ATENEA

FACULTAD DE ARTES Y CIENCIAS

Año XXI 3ª Época Números 1 y 2

UNIVERSIDAD DE PUERTO RICO
EN MAYAGÜEZ
ENERO - JULIO 2001

Revista ATENEA
Facultad de Artes y Ciencias
Universidad de Puerto Rico
Recinto Universitario de Mayagüez
Mayagüez, Puerto Rico

INFORMACIÓN A LOS AUTORES

*La Junta Editora de la Revista **ATENEA** publica cuentos y poemas escritos en español, inglés, francés o italiano y artículos relacionados con las Artes y las Ciencias, escritos en español o en inglés. Los artículos deben regirse por las normas estipuladas en la última edición del manual del Modern Language Association of America (M.L.A.).*

Para la publicación de cualquier artículo debe enviarse original y copia a la siguiente dirección:

Director de Publicaciones
*Revista **ATENEA***
Facultad de Artes y Ciencias
Universidad de Puerto Rico
Recinto Universitario de Mayagüez
PO Box 9010
Mayagüez, Puerto Rico 00681-9010

URL site: http://mayaweb.clu.edu/artssciences/atenea/atenea.html

*La Junta Editora de la Revista **ATENEA** no se hace responsable de las opiniones emitidas por los colaboradores y se reserva el derecho de publicación.*

ATENEA

Revista de la Facultad de Artes y Ciencias
de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, Recinto de Mayagüez

ATENEA se publica dos veces al año por la Facultad de Artes y Ciencias de la Universidad de Puerto Rico en Mayagüez.

Dirección editorial:

ATENEA
Recinto Universitario de Mayagüez
PO Box 9010
Mayagüez, Puerto Rico 00681-9010

Precios de suscripción

Puerto Rico y Estados Unidos:
Año (2 núms.) ..... 6 $ USA
Número atrasado ..... 4 $ USA

Otros Países:
Año (2 núms.) ..... 8 $ USA
Número atrasado ..... 5 $ USA

No se devuelven los artículos de colaboración espontánea ni se sostiene correspondencia acerca de ellos.

ISSN: 0885-6079

Diseño de Portada: