'*Inferno* in particolare si fa spesso riferimento, come termine di paragone, a grandi personaggi shakesperiani come Macbeth in relazione al conte Ugolino e Romeo e Giulietta per Paolo e Francesca; però, come fa giustamente notare Fergusson (43), è necessario tenere presente una differenza fondamentale riguardante la coerenza interna dell'unità drammatica generale del poema dantesco: ogni figura come ad esempio il conte Ugolino, ha uno spessore tragico ma non può essere letto in una sola direzione (come Macbeth) cioè inseparabilmente dal carattere, dal plot e dal pensiero dell'autore. Ugolino costituisce un perno nell'utilità generale dell'*Inferno* ma da lui si irradiano diverse direzioni di lettura che non possiamo dimenticare. In primo luogo nella microstruttura del canto XXXII dove appare, egli è una figura narrativa che serve come portavoce del gruppo dei traditori a cui appartiene, dando uno spessore drammatico al peccato a

cui si riferisce attraverso la tragicità della propria storia personale, nello stesso tempo, nella macrostruttura dell'intera opera il tradimento si allarga verso significati di carattere morale e allegorico nel Purgatorio e nel Paradiso.

Questa stratificazione di piani di lettura che si proietta nella unità generale della Divina Commedia, resta valida non solo per Ugolino ma anche per le altre figure maggiori. L'intersecarsi di micro e macrostrutture attraverso le diverse rifrazioni dei quattro piani di lettura (letterale, allegorico, morale e anagogico) è sicuramente quello che rende impossibile alla Commedia di essere eventualmente rappresentata o diciamo quasi, perchè come vedremo più avanti la dinamicità dei personaggi e la complessa struttura del poema ci suggeriscono in realtà l'idea di una forte connotazione teatrale, ma lo spunto viene ancor di più osservando la dovizia di particolari dettagli scenici e le accuratissime "indicazioni di regia" che Dante sembra fornirci in tutti i canti, tanto da farli sembrare delle sceneggiature pronte per esser messe in scena o filmate. Pensiamo alla precisione dello staging della scena dell'incontro coi tre Fiorentini antichi nel girone dei sodomiti, in cui tutta l'attenzione è focalizzata sui piedi, poichè questi dannati non possono arrestare il loro cammino in quanto minacciati da una continua pioggia di fuoco: "Qual sogliono i campion far nudi e unti . . ." (XVI 22).

E' opportuno notare l'abilità di Dante nel risolvere con una sintassi altrettanto cinetica la descrizione del movimento circolare dei tre Fiorentini: "Questi, l'orme di cui pestar mi vedi" (XVI 34).

Ricordiamo anche l'insistenza semantica con la quale Dante ci trasmette la posizione capovolta dei papi simoniaci: "O qual che se', che 'l di su tien di sotto, anima trista come pal commessa" (XIX 46-47) in cui ancora una volta la nostra attenzione è inchiodata sugli arti in questione, prima partendo dall'anca di Virgilio poi spostandosi sulle zanche-gambe che piangono.

Questi sono solo alcuni esempi dell'abilità del Poeta nel risolvere linguisticamente quello che normalmente fa una cinepresa; a questo proposito vorrei aprire una parentesi riguardo alle due differenti "tecniche" di Dante nell'allestire poeticamente e drammaturgicamente lo staging dei personaggi in apertura di scena ed in chiusura. Nel primo caso abbiamo un marcato taglio "cinematografico," mentre nel leavetaking c'è un progressivo abbandono mimetico/teatrale dello stesso, infatti si verifica spesso che la presentazione di un carattere sia effettuata attraverso gli occhi del Poeta e non del Pellegrino il quale lo introduce in un determinato contesto gradualmente o partendo dall'ambiente. Pensiamo a questo proposito a Francesca, Brunetto, Ulisse, Vanni Fucci o ai Barattieri. Altre volte la sequenza parte da un

piano molto più ravvicinato, quasi un close up su di un atteggiamento o su un particolare fisico del personaggio, aprendosi lentamente fino ad inquadrare l'intera persona e poi l'intera scena, come avviene con Ugolino, Cavalcante o Gerione. Farinata merita a questo riguardo un'attenzione particolare, egli non viene percepito attraverso la vista ma attraverso l'udito: "O Tosco," con un inconfondibile tono che in due parole ci indica sia la provenienza toscana che il suo carattere altero.

Nel caso in cui Dante inizi con una lenta introduzione nell'ambiente, la precisione scenografica è spesso aiutata da una similitudine che ci concretizza l'ambiente inquadrandolo in una dimensione realistica (pensiamo all'immagine del sarto, della pece usata dai veneziani per impalmare le barche, o al villanello). L'espedito della similitudine è anche usato quando il Poeta vuole rendere mimeticamente l'azione del personaggio (Gerione ad esempio), o nel caso in cui ci si avvicini lentamente al personaggio (vedi Ugolino: "Sì che l'un capo a l'altro era cappello; e come il pan per fame si manduca"; XXXII, 126-27).

Nel momento dell'uscita di scena, siamo talmente presi dalla drammaticità della pena o dal racconto fattoci da questi caratteri che li seguiamo più dal punto di vista del loro acting, in quanto *dramatis personae*, che non dai dettagli scenografici o dalla pregnanza della poesia. In questo senso l'allontanamento è più "teatrale" che "cinematografico"; seguendo questo percorso siamo quasi costretti a vivere lo stesso viaggio di Dante: da Poeta a Pellegrino, da regista a personaggio. Viene spontaneo chiedersi dunque a questo proposito, come mai la Divina Commedia, o anche una sola parte di essa, sia stata così scarsamente oggetto di elaborazioni teatrali. L'opera in generale ha indubbiamente influenzato numerosi autori a partire dal teatro del 600 fino ai nostri giorni: in particolare mi riferisco alla Tartarea o "Commedia infernale" di Giovanni Briccio del 1614; al Conte Ugolino di Giovanni Leone Semproni, pubblicata nel 1724; alla tragedia di Andrea Rubbi, Ugolino Conte de'Gherardeschi, pubblicata nel 1779. Nel 1791 uscì la prima Francesca da Rimini di Vincenzo Pieracci il quale intorno al 1820 scrisse anche la prima opera italiana su Dante intitolata Dante a Verona. Fu seguito all'opera del Pieracci la Francesca da Rimini di Silvio Pellico la cui versione contemporanea ci verrà poi fornita dal D'Annunzio.

L'unica trasposizione teatrale vera e propria della Divina Commedia si ebbe nel 1966 ad opera di Orazio Costa, ma non si hanno molte notizie a questo proposito e le poche critiche disponibili consigliano piuttosto di stendere un velo di pudore su tale esperimento.<sup>1</sup> In tempi più recenti abbiamo avuto le sperimentazioni di Carmelo Bene nella sua *Lectura Dantis*, ma si è tratta solo di una

elaborazione fonetica sul testo. A parte del timore e delle intrinseche difficoltà che la rappresentazione di un tale testo può portare, si corre anche il rischio di trasformarla in una sceneggiatura ma il prendere rischi, d'altronde, è connotato con il fluire dell'arte.

Facciamo un passo indietro e torniamo alle parole di Dante in presentazione dalla sua opera nella famosa epistola a Cangrande della Scala: "removere viventes in hac vita de statu miserie et perducere ad statum felicitatis." Se prendiamo questo proposito alla lettera, vediamo come sia impossibile pensare a tale intenzione in termini di catarsi aristotelica per un pubblico lontano sei secoli dai problemi morali e politici del Medioevo. Tuttavia, nonostante l'enorme distacco storico la Divina Commedia continua ad essere largamente letta con immenso piacere, qual'è dunque il problema? La differenza sta nel diverso atteggiamento dello spettatore rispetto al lettore. Lo spettacolo è volutamente trascinato in un processo di identificazione dovuto al flusso inarrestabile dell'azione teatrale, mentre il lettore scorre su una pagina dei versi, si ferma, riflette, ripercorre gli stessi versi e così via, impossessandosi del testo come documento e come opera d'arte pur mantenendosi ad una adeguata distanza storica.

Queste istanze sono state studiate da Bertolt Brecht nel teatro epico e nel teatro didascalico. Due tra i più fondamentali principi della drammaturgia brechtiana sono: l'eliminazione dell'azione intesa come evoluzione di avvenimenti in una storia e l'immedesimazione dello spettatore con il destino della vicenda rappresentata e con l'eroe in particolare. Il teatro epico, ritiene Brecht, non deve tanto sviluppare azioni quanto rappresentare situazioni. In questo caso rappresentare significa, principalmente, scoprire queste situazioni. Si potrebbe dire, allo stesso titolo: estraniarle. In questo modo lo spettatore anziché essere coinvolto in suggestioni che lo trascinano in un vortice di identificazioni arbitrarie, rimane in una posizione distante (estraniata), quel tanto che basta per rendersi conto oggettivamente dell'azione teatrale come evento storico-politico.<sup>2</sup>

Pensare all'Inferno come ad un dramma non significa necessariamente spogliarlo di tutti quei momenti di altissima poesia che esso contiene, ma dargli una possibilità pratica di essere messo in scena. Naturalmente sarebbe un po' azzardato voler cercare delle similarità tra il teatro di Brecht e l'Inferno di Dante, tuttavia in diverse situazioni egli pare mettere in atto delle soluzioni "tecniche" di interruzione e di oggettivazione di momenti che oggi potrebbero essere usati in sede teatrale in senso brechtiano. Anche nei momenti più commoventi (pensiamo al canto V dei lussuriosi) in cui negli ultimi versi, dopo che Francesca ha raccontato la sua struggente vicenda sentimentale, Dante conclude, o meglio interrompe bruscamente il

canto con il proprio improvviso svenimento. Il cambiamento di tono è talmente repentino e il peso specifico semantico-sintattico è così forte in confronto a quello di poco prima, in cui parole e persone sembrano mescolarsi al vento che soffia, che ci pare di sentire il contrasto provocato dal tonfo del corpo di Dante: "e caddi come corpo morto cade" (V 143). Non è questo l'unico caso in cui Dante ci riporta violentemente alla realtà, e in genere è proprio là dove il canto si fa più pregnante, e lo spettatore/lettore è mesmerizzato dal potenziale drammatico di un personaggio, che Dante chiude velocemente il canto e non opera quei larghi enjambement, come fa in altri casi, dove la fine di un canto si travasa in quello seguente.

Come abbiamo già visto i maggiori caratteri che si incontrano in realtà non fanno parte di un plot narrativo, ma sono spesso degli "espedienti" che permettono a Dante di mettere in luce una particolare situazione politico-storica. Rappresentano in senso brechtiano delle citazioni, e poichè la tensione non è legata tanto all'esito quanto alla vicenda, esse possono coprire anche lunghi e lontani periodi di tempo: nel teatro epico la concezione del tempo è infatti completamente opposta a quella del teatro classico.

"Il teatro epico, come le immagini di una pellicola cinematografica, procede a scossoni. La sua forma fondamentale è quella dello shock. I song, le didascalie, le convenzioni fantasmatiche staccano ogni situazione dall'altra" (Benjamin 133). Pensiamo ai personaggi mitologici fantasmatici che introducono le bolge, o alle lunghe similitudini preparatorie (es. il villanello, canto XXV) o le invettive contro Firenze o contro la corruzione a limitare l'illusione del pubblico. Essi paralizzano la sua predisposizione all'immedesimazione" (Benjamin 133).

L'articolazione che ci permette di vedere l'*Inferno* come un prototipo del teatro epico brechtiano, è la bipolarità della figura di Dante. Sappiamo che Dante-Pellegrino sta compiendo questo viaggio nell'al di là per diverse ragioni, ma sappiamo anche che Dante-Poeta è sempre presente e di tanto in tanto compare direttamente rivolgendosi anche al lettore in prima persona (es. XVI 128; VIII 94); altre volte riferendosi alla *Commedia* (XXI 2; XVI 128); o a sè stesso come io narrante. La scansione diegetica che dovrebbe essere soppressa o assorbita in qualsiasi eventuale rappresentazione naturalistica, nel teatro epico è invece il perno su cui si basa la figura dell'eroe non tragico, cioè l'inserimento accanto agli eventi di una "terza persona" che non vi partecipa, ma che "pensa". In termini pratici l'attore interprete di Dante può e deve dimostrare che recitando non smarrisce la sua facoltà di giudicare e nello stesso tempo gli è impedito di immedesimarsi nel personaggio.

"Uno degli esiti essenziali del teatro epico è RENDERE CITABILI I GESTI. L'attore deve essere in grado di spazieggiare i suoi gesti, come un tipografo le parole. Quest'effetto può essere ottenuto per esempio quando l'attore cita lui stesso in scena un suo gesto" (Benjamin 131). Nell'*Inferno*, come abbiamo già detto, troviamo spesso l'io narrante che puntualizza i propri movimenti con ricchezza di particolari e con precisione tipografica. La sensibilità cinetica di Dante nel descrivere ogni singolo movimento nell'ambito di una scena non è inferiore a nessun copione cinematografico. Dove la parola o la sintassi non basta, fa da sostegno una metafora o una similitudine che vivifica la scena o la mette in movimento. Per concludere questo breve tentativo di ricostruire un possibile itinerario drammaturgico nell'*Inferno* dantesco, credo necessario sottolineare ancora una volta che nonostante tutto ciò, Dante scrisse la *Divina Commedia* senza alcuna intenzionalità teatrale, e l'arbitrarietà della mia analisi è sicuramente dovuta alla genialità del Poeta, che tutt'ora non cessa di rivelarci nuovi aspetti e possibilità tra gli interstizi della sua poesia.

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## NOTE

<sup>1</sup>Per ulteriori notizie su questa rappresentazione e sulle opere citate, consultare Corrigan (93-103).

<sup>2</sup>Confrontare i differenti risultati ottenuti nel passaggio del teatro drammatico al teatro epico, come visto nello schema tratto da Brecht (37).

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## MYTH AND FEMININE SYMBOLY IN VIDAS SECAS

*Lynda Jentsch-Grooms*

Having noted its regional, deterministic, social, psychological, and political aspects, Richard Mazzara opines that Graciliano Ramos's last novel approaches epic stature (53). Concomitantly this writer posits that, when examined in view of C. G. Jung's theories concerning archetypes and symbols, Vidas Secas reveals a literary onionskin which can well be denominated mythic. Primary in this respect is the novel's circular structure, which has been cited by Nelly Novaes Coelho as indicative of the work's Sartrean bent (28) and by Mazzara as lending an "optimistic note" to the ending (23). For his part, Lamberto Puccinelli views the structure in a manner more in keeping with a mythic interpretation, correlating it with the particular cycle of nature which simultaneously imprisons the protagonists in a grim, tenuous existence and fosters in them the innate strength and wisdom to survive (130). This is in keeping with Lillian Feder's estimation of such circular structures as ramifications of the Eternal Return and other mythic representations humankind has constructed to elucidate

man's fear of and awe at the mysterious cycle of the death and rebirth of the year and his involvement in the mystery of his own birth, nature and death. The mythical representations of such themes, moreover, indicate man's attempt to do something about the mysteries which continually remind him of his helplessness and at the same time challenge him with endless possibilities of control through his own imagination and action. (11)

Female characters who assume symbolic meaning and those symbols from nature which resonate as feminine in the unconscious form a group of images which is imbued with its own mythos. This monograph will treat the characters of Sinha Vitória and Baleia as well as water symbolgy in order to demonstrate that the feminine nature of these images is primary in what Jung considered to be the most important function of the symbol: that of a psychic transformer of energy which has the ability to reconcile and reunite opposites within the psyche, thereby enriching reality and clearing a path toward new ways of finding meaning. In this respect Sinha Vitória is not merely symbolic but archetypal, clearly exhibiting the two halves of the syzygy

forming the Mother archetype. She is at once the Terrible Mother who, maddened by the suffering brought on her family by the yearly drought, lashes out at her own children and faithful dog, and the Great Mother, shielding and consoling both her husband, Fabiano, and herself in a single embrace ("... amparou-o e amparou-se" [164]) and prodding her family toward a life change in hopes of breaking the cycle of misery which enslaves them all.

The fact that the title Sinha precedes her given name each time she is mentioned underscores Vitória's primacy in the novel.<sup>1</sup> She is the object of Fabiano's unreserved respect--even in his thoughts she is "Sinha Vitória"--and is by far the most intelligent member of the family. In contrast to Vidas Secas's stark, bare-boned descriptive passages, Ramos's indirect free discourse allows the reader access to the warm terms of admiration Fabiano employs in his musings about his wife: "... riu-se encantado com a espreteza de Sinha Vitória. Uma pessoa como aquela valia ouro. Tinha idéias, sim senhor, tinha muita coisa no miolo. Nas situações difíceis encontrava saída" (154). While it is clear that this barefoot, pipe smoking sertaneja displays good judgment, intelligence, conscientiousness, and farsightedness, any pretense of employing her superior rational powers to supplant her husband as head of the family would be unthinkable and she quite naturally remains within the bounds of the traditional role dictated by the surrounding culture.

Vitória turns her role to the entire family's advantage, however, assuring their survival by utilizing her intuition rather than her rational prowess. Vitória not only personifies the necessary balance between the two halves of the psyche by displaying expertise in both of them, but also innately seeks in all things the equilibrium upon which future advancement can be grounded. Her only real fears are the dangers brought on by the extremes of drought and flood. At the same time she manages to temper both Fabiano's tunnel-visioned negativism with respect to city life and his naive optimism toward the future. Vitória's tendency to radiate toward a middle ground mirrors the drive toward balance inherent in nature, and her groundedness in the latter endows her with a power far deeper than the one she may have derived by tapping the resources of her rational mind. She remains true to her most basic role of the family's food giver as the torments of the drought reduce her preoccupations to two: "... o bebedouro secava, a panela não tinha sido temperada" (80). At the same time she receives her greatest reassurances that all will end well by way of ritualistic religious practices and signs from nature such as Fabiano's rhythmic snoring, the distant tinkling of cattle bells, and the omnipresent buzz of flies. At times her speech reflects the atemporal time sense of a child,

as she speaks glowingly about the past, confusing it with the future. Rather than being the mark of an ignoramus, this is an example of the unconscious link with what Jung calls the "Great time," a magical epoch when all things were in a marvellous balance and for which humankind continually yearns. Vitória's rootedness in the powerful mythos of the natural cycle is nowhere more evident, however, than in Ramos's depictions of his female protagonist's body as her breasts and buttocks wax and wane with the seasons of plenty and deprivation. Throughout the novel the author offers a positive valorization of woman's not overstepping the bounds of her role and intuitively remaining synchronized with nature's cycle, thus deriving tremendous power for creative change.

Augusto Willemssen has noted a gradual animalization of Ramos's human characters as his work evolves from Caetés to Vidas Secas (415). Far from making mindless brutes of Vitória and Fabiano, this process contributes to their being outstanding exceptions to most of Ramos's unsavory protagonists. As do animals, the sertaneiros yield themselves to the forces and cycles of nature rather than trying to control them, and survive valiantly, not despite of but in part because of minimized rational powers. Vitória's solidarity with the animal world is depicted in one of the novel's rare moments of tenderness and joy as she kisses the family dog on her bloodied snout after the latter retrieves a cavy for the hungry family members to eat. The human/animal bond is further strengthened as Vitória licks the blood from her own lips. Several chapters later, having vacillated in choosing bicho or homem to define himself, Fabiano mutters, "... realmente mulher é bicho difícil de entender" (77).

Willemssen also notes Ramos's complementary humanization of his animal characters, culminating in Vidas Secas's portrayal of the faithful bitch, Baleia (415). While Fabiano's indecision in defining himself as homem or bicho is resolved with the self-denigrating murmur, "Você é um bicho, Fabiano" (53), her owner demonstrates nothing but tender admiration for his dog by subsequently complementing her with "Você é um bicho, Baleia" (55), bicho here taking on its secondary meaning of "clever individual."<sup>2</sup> Baleia is included in the frequent enumerations of the family members as "uma pessoa de família," and in being named stands out from Fabiano and Vitória's sons who are known only as "o menino mais velho" and "o menino mais novo." She is not only "sabida como gente" (71), has human feelings, opinions and an unshakable hope, but upon her death Fabiano takes for granted that her soul will remain to hover protectively over the the family (160).

Indeed, Ramos does not merely personify Baleia but presents her

in an almost exclusively positive light, emphasizing her roles as a self-sacrificing provider in times of deprivation as well as the family's ever-vigilant protector, stoic source of consolation, and intuitive guide in the flight from the entrapment of their hapless existence. According to Marie Sovereign, Baleia is the "outstanding heroine in Graeciliano Ramos" since her character easily outshines that of any other female protagonist in Ramos's novels (60).<sup>3</sup> Like Vitória, Baleia is imbued with an inherently feminine rootedness in the world of nature which empowers her to carry out her varied heroic functions. She is pictured as taking the lead in the family's march, stopping and waiting for the others when she gets too far ahead, and literally testing the wind for signs of guidance: "O vento morno que soprava da lagoa fixou-lhe a resolução" (93). Baleia sees the human protagonists through the climactic midpoint of their journey-cycle as well as their subsequent Christmas visit to the city. After she leads the family home, Fabiano is forced to shoot her because she has contracted rabies. Even after her death Fabiano is goaded by Baleia's memory (likened by Ramos to the environment), which chases him, causing him to flee.

In Jungian terms, the fact that Baleia is named after a sea animal signifies that she is preeminent in the realm that is symbolized by water: the unconscious (302). Being both an animal and a female allows her to more easily and naturally tap this source of power and creativity.

Water symbolism is clearly archetypal in its maternal, life-giving aspects. Drawing heavily from the Vedic tradition, Mircea Eliade calls water "the foundation of the whole world . . . the elixir of immortality . . . the principle of all healing" (188). In a novel where drought is predominant, examples of the obviously positive attributes of water are myriad. With the promise of rain, for instance, Fabiano's usual state of oppressive fatalism gives way to jubilant optimism and he feels capable of "atos importantes" (106).<sup>4</sup> As with any archetypal symbol, however, water has its negative facets as well. That the rain to come is potentially destructive is foreboded by the similitude Ramos draws between water and blood: "Uns riachos miúdos marejavam na areia como artérias abertas de animais" (91). The gathering thunderclouds are the color of blood, itself a dual-faceted image which can symbolize death and, subsequently, life.

It is at the structural midpoint of the novel that a flood threatens to destroy the ranch occupied by the family. The violent weather conditions which result in the flood occur during winter, whose Portuguese equivalent, *inverno*, is the title of the chapter in question and differs by one phoneme with *inferno*, the curse word which titillates the older boy's imagination in the previous chapter. Both

literally and figuratively the flood initiates a descent into hell, a moment of crisis through which the family must pass in order to be renewed and the cycle completed. Archetypically flood images depict a catalysmic purging of the world where the past is nullified and the integrity of the "Great Time" is restored. Humanity returns to its progenitive waters and a new era is instated.<sup>5</sup> Eliade posits that if humankind is not periodically swallowed up by water it will become completely sterile, its seeds of life having withered away for lack of nourishment. It is, he says, the mythological destiny of water to open and close the cosmic cycles (254).

Figuratively and structurally the flood is the watershed moment in Vidas Secas. It is after this event that the family members take their Christmas trip to the city, the place which in the end becomes the goal of their flight from the hostile cycle of the rural environment. The convergent trinity of the feminine elements discussed above appears to press for this particular resolution of the family's continued victimization. Vitória exhibits a clearly positive reaction to the bustle of city life which, as Joanna Courteau points out, she sees as "testimony to another escape from death" (155). Baleia's appraisal is mixed. She finds the city illogical yet shrugs her canine shoulders and resigns herself to it. The faithful dog's fate as it relates to this question is of particular interest here. She has contracted rabies despite the fact that her being named for a water animal should have prevented this, according to Willemsen's research of nordestino folklore (419).<sup>6</sup> The fact that rabies is known in Romance languages as the equivalent of hydrophobia is another tantalizing link to water symbolism: As the disease advances, convulsions involving the swallowing muscles forcefully expel any liquid taken orally. Eventually the sight or mere thought of liquid prompts these spasms, causing a long and painful death by dehydration. Following a Jungian line of thought concerning the symbols and archetypes in question, it can be said that, rather than being symbolic of the destruction of Ramos's oppressed people, as Mazzara has it (93), Baleia's death is necessary because she has become useless without her groundedness in the unconscious symbolized by water.

The ending of the novel in itself can hardly be seen as optimistic. The reader witnesses the family's trudge to the city and is privy to Fabiano's thoughts concerning the latter: "Eles dois velhinhos, acabando-se como uns cachorros, inúteis. . . Que iriam fazer? Retardaram-se, temerosos. Chegariam a uma terra desconhecida e civilizada, ficariam presos nela" (172). Indeed, in Ramos's three novels prior to Vidas Secas, the city is depicted as a dehumanizing, immoral contaminant, an environment at least as hostile as the one from which

Vitória and Fabiano's family is fleeing. Do the city gates here represent the clutches of another deadly cycle which promises to further dizzy these already benumbed sertanejos? Will its insidiousness find more yielding flesh in these who have given up the power they once derived from their connectedness with nature?

Speculation aside, Coelho sees the characters of Vidas Secas as fighting battle after battle for life and against death. She extols their "resigned acceptance illumined by the firm hope of a victory" (36). This is the victory for which the female protagonist is named and toward which the feminine elements in the novel strain. And it is won in the affirmation of each person's own individual existence. In Vidas Secas life is exalted in the struggle to simply not die. This philosophy is underscored in Ramos's Memórias do Cárcere where he states, "Com efeito, lá dentro os melindres da consciência embotam-se, alteram-se os valores morais, e o nosso dever principal é existir" (2:132). Puccinelli sees the protagonists of Vidas Secas as primitive beings who know how to accept existence as it is given and as mythical representations of primeval humanity existing in today's world. For him they are the argila in natura from which a new, revitalized race has the power to spring (132).

In a century where literary attempts to find "absolute meaning" have reflected a tendency toward nihilism, Ramos presents a clear affirmation of the value of life for its own sake. The cycle of Vidas Secas, from "Mudança" to "Fuga," is reminiscent of the psychological variant of Jung's archetype of the night sea journey which, as explained by Gloria Young, involves introspection, a risky descent into the preconscious or unconscious, a restorative return to the primitive sources of being, and an advance through temporary regression (191). The novel implies that this cycle--here existential rather than psychological--is never ending. In Vidas Secas Ramos presents the view that when life appears threatened, strength to overwhelm the odds is derived through tapping the unconscious, that area of the psyche which tends to be undervalued in the current age of reason. Vidas Secas's female characters provide the most ready access to this resource and are crucial to the carrying out in this novel of what Feder proposes to be the underlying purpose of myth: that of demonstrating humankind's attempt, through imagination and action, to control the forces which render it helpless. In pointing to Vitória as the prime facilitator in this regard, it is appropriate to paraphrase Jung's associate, Jolande Jacobi, in her comments referring to one who has undertaken some form of night sea journey: "She has pressed forward to her limits and taken her destiny upon herself" (186).

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The only other characters whose names are preceded by titles of respect are minor ones: Seu Tomás, a former boss whose kindness, education, fine bed and money are no insurance against the ravages of the drought; Sinha Terta, held in awe by the family because of her prowess in the use of language; and Sinha Rita, an astute businesswoman from the city.

<sup>2</sup>The animalization/humanization processes continue to be most salient in the character of Fabiano in contrast with Baleia, as exemplified in the physical description of their lower extremities. Willemsen points out that Fabiano's feet are cascos, capable of patadas and coices, while Baleia's are only once called patas and thereafter pernas (423).

<sup>3</sup>The only mildly negative comment made concerning Baleia is Fabiano's gentle chiding "Sem vergonha!" when she exposes her reddened, hairless belly.

<sup>4</sup>The archetypically feminine symbol of the moon oversees the rain's advent and, goddess-like, blesses the event. (The words lua and sol are capitalized each time they appear in the text.) In addition, the moon is pictured as being surrounded by a halo or shadow "cor de leite" (49), further emphasizing the benign, maternal aspects of this symbol. At the end of the novel Fabiano plans that the family will continue its trek, drinking and resting by moonlight.

<sup>5</sup>On an individual level this phenomenon is mirrored in baptismal or initiation rites involving immersion in water practiced by both ancient and present day religions and cultures the world over.

<sup>6</sup>Other examples of this phenomenon in Ramos's work are the canine characters Tubarão in São Bernardo and Moqueca in Angústia.

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# THE MEDIEVAL CONCEPTION OF THE SIN OF "MALDECIR" AS REFLECTED IN SPANISH EXEMPLARY LITERATURE

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One aspect of medieval culture which seems strange from a modern perspective is the gravity which it assigned to sins of the tongue, or "vitia linguae." This category of sins was exhaustively classified and defined by the major moral theologians of the period, such as Thomas Aquinas, Alexander of Hales, and Bonaventure. Alexander, for example, divides sins of the tongue into thirteen different types in his Summa theologica: each is then defined and explained, along with the circumstances under which each sin is mortal or venial.

The imaginative literature of the period also demonstrates the gravity assigned to sins of the tongue in medieval culture, especially in exemplary literature. This genre is of great importance to those interested in investigating medieval thought, as these didactic works constitute perhaps the most faithful representation of how medieval man perceived himself, his society, and his place in the universe. Two of the most extensive surviving collections of exempla in Spanish are the Libro de los exemplos por a.b.c. of Clemente Sanchez de Vercial, dating from around the end of the fourteenth or early fifteenth century, and El especulo de los legos, an anonymous translation of the Speculum Laicorum, dating from around the beginning of the fifteenth century. These works provide us with insight into medieval thought, as the exempla they contain serve not only as the basis for medieval preaching in the vernacular but also as spiritual readings for laymen and clergy alike. Both works manifest the intense medieval concern with the abuse of speech. For example, in the Libro de los exemplos, one finds twenty-nine exempla concerning the moral and immoral use of speech. In El especulo, one particular sin of the tongue, defamation or maldecir, is regarded as the moral equivalent of homicide and worthy of punishment "en peor lugar que el infierno, si ser pudiese . . ." (117, 13-14).<sup>1</sup>

Why such concern for sins involving the abuse of speech? What answers to this question appear in exemplary literature? This study argues that this concern was the result of three aspects of medieval culture: first, the medieval philosophical-theological perception of the order of the universe and man's place in it; second, the medieval secular preoccupation with the idea of fama; finally, and most

importantly, the acute medieval consciousness of the power of language as employed for either moral or immoral purposes. This essay will focus specifically on the sin of maldecir, or defamation, as presented in the two aforementioned texts. To understand the medieval perspective on this topic it will be helpful to delineate pertinent aspects of the philosophical and social contexts. Examined in this light, these three aspects appear as the organizing principles of a cultural ambience in which the sin of defamation was of extreme gravity. In the exemplary literature of medieval Spain, this gravity is especially noteworthy for its evident support of the long-acknowledged Spanish preoccupation with honra.

It is important to note first that medieval moral theology was extremely sensitive to the fact that man is a social being and that each individual in society seeks his own ends. The ideal was that each individual should seek ends in harmony with those of other individuals, ends that benefit society as a whole. This ideal forms the basis of the doctrine of Aquinas: "homo est animal sociale" (1a.96,4), and "Proprium est naturae rationalis ut tendat in finem quasi se agens vel ducens ad finem" (1a2ae.I,2). In the words of Marcus Lefebure: ". . . these two features of his being are so intimately interconnected that his being has to be thought of not merely as a being with, but a being towards . . . his satisfaction is to come from playing his part in the symphony of society" (Summa, 38:xix). According to this perspective, in which each individual in society is seeking his own ends, it is clearly impossible that there not be conflicting ends in the imperfect human world. It follows that there must be a set of precepts to govern the relationship between individuals in society; in medieval thought these precepts grouped themselves under the concept of justice. Aquinas defines justice thusly: "The proper characteristic of justice, as compared to the other moral virtues, is to govern man in his dealings with others" (2a2ae.57,1). This idea of justice, passed into medieval tradition, consists of a group of precepts about how man is to conduct himself in his social context. This is crucial to an understanding of medieval thought, given the consciousness of the social nature of man and his teleological nature as a "being towards." It is therefore not surprising to find this consciousness reflected in the Especulo: "la detraction . . . aparta el oydor de la dulcedumbre del amor e lo trae al proximo a amargura de enemiganza e rancor," y "turba la paz de los que bien en paz" (116, 17-19).

In order to better understand the import of sins of the tongue in general and the sin of maldecir specifically, it is helpful to understand the medieval perception of man in relation to his universe. To the medieval mind, all things in nature are a reflection of the divine

exemplar. It was believed that God manifests himself in all of creation, and that the most faithful representation of the divine in nature is man. In the words of Bonaventure:

In every creature there is a refulgence of the divine exemplar, but mixed with darkness: hence it resembles some kind of opacity combined with light. The creature exists only as a kind of imitation of God's wisdom, as a certain plastic representation of it . . . [man] resembles light, a mirror, an image." (*Collationes* 12:14)

This passage illustrates the medieval idea of nature as a reflection of the divine and of man as the highest expression of the divine in nature. From this idea it is extrapolated that it is the duty of man to dedicate himself to rediscovering the divine in nature, and in this manner come closer to God. This idea is expressed in mystical terms in Bonaventure's well known "journey of the soul to God." One finds the same concept of man as an image of God in the *Summa theologica* of Aquinas:

Now it is plain that man bears some likeness to God that is derived from God as its original . . . this particular infinitely surpasses the thing modelled on it . . . . God's image . . . is in man as in an alien nature, like the king's image on a silver coin--the example used by Augustine . . . . But in intensity and concentration a better likeness of the divine perfection is to be found in the intelligent creation, which has a capacity for a higher good. (1a.93,1-2ad3)

These passages clearly show the view of the soul as a reflection of God, which demonstrates one reason for the seriousness of defamation from the medieval perspective.

Equally fundamental is the medieval belief that there is a divine order reflected in God's earthly creation. Aquinas employed the following metaphor in describing this order:

. . . if you were to go into a well laid-out home, from its arrangement you would get a good idea of the arranger's plan . . . . Now the highest perfection of any being consists in the attaining of its end. Hence it is appropriate to God's goodness that, as he has brought things into being, he also guides them toward this end. (1a2ae103.1)

Aquinas also posits this reflection of the divine order in the human concept of justice as instituted to maintain social order modelled on the divine exemplar: "Legal justice is relative to the divine good in human terms as divine justice is to the divine good, to which all sin is repugnant" (2a2ae59.1). This idea of justice, together with the prevalent conception of man and his place in creation, constitute the moral basis of the medieval obsession with the sin of maldecir.

Aquinas defined defamation as "the taking away of someone's character . . ." (2a2ae72.1). Alexander of Hales assigned to this sin the name of "maledictio" (from which origin comes the Spanish name), and defined it as speaking ill of one who does not merit it, or merits better (II-II, 3.3.2.10.1).

In light of this cultural context, it is possible to sketch generally the reasons for the gravity accorded to the sin of "maldecir." We have seen that man was perceived as a goal-oriented social being. We have also noted that human justice was viewed as a group of concepts regarding how individuals should comport themselves in society, and that this human justice is a reflection of the divine justice which arranges all things on earth and in heaven. God was conceived of as present in all things and as motivating all things toward that ultimate good, Himself, from whence they issued: man was believed to be the highest manifestation of God in nature. To defame another would then be to move in direct opposition to this, a violation of divine and human justice. Not only does the defamer move farther away from God, he causes others to do so as well: "lo tercero de la detraction es mucho peor porque aparta al ome del estado del saluacion e lo trae a la cueua de la pena perdurable . . ." (117, 7-8). It would be a reversal of the tendency of all things to return to the original good: as Bonaventure puts it, the sin "implies a movement away from the changeless Good" (Breviloquium III:5,4).

The particular reason for the seriousness of this sin derives from the medieval notion of the specific nature of man. Each individual possesses some essence in the image of God as a reflection of the divine. The sin of maldecir, according to the given definition, unjustly takes away something of this essence; for this reason it is not only a sin against man, but also against the operation of God Himself in man. To state it in terms of Bonaventurian metaphysics, it constitutes an eclipse of the divine light in man. Instead of bringing oneself closer to God through the celebration of His presence in man, one denies or attempts to take away something of this essence in another. The seriousness of this sin to the medievals stems from this conception of justice and of man, his place in nature and in society.

These serious theoretical reasons for regarding defamation as abortive find an equally serious practical application in the medieval Spanish society. In the Spain of the middle ages, fama was conceived of as man's reputation with regard to his family's social status and his personal conduct and deeds. The ideal was to be a polite courtesan, a just Christian, and skilled and valiant in the exercise of arms. But this fama unfortunately consisted less of possessing these virtues themselves than in having the reputation of possessing them. A man's fama was what was said about him, something external and not internal, as Maria Rosa Lida de Malkiel clearly shows in her study, *La idea de fama en la edad media castellana*. She finds the preoccupation with this external fama reflected throughout the literature of the period, as in the didactic works of Don Juan Manuel:

No sorprende, pues, la frecuencia con que Don Juan Manuel aduce como móvil de conducta la honra no entendida precisamente como gloria caballerescas, sino como juicio valorativo de la sociedad . . . No parece diferir . . . esta honra, de raíz enteramente social, la fama de la que hay mención frecuente en los escritos de Don Juan Manuel. (211-12)

Neither is it surprising to find a preoccupation with this concern in the *Especulo*: "Detraction . . . es mala porque trae al absente del olor de la buena fama," and "El cal maldedidor comete furto, ca quita al proximo la fama del buen nombre" (116, 7-8). Once again defamation is conceived of as a taking away, implicit in the use of the word "detraction" interchangeably with *maldedir*. Moreover, Spaniards were acutely aware that this reputation lasted long after death, as we shall see. If we accept this argument, it is reasonable to conclude that the cult of fama contributed considerably to the gravity accorded the sin of defamation. The act of defamation would injure the individual's reputation, possibly for generations. Although Lida de Malkiel's study confines itself to medieval Spain, it is not unreasonable to assume that this concept of an individual's good name as something external would apply to other nations as well (although perhaps not to the same extent) whose chivalric or courtly structures were similar to those of Spain.

The third and most important aspect of medieval culture which affected the prevalent conception of defamation was the acute medieval awareness of the power of language. Recognition of this power was based on medieval theories of the act of communication,

which generally asserted that images or meanings are reproduced or reified in the mind of the listener as "forms." Not only was it believed possible to communicate absolute meaning, it was also believed that this communicated meaning "informed" or became a part of the individual who received it. This was thought to be achieved by communicating images universally available to human experience, a process named "assimilatio," or "that which invokes a universal" (Allen 181). According to Allen, "the claim that assimilatio makes about reference is that the world of words and the world of things are not two, but one" (249). Due to the assimilation of these meanings into the listener, Bonaventure can conclude:

. . . all speech signifies a conception of the mind, and that inward conception is the word of the mind and its offspring, which is also known by the one who as the conception . . . [the word] is received into the ear of the heart of the listener. (De reductione 15; my emphasis)

The concept of language as an act and the belief in the direct relation between understanding, knowing, and being, constitutes the medieval conception of the power of language. As Marvin B. Becker points out, "At the level of conceptualization the tie existed between being and knowing. The ideal was to achieve an identity between sign and reference, between the epistemological and the ontological" (49).<sup>2</sup> It follows that to "de-fame," taking away something of the social fama--or something of the divine essence in moral terms--consists of offering the listener a false signified that is then assimilated and becomes part of the listener's essence. James J. Murphy makes note of this metalinguistic consciousness in the De catechizandis rudibus of St. Augustine:

Since all men learn whatever it is God wants them to learn in the universe through signs . . . Man's use of his own man-made conventional signs is of the utmost importance to Augustine. The proper use of conventional signs can prompt a man to find his way to God, or can sidetrack him into error and disbelief and ultimately into sin, which is leading him away from God. Augustine therefore sees man's use of signs--especially when arranged in the sophisticated patterns taught by the rhetor--as an enormous divine responsibility which God places upon every man. (290)

Although the text to which Murphy is referring concerns for the most

part the teaching of the faith, Murphy rightly underscores the broad implications of this metalinguistic sensitivity which was passed on to the medievals. The act of communicating a signified was believed to have a direct effect on the recipient's mode of being. This would consequently inform his actions in his social role: therein resides the seriousness of this sin.

We can see therefore that the moral and social significance of defamation was greatly magnified by this sensitivity; it was realized that defamation comprised not only a sin against the person defamed but against the listener; through the power of language he too could be led to sin. We see this concern over the dual nature of this sin in the following passage from the *Especulo*: "Uno es el que fabla e una es la palabra que dize e aquella sola palabra mata en un momento las almas de la muchedumbre de los oydores que dan sus orejas a oyr las palabras del dezidor" (118, 5-8). We can also see this metalinguistic consciousness manifest in the frequent warnings presented against listening to such speech: "Atapa tus orejas con espinas . . . non es menos mal oyr al maldezidor que dezir el mal . . . esta en mayor peligro el tesoro cuando todas las puertas estan abiertas," (116, 20, 22-24) and "non entrasen por las sus orejas a la su alma el veneno de las malas palabras" (119, 4-5) (Note the relationship implied between ear and soul.) It can be seen then that the cultural aspect which most influenced the medieval conception of the gravity of this sin was the individual's acute metalinguistic sensitivity to the power of language based on the theory of linguistic communication described here.

This theory is implicit in various aspects of exemplary literature, for the exemplum is based on common human experience and therefore considered easily "assimilated," in Allen's sense. Another aspect which reflects this theory of language is the frequent use of proverbs. These pithy statements were considered theoretically effective; they were easily memorized because of their brevity and lyrical nature, and their didactic content was readily understandable to all and therefore also easily "assimilated." Proverbs appear at the beginning of each example in Vercial's text and serve to orient the reader to its moral content; they also appear throughout the *Especulo* and many other medieval exemplary texts.

Metaphors are also a favorite device; these metaphors are purposely concrete and "universal." The defamer, for example, is described thus: "Semejable es el maldiziente a la serpiente que muerde ascondidamente," his tongue is compared to the "veneno de las serpientes que son llamadas asprios" (117, 4-6). It is through this "semejanza" or similarity that assimilatio functions; the snake was not only a concrete fact of life but one of the strongest primordial symbols

of evil. A direct comparison is established between poisoning and the act of defamation on the basis of this "semejanza": "E así como el veneno priva al ome de la vida corporal, así el maldizidor priva al oydor de la salud espiritual" (117, 1-3). The defamer is also metaphorically a thief who steals the good name of his victim, and his tongue is compared to a sword or a knife. The use of such images, along with the rhetorical tools previously discussed, appear to function in a way that would support the concept of assimilation.

Given the medieval metalinguistic sensitivity to the power of language, it is not surprising that this medium would also be employed to prevent its abuse. As Mark D. Johnston correctly points out: "[the medievals] recognized the function of language as a basis for social order and they attempted to integrate various elements of ethical and rhetorical doctrine" (22). As Murphy noted on Augustine, rhetoric was considered the most effective form of communication; the exemplum was fundamental to the popular rhetoric employed to combat the social ills of the day. Medievalists simultaneously recognized the destructive capacity of language and employed rhetoric to prevent its abuse. What the exemplary texts attempt to do then is to employ the most effective rhetorical methods to accomplish this task, some of which have been discussed above in their relation to the medieval theory of linguistic communication.

If we examine now one of the exempla of Sanchez de Vercial, we see how it reflects many of the medieval concerns with the social and moral implications of the abuse of language that have been outlined here.

## DEFUNTO DETRAHERE DISPLICIT NIMIS DEO

Decir mal del finado

es grave pecado

1. El Papa que subdido a Sant Gregoria dezia mal de la su vida reprehendiendolo que era prodigo y desgastador e que avia dissipado los bienes de la iglesia. E aparesciole Sant Gregorio una e dos e tres vezes amonestandolo que cessasse de detraher e de zír mal del. E el non lo queriendo fazer aparesciole la quarta e dióle un golpe en la cabeza mortal de luego morio. E esto dice la Coronica Mariana.
2. E otrosy un sacerdote dezia mal de Sant Ambrosio despues del enterrado luego vino la plaga e morio.
3. E un obispo deziendo mal de Sant Ambrosio, dixeronle, lo que acasciera al sacerdote porque dezia mal del; e el menoscrecio e noncura dello, e luego cayo en gran enfermedad de que morio. (94-5)

The role of the introductory proverb in the assimilative process has already been discussed. The punishment of the slanderers not only reflects the seriousness of the sin, but social realities. The return of the plague was a horrifying possibility of medieval life and therefore also easily "assimilated."

This exemplum reflects both the social import of the sin of defamation and the contribution of the acute medieval metalinguistic awareness to this importance. It illustrates the preoccupation with reputation and reflects cognizance of the fact that this reputation endures after the individual's death. To affect this reputation adversely would therefore be an extremely serious act, one meriting capital punishment. The individual who defames not only sins himself, but through the abuse of language is capable of causing others to do so as well. This is an extreme example which serves to illustrate well this point: the Pope has the power to create official church opinion on any matter. This Pope detracts from the social reputation of St. Gregory; his untrue claims are accepted as true. According to the medieval view, the defamer creates a false image which through the medium of the linguistic signifier becomes integrated into the character of the listener which then informs him in the performance of his social role. From this perspective, it is possible to understand the medieval preoccupation with this sin.

Medieval exemplary texts comprise a rich resource for insight into medieval thought. An attempt has been made here to understand one crucial aspect of this thought as reflected in certain Spanish exemplary texts: the gravity with which the sin of *maldecir* was viewed. It has been seen that there are at least three cultural factors which contribute to this concern: moral-theological tradition, obsession with social reputation, and most importantly the acute medieval consciousness of the power of language based on medieval theories of the communicative process. This consciousness is reflected in the rhetorical devices manifest in the exemplary literature of the day, literature which attempted to employ the power of rhetoric to combat the social and moral vice of defamation.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>All page and line references are from the Mohedano Hernandez edition in the list of works cited; references refer to this text and not the original manuscript. The original verse numbers are also given in this edition. Authorship of the Especulo has been attributed by some literary historians to John of Hoveden. However, as Mohedano points out, there is no evidence to support this theory.

<sup>2</sup>Becker is here discussing the conceptual nature of the symbolic contract in medieval exchange systems. However, the same conceptualization would apply to the exchange of images or meanings, as I believe Becker would agree.

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## "SACRED AND PROFANE LOVE": VENUS FIGURES IN LOPE DE VEGA'S COMEDIA

*Debra Collins Ames*

Well known to all familiar with Lope de Vega's life and works is his desire to be considered a learned author, to overcome his reputation as a so-called popular writer. Equally well known are the jeers of Lope's archrivals, who criticized his displays of erudition as facile embellishment, easily obtained from secondary sources, and therefore a transparent attempt to project an image that Lope did not merit. Although born largely of petty jealousy, this criticism has nevertheless far outlived Lope and his detractors, for even in this century, many scholars have dismissed his classical allusions as simply elements of his baroque style, a rudimentary characterization device in which every great leader is a Hector, every warrior a Mars, and every seductive woman a Venus. Although earlier writers had used such classical comparisons as just such an erudite shorthand to convey the most salient quality of a person, Lope goes far beyond these models, using classical allusions to suggest that someone not only shares the same trait as a given mythological character, but that it will ultimately lead him to the same tragic destiny.

As devices of characterization and prefiguration, these allusions depend both upon the readers' knowledge of the ancient tales, as well as their willingness to look beyond the standard associations and on to the secondary meanings that Lope may have had in mind, the finer parallels between those on stage and the classical figures with whom they are compared. By the time Lope began writing his plays, classical literature had already enjoyed a long history at the hands of multitudinous interpreters; certain elements in tales had crystallized and become permanent features, while others had remained fluid, changing in accord with each generation's ideology, or each writer's particular needs. With all these variations at his disposal, Lope could evoke a number of possible associations through a single reference. Such disparate views make allusions rich yet ambiguous sources of characterization, and neither their complexity, nor their contribution should be underestimated. As Alexander Parker points out in his oft-cited study of the Golden Age comedia, taking advantage of these subtle clues is imperative:

The Spanish drama is, of course . . . essentially a drama of action and not of characterization. It does not set out to

portray rounded and complete characters . . . ; since the dramatists are out to present, with a strict limitation of time, an action that is full of incident, they generally have no time to elaborate their characters, and must confine their characterization to brief touches. They left to the audience and the actors to fill in, from these hints and touches, the psychology of the characters. And it is important that the modern reader of Spanish plays should do the same. He will find that the dramatist will give him the hint, but it is up to him to take it. (681-82)

Classical allusions are thus but one example of this broader tendency noted by Parker for playwrights to entrust the responsibility of interpretation and speculation to the audience.

One classical tale that invites such examination is Venus's affairs with Mars and Adonis. A brief summary of this story will reveal the diverse associations that we must bear in mind when studying Lope's allusions to her, and will enable us to appreciate the comparison's underlying implications in two masterpieces, El castigo sin venganza and El caballero de Olmedo.

Reviewing the love affair between Venus and Mars, we recognize its immediate appeal to a man of Lope's nature and interests. In the widely read Ovidian Metamorphoses as well as the Art of Love, we find Venus passionately attracted to the god of war and shamelessly unencumbered by her marital ties to Vulcan. With obvious pleasure, Ovid recounts how the blacksmith uses his craft to execute a fitting revenge upon the adulterers, weaving a net so fine that no eye can detect it and casting the mesh on the lovers' bed, so that when they return, it scoops them up, naked for all to see. With mirth and envy, one heckler "prayed that some day he might be overtaken / by such disgrace himself" (Metamorphoses, IV, 190-91). Although the details of the episode circulate among the gleeful gods, the lovers persist in their affair.

This light-hearted tale was not destined to remain a simple story of cuckoldry and bawdy revenge, for the union of these antithetical deities of love and war lent itself well to symbolic interpretations: Venus becomes known as a tempering force that soothes the bellicose Mars, giving rise to Harmony, their offspring. Fascinated by this amorous subjugation, artists often depicted Venus literally disarming the god of war and even toying with the captured arms herself: in the fresco The Triumph of Venus, Francesco Cossa allows Mars to retain his armor as he kneels in chains before the goddess; Botticelli and Piero di Cosimo depict Venus watching over the slumbering Mars, now bereft

of his armor and weapons, while Marco Zoppo reveals the goddess and a group of cupids displaying the captured arms of Mars (Waddington 214-15).

Whereas Venus's affair with Mars promoted her image as a harmonious force, her liaison with Adonis had quite the opposite effect, casting her as a dangerous beauty whose charms inspired rivalry, violence and death. Although she recognizes that her passion has evoked the jealous wrath of Mars and thus compromised Adonis's safety, her warnings fail to prevent his tragic death at the tusks of a wild boar that turns on him, a mishap indeed prearranged by the jilted Mars, according to many versions of the myth.<sup>1</sup> As a long-standing symbol of lechery and jealousy, the boar is a most appropriate agent of death, and a reminder of the ultimate reasons behind the loss of this young life.<sup>2</sup>

These episodes enable one to glimpse the essentially paradoxical nature of Venus and her charms, her ability to evoke both world harmony and fatal strife. Unable to reconcile such contradictory effects, many came to subscribe to a bipartite view of Venus, conceiving of her not as a single goddess, but rather as an appellation that circumscribed multiple deities, each with her own history and connotations. Renaissance philosophers often referred to her as twin sisters, each with her own distinct character: Venus Coelestis was associated with modesty and chastity, whereas her counterpart Venus Naturalis was linked with fertility and sensuality (Gira 107).

Fascinated by these complementary figures, artists and writers exploited the paradoxical goddesses in portrait and verse. Painters could set the two figures side by side to contrast them (Titian's Sacred and Profane Love) or meld them into one being that possessed both sets of traits (Botticelli's The Birth of Venus) (Gira 107-11). Writers frequently endowed their heroines with this paradoxical combination of pudor and cupiditas, seeking to explore the effects that such powerful charms might have on men. It has been observed, for example, that many women associated with the goddess in Shakespeare's theater exude both modesty and sensuality, traits that delicately offset one another, yet when that balance is either disturbed or misunderstood, tragedy ensues (Gira 98). Some of Lope's heroines are also endowed with these contradictory traits, linked with Venus, and--not coincidentally, it would appear--involved in various types of tragic events.

One such woman is Casandra, the heroine who brings death to herself and her beloved in El castigo sin venganza. Lope explicitly connects Casandra with Venus on two occasions, leaving it up to us to interpret these allusions and draw our own conclusions about their

meaning. The first reference to the goddess appears when Batín and Federico are discussing the arrival of the Duke's beautiful and surprisingly young wife. The servant praises her enthusiastically and remarks how much better suited she is to Federico than to his father:

Paréceme una azucena . . .  
 ¿No era mejor para ti  
 esta clavellina fresca,  
 esta naranja en azar,  
 toda de pimpollos hecha,  
 esta alcorza de ambar y oro,  
 esta Venus, esta Elena? (625, 638-43)

Batín's compliments reflect well the opposing forces at work within Casandra. Focusing on her youth and presumed chastity, he portrays her as the incarnation of Spring itself, associating her with virginally white blossoms. As he continues to add flowers to this metaphorical bouquet, the cumulative effect becomes overwhelming; their heady perfume intoxicates, imparting a sensual note to his description and influencing the way in which we view Casandra.<sup>3</sup> The classical allusions further taint our view of her, for she is clearly not the goddess whose love will subjugate Mars and beget harmony; nor is she the Venus Coelestis worshiped by the pure of heart; the Duquesa may exhibit the outer trappings of this goddess, but her true self shows through, just as the arousing perfume belies the outward whiteness of the blossoms with which she is compared. She is the Venus who incites desire and discord, the Helen who brings war to her homeland.

Although her real nature becomes increasingly clear as the play develops, this tantalizing combination of modesty and sensuality manifests itself from the very beginning of the work. The first time Casandra appears, she is in the arms of Federico as he rescues her from a coach that had overturned while crossing a river. Federico naturally expresses great surprise that she is traveling alone, but Casandra assures him that she has been accompanied by the Marqués and Rutilio. We later discover that she was alone at the time of the accident because she had gone off to bathe her feet in the river. By calling our attention to this bit of self-indulgence, Lope infuses her character with an aura of marked sensuality. Although she had dismissed her companions before going to the river, such outer modesty remains a hollow tribute to the decorum of the nobility--already, one can sense the way in which her true desires chafe at her sense of propriety.<sup>4</sup>

Although Casandra exhibits both modesty and sensuality early in

the play, any balance between these traits soon disintegrates. The Duquesa emerges as an incarnation of Venus Naturalis, devoted to the pleasures of physical love with an ever-diminishing concern for familial honor and spiritual salvation. When Venus is explicitly linked with Casandra for the second time, no doubt remains as to which goddess is being evoked. The Duquesa urges Federico to express his passion for the unnamed beloved who torments him, knowing full well that it is she: "Dile tu amor, sea quien fuere, / que no sin causa pintaron / a Venus tal vez los griegos / rendida a un sátiro o fauno" (1490-93). Casandra implies in a none-too-subtle fashion that like Venus, she too is willing to engage in relations unbecoming to her status. Like the goddess who enjoyed carnal pleasures with whomever she desired, Casandra is ultimately not inhibited by the social mores that condemn such love between stepmother and stepson.

This pronounced imbalance in Casandra's nature manifests itself in her behavior and, ultimately, it leads to tragedy. The Duke initially hopes that Casandra will bring peace to him, to Federico, and to his people (782-83), yet this Venus fails to subjugate Mars (1354-55), and succeeds only in incurring the warrior's wrath, his jealousy, his private dishonor, and his painful meting of justice. Although the errant ways of both Federico and his father contribute to the bloody denouement, Casandra's lack of self-restraint was instrumental in wreaking the fatal havoc that ends the play. A woman closer to the ideal of Venus Coelestis would not have sought satisfaction outside her marriage, as poor a union as this was. Although Casandra's complaints about the Duke's neglect are legitimate, they are, nonetheless, a brazen expression of female sexuality by *comedia* standards. Not only is she impure herself, but her physical beauty in turn engenders an impure love in Federico--far from bringing peace to the dukedom, the love of this Venus Naturalis can only lead to sin, death and damnation.

Although at first glance Casandra would seem to have little in common with Inés, the demure heroine of *El caballero de Olmedo*, the fact that both women are linked with Venus invites a more careful comparison of the two. Such an analysis reveals that while the two women are different, the masculine response to their charms is quite similar. Like the goddess whose love paradoxically engenders both peace and strife, Inés similarly evokes an ambiguous passion--uplifting in Alonso, destructive in Rodrigo, and ultimately, tragic for all. A closer examination of Inés also reveals a careful melding of two different Venus figures. In the same way that Lope infuses Casandra with the traits of Venus Coelestis and Venus Naturalis, so too does he draw upon the goddess's many faces in creating Inés.

When Fabia reports to the young woman that: "Don Alonso en una

feria / te vio, labradora Venus, / haciendo las cejas arco, / y flecha los ojos bellos" (827-30), the allusion appears merely to convey the extent of the heroine's beauty. If we link the reference to other descriptions of Inés, however, the passage acquires additional levels of meaning. The comparison of a woman's physical charms with weapons was a literary commonplace in Lope's day, related to the motif of the *guerra de amor*, yet this one appears to have greater significance, for it is not the only occasion on which the beauty of Inés is described in martial terms. Earlier in the play, don Alonso uses images of war in recounting her promenade through town:

Por la tarde salió Inés  
a la feria de Medina . . .  
las manos haciendo tretas,  
que como juego de esgrima,  
tiene tanta gracia en ellas,  
que señala las heridas . . .  
con la caja de la boca  
allegaba infantería,  
porque, sin ser capitán,  
hizo gente por la villa. (75-76, 87-90, 95-98)

Although Inés is physically armed only with her beauty, both Alonso and Fabia perceive her as a sort of *Venus armata*, ready to participate in the warfare of love. As we saw earlier, Venus frequently appears armed because she has stripped Mars of his weapons and donned them herself, but there is an alternate tradition, described by Edgar Wind in his book *Pagan Mysteries in The Renaissance*, in which she is neither bellicose nor subjugating:

[W]hile appearing armed, Venus may give to the armour a peaceable motive. The martial Venus may stand for the strength that comes from love, for the fortitude that is inspired by charity, or--in the reverse--for a sweetness derived from strength: *de forti dulcedo*. (92)

By drawing upon this tradition, Lope infuses Inés not only with the legendary beauty of Venus, but also with her strength in meeting the demands of love. In the course of the play, Inés proves herself worthy of the comparison as she bravely confronts the various obstacles that arise--her obligations to Rodrigo, Alonso's departure, and ultimately, his death. Coexisting with her strength is a purity that also attracts don Alonso to Inés; for him, she is indeed a Venus Coelestis--"un ángel"

(58), blessed with "divino entendimiento" (1086), and the power to purify with her touch ("[como] el marfil / del unicornio santigua / las aguas, así el cristal / de un dedo puso en la pila" [139-42]).

Although this strong, pure woman inspires Alonso with the deepest adoration, her love--like that of Venus, and like that of Casandra--is capable of inciting jealousy, strife, and tragedy. Rodrigo is enraged by his rival and plots his death, arranging for the young *galán* to be struck down on the lonely road between Olmedo and Medina. Like Adonis, Alonso fails to heed the warnings given him and pays for the love of Venus with his own life. Perhaps on a first reading we do not realize that Alonso's death has been foretold early on, when Fabia declares to Inés, "con galas parece Adonis: / mejor fin le den los cielos" (861-62), her supplication reminding us that Adonis was not known only for his beauty, but also for his premature death occasioned by Venus's love. In retrospect, the allusions to the god and goddess thus foreshadow the denouement by suggesting an overall re-enactment of the classical tale.

In conclusion, we see that Lope's references to Venus are not mere embellishments inserted to counteract his image as a popular author, nor are they simple epithets designed to laud the heroine's physical charms. Such allusions have been shown to serve a dual purpose in Lope's theater, for they illuminate important inner qualities of these women, and subtly prefigure the tragedy that their love is destined to bring.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>In his commentary on Garcilaso's poetry (*Garcilaso y sus comentaristas* 565-67), Herrera states that Apollodorus, Aphthonius and Cassius Dionysius all name Mars the instigator of Adonis's death; Lope, drawing upon another tradition, makes Apollo responsible for it in his play *Adonis y Venus*.

<sup>2</sup>Ferguson (18) tells us that the hog "is used to represent the demon of sensuality and gluttony." According to Allen (56), the boar was associated with lechery in the *Ovide moralisé* and viewed as an incarnation of jealousy by Horologgi in his commentary of the *Metamorphoses* (Anguillara 388).

<sup>3</sup>Elsewhere in the play, Lope similarly associates Casandra with a white horse that, despite being named "por la nieve pura / de la piel" (264-65) ultimately allows itself to be ridden by all; in retrospect, we

see the transformation in Cisne as foreshadowing the Duchess's own.

<sup>4</sup>On the erotic fascination with women's feet during the Golden Age, see Kossoff (381-86).

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## EL MODERNISMO ANTE EL ROMANTICISMO Y LA VANGUARDIA

*Alberto Julián Pérez*

La relación del Modernismo con el Romanticismo que lo precedió, con las literaturas europeas que lo inspiraron y con la Vanguardia de nuestro siglo, es aparentemente clara, pero considero que la crítica no ha tomado en cuenta aún con suficiente cuidado el punto de vista desde el cual los escritores modernistas, que reflejaron y comentaron un modelo literario francés finisecular parnasiano y simbolista, asumieron la crítica ideológica y estética que los parnasianos hicieron al Romanticismo. Esto se justifica en parte por la dificultad que implica para la crítica observar el desarrollo de un movimiento como el Modernismo desde un siglo dominado por una estética diferente, la de la Vanguardia, situación que ha llevado a una distorsión o a un obscurecimiento de nuestro horizonte de comprensión de los fenómenos culturales activos que estaban en juego en el momento en que el Modernismo irrumpió en la escena latinoamericana.

Me parece necesario tratar de esclarecer la relación del Modernismo con el Romanticismo, entender cómo los modernistas leían a los románticos y en qué medida su literatura post-romántica corrigió la visión romántica del mundo con una visión y una concepción literaria diversa. Este cambio de perspectiva puede ayudarnos a renovar consistentemente nuestra comprensión del Modernismo como fenómeno.

El complejo carácter del Modernismo hace arduo penetrar racionalmente en una problemática como la que acabo de formular, en parte por la falta en Latinoamérica de un movimiento romántico artísticamente consumado como lo fue el europeo, capaz de instaurar una tradición literaria local normativamente fuerte y, por otro lado, porque aceptar el Modernismo implicó abandonar el desprestigiado modelo literario español y adoptar de una manera muy directa y agresiva el modelo literario francés, hecho este último especialmente contradictorio y conflictivo desde el punto de vista de la ideología nacionalista pequeño-burguesa de las élites ilustradas latinoamericanas.

El movimiento modernista se instaura en una especie de "vaeso" poético creado por la falta de una expresión literaria romántica satisfactoria, capaz de poner las grandes gestas latinoamericanas de emancipación en una justa altura poética. El Romanticismo no produjo en Latinoamérica un gran poeta representativo de primer

nivel, un Víctor Hugo, como muchos seguramente esperaban, para consolidar la fundación de una literatura nacional. El Modernismo no encontró una fecunda dialéctica literaria en la cual insertarse y con la cual enriquecerse, sino que procedió como una especie de trasplante, como un proceso de transculturación a partir de cierta experiencia literaria europea. Esto último fue bastante injurioso para la ideología de los estados nacionales burgueses en Latinoamérica, que después de largas guerras civiles, gozaban de una época de relativa calma y estabilidad político-económica: el Modernismo parecía agredir sus intereses imponiendo una estética foránea a la que Darío, con gran astucia, procedió a americanizar.

En la medida que el Modernismo adoptó la ideología estética y literaria finisecular francesa, fue tomando posiciones muy semejantes a las de su modelo con respecto al Romanticismo. Siguiendo un estudio en Francis Vincent, podemos entender la estética del Parnaso, una de las que más influyeron en el Modernismo, como una reacción contra el Romanticismo, especialmente el Romanticismo social de Hugo.<sup>1</sup> El Parnaso, en vez de darle al poeta un papel como profeta y conductor de pueblos, lo redujo al papel de un artesano que se comportaba de manera impersonal frente a su creación, tratando de eliminar de la poesía la confidencia y la emoción. El poeta parnasiano negó la función social del arte, transformándolo en un objeto autónomo con un fin en sí mismo, "arte por el arte," eliminando de la poesía temas religiosos, filosóficos, políticos y sociales y reemplazando el patetismo romántico por lo lúdico.

Para los parnasianos la forma tenía preeminencia sobre el contenido y los poetas confiaban todo a su técnica; empleaban rimas ricas y mostraban una erudición poética propia de artistas iniciados en la complejidad de un arte para elegidos. Reemplazaron el tema de la subjetividad romántica y la relación del poeta con la naturaleza por una descripción impersonal y objetiva del mundo exterior en su riqueza, exotismo y colorido. La experiencia personal del poeta dejó de ser un motivo para poetizar; la creación se nutrió entonces de erudición histórica, arqueológica y mitológica. Este Parnasianismo, que estuvo presente en el origen y primer momento del Modernismo, alcanzó su obra más importante en Prosas profanas (1896) de Darío.

La estética del Parnaso influyó más en Latinoamérica que la del Simbolismo. Los poetas latinoamericanos se adaptaron con dificultad al nuevo lirismo simbolista que Darío incorporara en Cantos de vida y esperanza, publicado en 1905, casi veinte años después que Moréas diera a conocer en Francia el manifiesto del grupo, al punto que J. R. Jiménez pudo decir que el Modernismo latinoamericano había sido fundamentalmente parnasiano, mientras el español, representado por

figuras como el mismo Jiménez y Antonio Machado, había sido simbolista.<sup>2</sup> Cuando leemos la poesía de Lugones, Herrera y Reissig y otros poetas modernistas latinoamericanos contemporáneos a Darío, comprobamos lo acertado de la observación de Jiménez.

El Parnaso reaccionó contra el Romanticismo con sentido conservador, tratando de distanciar el arte de la expresión de la experiencia vital del poeta y de su función social, creando un arte autónomo y estetizante. En Latinoamérica el Modernismo practicó esta misma poética conservadora parnasiana, proponiendo la separación del arte y la vida y una creación formalizante y aristocrática. Constituyó, al menos en su primera etapa, el triunfo y la consolidación de una estética derivada de una lectura políticamente conservadora de la tradición romántica que, para los latinoamericanos, se transformó--paradójicamente--en el origen de un movimiento artístico capaz de representarlos, con un nivel de sofisticación y calidad artística semejante al de las culturas europeas, concretando así, parcialmente, el logro de un viejo anhelo de independencia y autonomía cultural nacional.

El deseo de tener una literatura propia de gran nivel es una legítima aspiración nacional; lo paradójico es que esto, que no pudo concretarse en Latinoamérica durante el auge del Romanticismo, que tan bien representaba estética e ideológicamente los ideales liberales a que aspiraban los grupos intelectuales de los nuevos estados, se lograra en un momento en que las naciones de Europa estaban en crisis y se habían gestado revoluciones, como las de 1848 y 1870, que indicaban un proceso de transformación social y en que el gran arte romántico que representaba a la burguesía triunfante de principios del siglo XIX estaba siendo reemplazado por un arte post-romántico políticamente conservador y formalista. La consolidación político-institucional y cultural de estas naciones latinoamericanas, que creían en la promesa liberal de alcanzar un poder estatal igual al de las naciones imperialistas más ricas y poderosas, llegó tardíamente: la crisis internacional puso en evidencia las limitaciones y la pérdida de legitimidad de la ideología del liberalismo burgués, mostrando su incapacidad para culminar el proceso de independencia nacional auténtica al que los países latinoamericanos legítimamente aspiraban.

Las naciones latinoamericanas no fueron capaces de integrarse al concierto internacional del poder burgués al que creían que podrían acceder en un doble sentido: como estados nacionales y como cultura nacional. Empezaron a fortalecer sus bases jurídicas, culturales y artísticas a fin del siglo XIX, cuando el orden burgués había entrado en crisis y se avecinaba la Primera Guerra Mundial. Al llegar la guerra, en la segunda década de nuestro siglo, el desarrollo de la

escena internacional no sólo confirmó el estatus neo-colonial de estas naciones, sino que su estética aristocratizante, el Modernismo, perdió legitimidad frente a los avances de las nuevas poéticas europeas: el Futurismo, el Cubismo, el Expresionismo. Hispanoamérica se impuso un nuevo cambio como resultado de ese cambio internacional, demostrando que sus culturas nacionales no eran compartimientos estancos y que reflejaban, voluntaria o involuntariamente, la crisis global.

La Vanguardia, como se denominó en Hispanoamérica a estos movimientos diversos, modificó no sólo la forma de hacer arte sino también la forma de leerlo e interpretarlo. Los escritores reaccionaron frente a la tradición literaria modernista, negándola y creando una estética no figurativa. Este nuevo efecto estético que crearon los vanguardistas negaba el referente, combinando imágenes discontinuas, en las que el lector no trataba de buscar un sentido simbólico transcendente sino que las aceptaba en su calidad alusiva y en su polisemia.

Las Vanguardias modificaron profundamente nuestra forma de leer y nuestra relación con el pasado literario. Los escritores vanguardistas fundaron con su obra un nuevo canon, desligado del Modernismo y también del Romanticismo, al que el Modernismo aludía y comentaba críticamente. Para los escritores post-vanguardistas de la actualidad, como Parra y Cardenal, la Vanguardia se constituye en el pasado literario inmediato; mantienen un diálogo intertextual con Neruda y Pound, no con Verlaine y Víctor Hugo.

Las Vanguardias crearon una discontinuidad y una ruptura con respecto a la tradición romántica decimonónica y cambiaron el horizonte histórico de comprensión literaria de una manera drástica. Desde este horizonte, que ostenta otros valores, otra forma de comprender la literatura, leer la tradición post-romántica de finales del siglo XIX es una empresa llena de peligros: el Modernismo sigue desafiando la limitada capacidad hermenéutica de interpretación de los latinoamericanistas. Pero si logramos situar su problemática entendiendo la posición subjetiva desde la cual nosotros leemos e interpretamos a los modernistas y la posición desde la cual ellos leyeron y modificaron críticamente la tradición romántica, incluyendo en esta evaluación el punto de vista excéntrico del lector hispanoamericano que asume la literatura europea como un valor ideal que puede abrazar en su totalidad y al que atribuye virtudes salvadoras para su propia expresión literaria, creo que el Modernismo, como objeto de estudio, si bien siempre presentará algunos aspectos poco inteligibles o que no estamos preparados para entender, dada la intrincada red de relaciones socio-culturales en la que surgió y la

forma en que alude a nuestra dolorosa e inconclusa búsqueda de identidad cultural, nos resultará más claro como fenómeno. La imagen que logremos de él se adecuará mejor a lo que fue realmente, poniendo en primer plano la problemática cultural de sus escritores como lectores y el punto de vista subjetivo dentro del cual nosotros, críticos contemporáneos, que sufrimos todavía muchas de las frustraciones de los modernistas ante la tarea inacabada de la consolidación de una cultura nacional, formulamos nuestras demandas y evaluamos el pasado literario.

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## NOTAS

<sup>1</sup>Ver Vincent (28-82).

<sup>2</sup>Ver Jiménez (62).

## OBRAS CITADAS

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# LUIS DE GONGORA EN UN POEMA FUNDAMENTAL DE GERARDO DIEGO: LA FÁBULA DE EQUIS Y ZEDA

*Reyes Lázaro Gurtubay*

Andrés Sánchez Robayna, crítico y poeta español, en un artículo/homenaje aparecido en julio de 1987--al poco tiempo de la muerte de Gerardo Diego--provocativamente compara la importancia de Fábula de Equis y Zeda dentro de la poesía de vanguardia española a la de Altazor de Huidobro y lamenta su desconocimiento por parte de la crítica. Este poema extenso fue publicado en México en 1932 y posiblemente escrito hacia 1927. Sánchez Robayna sitúa su importancia en la síntesis de vanguardia y clasicismo que en él se produce.<sup>1</sup>

Diego mismo, en Versos escogidos, antología de su propia poesía publicada en 1970, se queja de la falta de comentarios sobre Equis y Zeda y dice: "Si algún libro mío solicita un comentario o, cuando menos, una explicación, es la Fábula de Equis y Zeda" (67). En 1987, cuando se cumplen 60 años del homenaje a Góngora--debido a Diego en gran parte--y pocos meses de la muerte del poeta santanderino, quiero recoger la invitación de éste.

Sorprende que Diego, en su prefacio a la Fábula de Equis y Zeda de Versos escogidos, nos diga que la influencia gongorina en el poema--obvia e innegable--es meramente superficial, y ello a pesar de que el segundo canto lleva la inscripción "Góngora 1927." Dice Diego: ". . . tengo que decir que el gongorismo de la Fábula es sólo de fachada. Por dentro es un poema absolutamente de nuestro siglo y nada debe a D. Luis, ni siquiera su retórica o sintaxis. Guarda, sí, una semejanza de ritmo . . . y ese canto central, un como asunto, deliberado, de obsequio de amante a amada, de Polifemo a Galatea. Y eso es todo" (69). Sin embargo, eso no es todo. Al negar en 1970 la influencia de Góngora en su fábula, Diego reacciona demasiado violentamente contra su amor de juventud. Veremos al analizar el poema que éste solo puede entenderse como un diálogo poético desde la modernidad con el Góngora culto de Fábula de Polifemo y Galatea y de las Soledades.

Góngora es el genio que revoluciona el lenguaje poético del siglo XVII español. A caballo entre dos épocas, el Renacimiento y el Barroco, el aspecto de su poesía que probablemente incide más en la vanguardia, lo que hace a los poetas del 27 ver en él un alma gemela, es su revaloración del espacio poético: el poder que Góngora da a la

palabra para campar por sus respetos. Góngora lleva esto a cabo por medio de su uso atrevido de la metáfora, que reelabora elementos tradicionales (de la tradición petrarquista, por ejemplo), pero llevándolos a límites hasta entonces no permitidos. Dicha metáfora posee varias características muy importantes. Primero, es de segundo orden: el nivel literal se pierde en Góngora; esto se ve en estos versos de la Fábula de Polifemo y Galatea:

que en tanta gloria, infierno son no breve,  
fugitivo cristal, pomos de nieve. (327-28)

Si Galatea es pálida, Góngora amplifica la blancura y la convertirá en cristal o nieve, siguiendo la tradición petrarquista, pero una vez que la transformación se ha producido, la realidad, el nivel literal, Galatea, desaparece; ya no hay Galatea, sólo cristal y nieve. Esto nos lleva a la segunda característica: es una metáfora biunívoca. Una vez que Galatea es nieve, la nieve es idéntica a Galatea: se le pueden atribuir a ella cualidades de la nieve (por ejemplo, la frialdad), diferentes de las que produjeron la metáfora en primer lugar--la blancura. Esto ya se sale de la tradición renacentista. Como dice Remy de Gourmont, el crítico francés del siglo XIX que redescubrió a Góngora, comparar a un río con una serpiente no es nuevo, pero hablar de las escamas del río sí (305). Claro está que esta fusión de características produce, como señala Dámaso Alonso, una contaminación. Las imágenes en las metáforas de Góngora se funden unas con otras en un tejido complicadísimo de relaciones: el cielo se convierte en mar y viceversa, las personas son accidentes geográficos (montañas, soles) y la geografía se personaliza. Todo se entrecruza y contamina de tal manera, todo es tan todo lo demás que, dice Sánchez Robayna, todo refiere a una misma metáfora última: la naturaleza como texto o enigma que se puede descifrar en todas sus manifestaciones.

Sarduy y Sánchez Robayna analizan la influencia de dicha metáfora en Góngora, que es, desde luego, anterior al Siglo de Oro, pero que el andaluz ejemplifica de manera obsesiva. En las Soledades la metáfora de la escritura reviste formas diferentes: se presenta como tejidos, mapas, letras, bordados. Así se describen originalmente en Soledad primera unas islas y el río en que se hallan:

con torcido discurso, si prolijo [. . .]  
engarzando edificios en su plata  
de quintas coronado, se dilata  
majestuosamente  
en brazos dividido caudalosos

de islas, que paréntesis frondosos  
al período son de su corriente . . . . 2

Las islas son paréntesis de la frase que es el río. En otro momento de las Soledades, el peregrino contempla una explanada que si "mucho poco mapa les despliega . . ." (194); no ve un campo, sino su representación escrita. En Soledad primera 540, varias mujeres jóvenes cantan "Coros tejiendo, voces alternando." También en la Soledad primera, el peregrino contempla la naturaleza y se maravilla del tapiz que "tejió de verdes hojas la arboleda" (717).

En la Soledad segunda se nos presenta a un pescado atrapado en las redes, con estas palabras: "tejido en ellas se quedó burlado" (95). En Soledad primera, varias grullas escriben sobre el ciclo:

caracteres tal vez formando alados  
en el papel diáfano del cielo  
las plumas de su vuelo (609-11)

y el peregrino anuncia que su llanto quedará grabado en "los anales diáfanos del viento":

Audaz mi pensamiento  
el cenit escaló, plumas vestido [. . . ]  
de sus vestidas plumas  
conservarán el desvanecimiento  
los anales diáfanos del viento. (137-43)

Obviamente, la naturaleza que es escritura refiere a la propia escritura del poema. Por eso llama Sarduy a la metáfora gongorina "metáfora al cuadrado" (55), puesto que las imágenes rebotan del texto a la naturaleza y viceversa, hasta que ambos se confunden. En resumen, Góngora otorga un enorme poder al lenguaje poético, que se sale de la horma petrarquista y nombra a la naturaleza con una libertad nueva. También, al identificar poema/naturaleza, Góngora lleva el poema al límite mismo de la referencialidad: la naturaleza no se presenta miméticamente, sino que es recreada, elaborada a base de asociaciones apoyadas en la mitología. Con Góngora estamos a un paso de dar al lenguaje carta blanca; sin embargo, Góngora no da ese paso: su poesía está todavía firmemente regida por la mitología y la tradición renacentista, por lo que se puede parafrasear, como lo ha hecho Alonso. En Fábula de Equis y Zeda Diego da un paso más allá y, siguiendo la tesis creacionista, concibe el poema como un ámbito cerrado.

Pasemos a analizar ahora el poema de Diego. Es difícil encontrar la fábula entera. En México se publicaron en 1932 sólo 50 ejemplares, en ediciones privadas de Justino Fernández y Edmundo O'Gorman. En Madrid se reeditaron 425 ejemplares en 1943 en Poemas adrede, que incluyen la Fábula y la colección que da nombre al libro. La componen tres cantos o "tiempos"--Diego los llamaba tiempos para subrayar su composición de sonata. Están compuestos en sextinas reales, estrofas de seis versos endecasílabos, como la Fábula de Polifemo y Galatea está escrita en octavas reales. Se llaman, en orden de aparición, "Exposición," "Amor" y "Desenlace" y vienen precedidos de un breve "Brindis." En "Exposición" se presenta un extraño paisaje con unas torres de almenas, un ciervo y un misterioso arquitecto que toca la lira y navega en su barba. En "Amor," Equis, el amante, se encuentra con Zeda, la bellísima amada en forma de rombo y le promete varios regalos. Finalmente en "Desenlace" se menciona la partida de Zeda y la presencia de la muerte.

La influencia gongorina del poema es profunda y no "de fachada." Las imágenes gongorinas se repiten: en "Exposición," "óvalo verde de la recompensa," "el beneficio verde" (las hojas del sauce), "la llama en ave de la borla" y "múltiple uve de alas en el viento" (en las estrofas 3, 9, 10). "Amor," la segunda sección, empieza con un claro eco de la Soledad primera: "Era del año la estación florida," convertido en la estrofa 15 en "Era el mes que aplicaba sus teorías." Hay también ese guiño sobre la belleza de Z (un rombo), comparable a la de Galatea, "que a armonizar con el clavel se atreve" (estrofa 16). Todas estas imágenes podrían ser, sin embargo, un simple juego, una parodia de la obra de Góngora por parte de Diego, algo superficial, como él señala. Sin embargo, no lo es; las metáforas centrales del poema sólo adquieren significado como reelaboraciones vanguardistas del Polifemo y de la Soledad primera.

No voy a parafrasear la fábula, lo que sería violar su propia ambivalencia de significado consciente y buscada. Ningún poeta se presta, por supuesto, a una explicación exhaustiva, pero en el caso de Diego existe una búsqueda de la imagen sugerente pero sin sentido, como insinuación, que no se daba en Góngora y que es típica de la generación del 27. "Imagen múltiple," la llama Diego en Imagen, su obra creacionista, en la que postula la teoría de Huidobro de que no hay que imitar a la naturaleza, sino crear una realidad propia, un mundo dentro del poema. Diego la define así: palabras que "se engarzan en una libre melodía de armonías" (45). En vez de parafrasear, entonces, seguiremos la pista a las metáforas desde su origen barroco y veremos cómo ello saca a la luz engarces insospechados en un poema tan oscuro.

El título mismo de la composición establece la síntesis gongorismo-vanguardia a la que aludía Sánchez Robayna. Por un lado, la primera palabra "fábula," más ese "Góngora 1927" que precede a "Amor" nos remiten a la Fábula de Polifemo y Galatea. Las temáticas de ambos poemas coinciden en esencia: historia de amor con final trágico. En Polifemo y Galatea el pastor Acis se enamora de Galatea y es correspondido; el cíclope Polifemo, enamorado a su vez de Galatea, asesina a Acis, que se convierte en arroyo. En la fábula de Diego, Equis, enamorado de Zeda, parece morir al final (se menciona la muerte) y convertirse también en río. Los nombres de los dos amantes, Equis y Zeda, nos recuerdan, por asonancia un poco estilizada, a Acis y Galatea. El título, pues, nos enmarca dentro de la más pura tradición poética. Pero, está claro, también nos distancia. Los amantes gongorinos, la descripción de cuya belleza ocupa una parte fundamental del poema barroco, han sido esquematizados, descarnados en la obra de Diego, hasta ser convertidos en letras del abecedario. El uso de las letras para descarnar el poema--deshumanizarlo como decía Ortega--y a la vez ensimismarlo, es decir, convertirlo en un ámbito cerrado que se mira y apunta a sí mismo--todo es letra impresa--nos sitúa de lleno en la vanguardia. La estrategia será utilizada después por muchos otros poetas de la generación (Salinas en "Underwood Girls" de Fábula y Signo) y tiene antecedentes en el "Poème en ix" de Mallarmé, donde otra equis da la nota dominante de la rima. El título, por tanto, nos indica ya el juego entre tradición y vanguardia que constituye el poema.

El "Brindis" (estrofa 1) es una dedicatoria a Basilio--"rey" en griego. Es una dedicatoria a un aristócrata del estilo de la del Polifemo y Galatea al Conde de Niebla. Como en Polifemo y Galatea, hay una referencia a la caza: el coto de Huelva donde el conde de Niebla "fatiga" los montes cazando se convierte en Equis y Zeda en "el coto de la reina en veda" (¿tal vez la poesía?). García Lorca, precisamente en "La imagen poética en Luis de Góngora," un texto escrito más o menos el mismo año que Equis y Zeda, llamaba a la poesía "cacería nocturna," en la cual las presas eran las imágenes (7:101).

Es fundamental el hecho de que la voz lírica introduzca la huella de la modernidad en ese "fuselaje" (seguirá haciéndolo a lo largo de todo el poema, con palabras como "delantal planchado," "esquí," "metro plegable," "asfalto," "jabón," etc.). Al lector se le avisa desde el principio de que este poema está escrito en el siglo veinte. Esta misma preocupación por escribir poesía absolutamente moderna, como decía Rimbaud, le hace decir a Diego en la introducción a la fábula: "Ni en el primer tiempo ni en el último de esta sonata . . . se recuerda para

nada a la poesía del siglo XVII" (Versos 68).

Seguimos avanzando, sin embargo, y nos sigue recordando a Góngora. "Exposición" nos sitúa en un paisaje en el que se levanta "una torre graduada" (¿tal vez poema?) sobre la que parece tener poder el cantor (contaminación poesía-realidad del poema): "orientada al arbitrio del que canta" (estrofa 2). Es una tarde hermética, como el poema mismo ("Una tarde de aquellas sin testigo/muralla en torno de una llave inversa"). Sin embargo, la estrofa 5 nos da una clave, tomada de la Soledad primera:

En la almena más alta un ciervo bueno  
 alisaba sus cuernos y extendía  
 y el doble esquí nacido de su seno  
 con deportiva vocación lamía  
 como si él condujese al misticismo  
 la rueda en flor del analfabetismo . . . .

En la Soledad primera leemos:

- si tradición apócrifa no miente -  
 de animal tenebroso, cuya frente  
 carro es brillante de nocturno día . . . . (73-76)

Un naufrago en esta escena ve la luz distante de una cabaña y la voz lírica lo compara a un animal que, según la tradición, lleva luz en la frente. Dámaso Alonso explica esto diciendo que "Hay un animal que, sea el que fuere, lleva en la frente un carbunco" (citado en Spitzer 262). Y dice que ese animal que esparce luz en la noche es, según la tradición apócrifa, un tigre o un ciervo. Leo Spitzer nos dice algo más interesante todavía: en una versión de la misma metáfora (de la leyenda de S. Huberto) hay un ciervo con una cruz de oro entre los cuernos; este ciervo es, a su vez, una versión del ciervo con un candelabro entre los cuernos que aparece en La Eneida (263). El doble esquí nacido de su seno se convierte, pues, en cruz, en equis (lo que explica los sustantivos "analfabetismo" y "misticismo," pues la 'equis es la antiletra, la firma de los que no saben escribir, el cero de la escritura), y en luz. En la almena hay luz y está Equis, y Equis es una cruz (misticismo) y es bueno, como el ciervo cristiano. La contaminación es digna de Góngora. El intertexto de las Soledades hace posible esta "imagen múltiple" que Diego busca en su obra creacionista. Si trasladamos esto a aquella metáfora de la estrofa 2 de "Desenlace":

Todo es pendiente y sin el ciervo ajeno  
 bello de regadío consumado  
 no tiñe nuestros dedos el sereno  
 éxtasis puntiagudo anaranjado . . .

el "éxtasis puntiagudo anaranjado" es luz, porque su ausencia se debe a que no está "el ciervo ajeno"; y es puntiagudo por la asociación cuerno del ciervo, cruz, equis. La estrofa señala la llegada de la noche.

Otro colosal ejemplo de contaminación gongorina se puede ver en las estrofas 6 y 9-13, donde cielo y tierra, playa y firmamento, arquitecto y naturaleza se confunden, de forma típicamente gongorina. Se nos presenta un anochecer circular, autosuficiente, un mundo cerrado en círculo, al igual que pretende serlo el poema. En la estrofa 7 leemos:

De punta a punta de arpa un arquitecto  
 recorriendo su playa infatigable  
 calculaba el perímetro perfecto  
 a puro arpegio de oro venerable  
 y obtenido el nivel luego al soslayo  
 --metro plegable--desplegaba el rayo . . .

Hay un arquitecto con arpa; es medidor y músico--poeta--a la vez que Dios, como Apolo; también como un dios despliega el rayo y es el sol. En la estrofa 10 el sol se está poniendo:

El arquitecto en posesión de orla  
 aplica ya peldaños de incremento  
 hacia la llama en ave de la borla  
 múltiple uve de alas en el viento  
 y con sus dedos, náufragos egregios  
 de la barba se arranca los arpegios . . . .

En la 12 el sol que se hunde en el mar ("bolsa de conciencia," que es también la noche y la barba del arquitecto) hace ascender por contrapeso, no al firmamento real sino "al firmamento impreso." El arquitecto es naturaleza y la naturaleza es verbo, poema:

Pero mientras el sol por contrapeso  
 al sumirse en la bolsa de conciencia  
 hace ascender al firmamento impreso  
 en ceremonia de correspondencia  
 y todas las estrellas salvo alguna

en columna gradual miden la luna . . . .

El poema se muestra como un mundo cerrado, un "jardín de curvatura brava" (estrofa 14).

Podemos encontrar muchos otros casos de influencia gongorina. En "Amor" se realiza el encuentro entre X y Z; ella es un rombo bellísimo. Notemos el guiño de la voz lírica al crear un rombo descarado que desafía en belleza a las ninfas gongorinas: "que a armonizar con el clavel se atreve." En la tercera estrofa de "Amor," el grumete cuya mano es azul no es otro que "el marinero niño alado," por guiar la embarcación o venera de su madre, Venus, que aparece en Polifemo y Galatea. En "Amor" X le ofrece a Z un hermoso ramillete de regalos; no miel como en el caso de Acis, sino regalos vanguardistas, propios del mundo hermético del poema: desde "los gusanos de pasar el rato" y "peces tan diminutos que los dos lloremos" al dulce "fruto de dos suaves nalgas / que al abrirse dan paso a una moneda." En "Desenlace," la tercera parte, todo se acelera, como en la coda de una sonata; paralelamente, la naturaleza es una pendiente cuesta abajo (estrofa 31); se va el arquitecto y el poeta deja de escribir. Aparece la muerte, que coincide con el cese de la escritura. Como en la Fábula de Polifemo y Galatea, donde Acis se transforma en río, la voz lírica insinúa la transformación de Equis con estas palabras:

Quién sabrá río erguido que patinas  
juntos los pies unidas tus dos alas  
quién adivinará cuando te inclinas  
si aquí en mi pecho--ay--la recta embalas . . . . (Estrofa 35)

Resumiendo, el intertexto gongorino contribuye decisivamente a la creación de imágenes múltiples que Diego busca. Hay, sin embargo, una diferencia fundamental entre Góngora y Diego. Mencioné al principio la importancia de la idea de la naturaleza como texto en Góngora. En Fábula de Equis y Zeda se repiten incesantemente también las referencias al texto, a la letra escrita y al poema. Esto se ve en los nombres de los protagonistas y en frases como "uve de alas en el viento" (10), "espiral de cláusula ascendente," "aprovechando ausencias de algún verbo" (11), "firmamento impreso" (12), "las calles que huelen a pintura" (18), "su porvenir listado en subjuntivo" (19), "la más genuina en tinta verde impresa" (21), "telegrama en tu estela de venados" (22), "tecleo / en ritmo y luz de mecanografía" (27), "yo inscribiré en tu rombo mi programa" (28). En este punto Diego recoge la metáfora de la naturaleza como texto de las Soledades y la

proyecta más allá que Góngora. El mundo natural desaparece. Ya no se trata de describir el enigma, sino de crear un enigma cerrado, "muralla en torno a una llave inversa" de que se hablaba en "Desenlace." Las claves para leer a Góngora son tradicionales: mitología, tradición petrarquista. Las claves gongorinas de Fábula de Equis y Zeda no permiten leerlo unívocamente. La intertextualidad gongorina posibilita el juego de "imágenes múltiples" pero no existe un sentido único del poema. En Fábula de Equis y Zeda la realidad es textual, como indica la última estrofa del poema:

Es el juicio final de los lebreles  
deliberado al ras de la garganta . . . .

En Fábula de Equis y Zeda la naturaleza como texto se convierte en el texto como única naturaleza.

Para terminar, quisiera volver a la mencionada afirmación de Diego en Versos escogidos, en la que negaba la influencia de Góngora en la Fábula. Después del entusiasmo de principios de siglo por Góngora, en pleno auge del cual se le identificó con las vanguardias europeas--especialmente con Mallarmé--se ha producido la esperada reacción de signo contrario. Críticos como Spitzer y Octavio Paz, entre otros, se empeñan en subrayar las diferencias: Góngora no es moderno, dicen. La oscuridad de Góngora es luminosa; la de la vanguardia busca una crítica del sentido, añaden (Spitzer 260). De esto concluyen que no existió una influencia real de Góngora en la vanguardia. Igualmente, la mayoría de las antologías sobre la generación del 27 insisten en negar la influencia. La Fábula de Equis y Zeda es un testimonio de que Góngora está muy presente en el 27, temática y técnicamente. Lo que es más: la búsqueda de la autoconciencia del poema que preconizaba Diego, entre otros, es un paso lógico tras del enorme poder de que Góngora dotó a la palabra poética. En muchos sentidos Diego hace en la Fábula lo mismo que Picasso hizo con sus Meninas. Ambos dialogaron con una de las obras artísticas más significativas del Siglo de Oro y actualizaron su mensaje.

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## NOTAS

<sup>1</sup>Dice Sánchez Robayna: "Gerardo Diego deja de ser ahí el poeta escindido entre vanguardia y clasicismo y escribe un poema de síntesis

de extraordinaria significación" ("Un poema").

<sup>2</sup>Estos versos fueron posteriormente eliminados por Góngora. Ver The Solitudes (145).

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## JORGE LUIS BORGES'S "TLÖN, UQBAR, ORBIS TERTIUS": EPISTEMOLOGY AND HISTORY; LANGUAGE AND LITERARY CREATION

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In May of 1940 there appeared in volume 68 of *Sur* "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," a labyrinthine story that has been the subject of much analysis and the source of no little confusion (Rodríguez Monegal 332).<sup>1</sup> With the invention of Tlön, a fantastic planet on which there is no matter, Borges is ostensibly reflecting an inveterate idealism that permeates most of his work.<sup>2</sup> Philosophically, Borges is an idealist; that is, he holds that man invents his world as Borges has invented "Tlön,"<sup>3</sup> and that human knowledge is not so much an articulation of a problematical but objective reality as it is a statement about the human mind and the content of human thought. In this sense, "Tlön" is an epistemological metaphor:

El concepto metáfora epistemológica ha sido acuñado por Umberto Eco para definir la condición de las formas del arte que reflejan el modo cómo la ciencia, o sin más, la cultura de la época, ven la realidad. Eco reconoce que el conocimiento del mundo tiene en la ciencia su canal autorizado; el arte, en cambio, "más que conocer el mundo, produce complementos del mundo, formas autónomas que se añaden a las existentes exhibiendo leyes propias y vida personal." Y concluye: "No obstante toda forma artística puede muy bien verse, si no como sustituto del conocimiento científico, como metáfora epistemológica." (Quoted in Alazraki 275.)

Of course, a literary text, like the world, is open to interpretation. Borges foreshadows this idea in the opening paragraph of "Tlön" as he and Bioy Casares, his collaborator and friend, are discoursing about narrative techniques:

" . . . nos demoró una vasta polémica sobre la ejecución de una novela en primera persona, cuyo narrador omitiera o desfigurara los hechos e incurriera en diversas contradicciones, que permitieran a unos pocos lectores--a muy pocos lectores--la adivinación de una realidad atroz o banal." (431).

Not only could this oxymoronic and enigmatic assertion be a statement about the reality created with the text of "Tlön," but, as we will see, it could also be a disquieting reference to a future reality created by man. There is textual evidence for a reading of the story as a masked commentary on and analysis of the historico-political situation of Planet Earth at the beginning of World War II and for a view of "Tlön" as historical prophecy. This reading of "Tlön" does not negate the epistemological reading. On the contrary, the one buttresses the other, and together they point to a constant in Borges's thought and in his literary practice--the power of language to create reality, while at the same time justifying its own creation.

First, let us examine the idealistic nature of this fantastic planet with its "diversas contradicciones." To understand the idealism that has engendered "Tlön" we must first understand Borges's motif of the labyrinth. He says: "Tlön será un laberinto, pero es un laberinto urdido por los hombres, un laberinto destinado a que lo descifren los hombres" (443). For Borges the world--human knowledge--is a vast and puzzling labyrinth in which man is trapped. Similarly in "Tlön," Borges shows metaphorically how man's knowledge of the world is very limited and relative. On Tlön reality becomes a hopeless chaotic labyrinth in which ideas enjoy a pre-eminence over matter. On such a planet, where there exists neither matter, nor science, nor metaphysics, nor time, man would be faced with the dilemma of existing in a physical world whose ultimate nature he could never know. From the point of view of philosophical idealism this is precisely the existential predicament of man on Planet Earth. Paradoxically, however, philosophical idealism enriches the human experience at the same time as it undermines the comfortable, although precarious, gnoseological underpinnings of existence. Idealism "liberates the imagination as to what the world may be, [but] it refuses to legislate as to what the world is" (Bertrand Russell, quoted in Alazraki 63). Borges succinctly states the same idea in "Tlön": "Hume notó para siempre que los argumentos de Berkeley no admitían la menor réplica y no causaban la menor convicción.<sup>4</sup> Ese dictamen es del todo verídico en su aplicación a la tierra; del todo falso en Tlön" (435). However, in creating "Tlön," Borges is not so much advancing idealism as his philosophy as he is making a statement of his fundamental skepticism about the nature and the limitations of human thought. He "endeavors to demonstrate that nothing is knowable. Yet if nothing is knowable, nothing can be affirmed to be impossible" (Gallagher 103). Could this be all there is to the creation of "Tlön," the elaboration of the epistemological metaphor? Part of the existing criticism presupposes the idealist point of view, which is clearly valid. However, there are some keys in

the Posdata which can open the door to a very different interpretation, one that discovers a latent content hidden in the labyrinthine prose of Borges--that is, a view of "Tlön" as historical prophecy.

First, the Posdata is dated 1947, well into the future of the publication of "Tlön" in 1940.<sup>5</sup> This could be an artifice of science-fiction or the date could have an historical significance. 1940 was the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War, and Hitler's armies had already begun their conquest of Europe. "Tlön," then, was conceived and written during the prologue to World War II (Rodríguez Monegal 334).<sup>6</sup> Rodríguez Monegal has commented on the clear references to totalitarian regimes in "Tlön," and Sosnowski, in a very informative paper, has also pointed up the close connection between the creation of "Tlön" and the outcome of World War II (35-43). As a matter of speculation, we can conceive of "Tlön" as an adumbration of the future totalitarian world as ideated by Nazi Germany and the Axis Powers, and there is much textual evidence to support this conception. In the text, the ideas of Tlön become real, i.e., objects in the world: "Tal fue la primera intrusión del mundo fantástico en el mundo real" (441). A mysterious compass and cone of unknown heavy metal symbolize this transformation, although they "are found among various familiar objects which will lend them a certain plausibility" (Irby 420).<sup>7</sup> Why does Borges mention specifically these two objects? For Echavarría Ferrari they are "metáforas 'solidificadas'" (407). For him, the compass could not exist on a planet where there is no matter and would be a contradictory object (if it could exist) on a world of no parallels, longitudes, or latitudes. The compass, then, "serviría más que para orientarse, para extraviarse; no tendría otra función que la de sembrar la confusión y el desvarío" (407). The compass as a metaphor for the binary opposition of confusion-orientation seems to be a correct interpretation from the point of view of the textual reality, but it also points clearly to a constant in the thought of Borges and to the historical context of his creation. The compass seems to represent for Borges man's attempt to understand and master the mysteries of the cosmos. The compass is an object, designed and made by man, that points to unseen forces in the earth. From the historical point of view, the compass, bearing Tlönese inscriptions, points clearly to the transformation of the world during those chaotic years of the early '40s. The compass, as well as the objects of the silver service, are all manufactured products that point to the concrete underlying ideologies that produced them: "platería de Utrecht y de París con dura fauna heráldica, un samovar" (441; emphasis mine). To understand the relationship between manufactured objects and ideologies we must first understand what ideology is. It is not simply the "sistema explícito

de ideas conceptualmente articuladas, sino . . . una matriz socialmente determinada de representación y percepción del mundo en todos sus niveles y dimensiones" (Perús-Cueva 35). Ideology may be called by another name, a world view or Weltanschauung, a way of experiencing and feeling the world. Ideology does not so much represent the thought of a particular individual as it does reveal the underlying social forces that created it. So, in this sense, a samovar, as a cultural artifact, reveals the particular social consciousness that produced it and no other. Further along in the text of "Tlön," Borges indicates that ideologies have the power to transform the world and contain the seeds of their own justification. He names not merely cultural objects but the very ideologies and theories that, out of the prewar chaos, would produce and justify the content of a New Order:

Casi inmediatamente la realidad cedió en más de un punto. Lo cierto es que anhelaba ceder. Hace diez años bastaba cualquier simetría con apariencia de orden--el materialismo dialéctico, el antisemitismo, el nazismo--para embelesar a los hombres. ¿Cómo no someterse a Tlön, a la minuciosa y vasta evidencia de un planeta ordenado? (442; emphasis mine)

As Sosnowski explains, Borges equates dialectical materialism, anti-semitism, and Nazism with respect to their "posición mediante la cual todo 'orden' se traduce en violación de derechos, toda interpretación científica de la historia es sinónimo de un régimen represivo . . ." (40).

As a "metáfora solidificada" the cone could also have its historical projection. Borges says that these cones "son imagen de la divinidad en ciertas religiones de Tlön" (442). This "divinidad" could be a Teutonic God of War.<sup>8</sup> These conical icons of Tlön conjure up images of the projectiles, missiles, bullets, and bombs of the Nazi war machine--the mortiferous instruments of the transformation of the face and the content of the world. Further textual evidence for the historical interpretation can be adduced from the Posdata. The "primitive language" of Tlön is the bearer of the culture it has created and has begun to be taught in the schools: "ya la enseñanza de su historia armoniosa (y llena de episodios conmovedores) ha obliterado a la que presidió mi niñez" (443). This "primitive language" could be German, which shares etymological roots with Gothic and Old Norse, languages which were, in their time, cultural expressions of barbarism, adventure, and conquest. As a matter of fact, Borges was very much interested in the Old Norse sagas and the word "Tlön" itself could be derived from

Old Norse.<sup>9</sup>

In the penultimate paragraph Borges points to other concrete changes that would take place in the world if Germany were to win the war: "Han sido reformadas la numismática, la farmacología y la arqueología. Entiendo que la biología y las matemáticas aguardan también su avatar . . ." (443). The coin of the realm of Tlön would become the world standard, reflecting a change in the economic base of the world economy, and would bear the martial effigy of the Head of State of the New Order. New chemicals and medicines would be developed (as indeed they were) because of the exigencies of war. The ruins of past civilizations (those destroyed by the Axis powers to form the New Order) would be discovered and interpreted in light of the prevailing ideology. Nazi Germany also hoped to engineer a genetically superior and pure race with its biological experiments. The science of mathematics was in effervescence. German scientists made new discoveries which led to the development of the V-2 rocket by Werner Von Braun and to the development of the atomic bomb with the theories of Albert Einstein, a development which indeed transformed the content of modern civilization.

Now we can place in historical context the "realidad atroz o banal" (431) that was alluded to at the outset of the story. The reality of Tlön as ideated by Nazi Germany would be "atrocious" for the majority of men; a world with its "tigres transparentes" (fear?) and its "torres de sangre" (the holocaust?) (435). On the other hand, it would be an orderly and "banal" reality for those who produced it, for they could conceive the world in no other way. Out of the chaos of war, the ideologies that gave rise to the war, would come the New Order (the Order of the Third Reich?). "El contacto y el hábito de Tlön han desintegrado este mundo. Encantada por su rigor, la humanidad olvida y torna a olvidar que es un rigor de ajedrecistas [the Nazi war machine?], no de ángeles" (443). There would be no room for mercy in forging a world of supermen. In the orderly and totalitarian world of Tlön--this "brave new world . . . obra de una sociedad secreta de astrónomos, de biólogos, de ingenieros, de metafísicos, de poetas, de químicos, de algebristas, de pintores, de geómetras . . . dirigidos por un oscuro hombre de genio . . ." (20)--history would be effaced, and the teaching of any ideas that would undermine or discredit the ruling class would be proscribed as is the practice in totalitarian regimes today. History would be rewritten and reality created with the language of the prevailing ideology. "Ya en las memorias un pasado ficticio ocupa el sitio de otro, del que nada sabemos con certidumbre--ni siquiera que es falso" (443).

In quiet despair, Borges points to the grim possibility of this

"dinastía de solitarios" winning the war. "Si nuestras previsiones no yerran, de aquí a cien años alguien descubrirá los cien tomos de la Segunda Enciclopedia de Tlön" (443). This discovery would corroborate the completed transformation of the world and the objective reality of Tlön, for the encyclopedia is the compendium of human knowledge.

The last key to the historical interpretation is found in the "banal" and enigmatic closing paragraph. "Entonces desaparecerán del planeta el inglés y el francés y el mero español. El mundo será Tlön" (443). As Sosnowski points out, Borges specifically mentions these three languages for a reason:

Cabe subrayar que los idiomas que desaparecerán serán los que portan gran parte de la cultura occidental y que son los que en esos años se enfrentaban en aras de una llamada defensa de la civilización occidental y de los valores cristianos en contra de los portadores de los mitos arios (y acaso del sonido germánico Tlön?). (40-41)

French and English were linguistic expressions of the Occidental culture which would have to be destroyed by the ideology of the Axis Powers to establish the New Order. By saying "mero español," the author is tacitly praising his own Hispanic heritage while at the same time slighting those who would view Hispanic culture as somehow second-rate and backward in comparison to the Anglo and Gallic traditions. Also, as Echavarría Ferrari and Irby have shown, textually "Tlön" is a world created by language and, on one level, the text itself is about its own creation.<sup>10</sup> Thus, there is a strong nexus between the metalanguage of "Tlön" and its historical projection. While language is an expression of human consciousness, ideas, and ideologies, it also is a way to record (or create) history.<sup>11</sup> As Borges has shown in "Tlön," language has the power to create reality and to transform the physical world.

Is "Tlön" a statement of Borges's elitism, a text not for all men? Is it a game Borges is playing, attempting to evade a horrible reality? Is it a cryptic statement of his idealism and skepticism with respect to man's ability to know an ultimate reality--a fanciful and elaborate epistemological metaphor? Or is it rather a statement about the world man creates by dint of ideation and ideologies, with his languages and his literatures, and how that world finds its own justification in the very content of the thought that produced it, no matter how "atrocious" or "banal" it seems to be? We will perhaps never know if Borges had a single purpose in writing "Tlön." He once

said in an interview that the subject of the story "is neither Uqbar nor Orbis Tertius, but rather a man who is being drowned in a new and overwhelming world scarcely understood by him" (Georges Charbonnier, quoted in Bell-Villada 134). Clearly Borges has been unable to escape the anguish of mankind, anguish produced by living in an unknowable world, on a planet constructed by the imagination.

And yet, and yet . . . Negar la sucesión temporal, negar el yo, negar el universo astronómico son desesperaciones aparentes y consuelos secretos. Nuestro destino . . . no es espantoso por irreal; es espantoso porque es irreversible y de hierro. El tiempo es la sustancia de que estoy hecho. El tiempo es un río que me arrebató, pero yo soy el río; es un tigre que me destroza, pero yo soy el tigre; es un fuego que me consume, pero yo soy el fuego. El mundo, desgraciadamente, es real; yo, desgraciadamente, soy Borges." (771)

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Later, the tale was published in El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan (1941) and in Ficciones (1944).

<sup>2</sup>Especially useful on this point are the following works: Alazraki (275-301); Barrenechea (121-43); Bell-Villada (129-35); EchavarríaFerrari (399-413); Gallagher (94-121); Irby (411-20); Mills (127-38); Sanchis Banus (2: 1081-97); Wyers Weber (124-41). Bell-Villada traces the origins and evolution of Bishop Berkeley's influence on Borges (130).

<sup>3</sup>From this point on a distinction will be made between Tlön as planet and "Tlön" as text.

<sup>4</sup>Borges had formulated this statement as early as 1931 in "La postulación de la realidad" (Obras completas 217).

<sup>5</sup>Alazraki (387) registers the variants: "Reproduzco el artículo anterior tal como apareció en el número 68 de Sur--tapas verde jade, mayo de 1940 . . . ." "Reproduzco el artículo anterior tal como apareció en la Antología de la literatura fantástica, 1940 . . . ." The first version, producing a sensation of "infinite retrogression" (Rodríguez Monegal 332), is in keeping with the "Borgesian" motif of infinity and circularity, inducing in the reader a sense of vertigo or unreality by making him a part of the text. Of course Borges could not

achieve the same effect at a later date, hence the later version as it appeared in the opening story of El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan (1941) and Ficciones (1944).

<sup>6</sup>Also, for an interesting discussion of the genesis of "Tlön," see Irby (416-17).

<sup>7</sup>Borges also uses the reverse device to create verisimilitude in the text, that of attributing spurious statements to real contemporary figures and bogus literary works to real authors. In addition to this disorienting technique, Borges also makes references to both real and nonexistent publications (Bell-Villada 132-33). This vertiginous interplay of fact and fiction in the text is in keeping with the epistemological nightmare of Tlön.

<sup>8</sup>See note 9 for a discussion of the connection between Tlön and Teutonic.

<sup>9</sup>From a conversation with Norman Thomas Di Giovanni at the University of Maryland in 1978. Di Giovanni worked with Borges for several years in Buenos Aires translating his works. According to Bell-Villada, Borges himself indicated in an interview that Tlön "was intended as an echo of Traum (German for 'dream')" (131). In any case, both etymologies are in keeping with the historical projection. There is another reference to the German language and literature in the text. At the end of Part I, Borges makes reference to an apocryphal work about the bogus country, Uqbar (Lesbare und lesenswerthe Bemerkungen über das Land Ukkbar in Klein-Asien, 1641) by a real seventeenth century German theologian (Johannes Valentinus Andreaë (1586-1654), whom Borges mentions again in the Posdata. Andreaë wrote a real work "called the Allgemeine und General Reformation der ganzen weiten Welt, which is almost an echo of Borges's mock-titles, resembling both Andreaë's spurious study of Ukkbar and the grandiose projects dealt with in this narrative" (Bell-Villada 133).

<sup>10</sup>For Irby's discussion of "Tlön" as a world of writing, *escritura*, see 418 of his work cited above.

<sup>11</sup>See Gabriel García Márquez' One Hundred Years of Solitude and George Orwell's 1984 for excellent fictive dramatizations of this connection between epistemology, language and history.

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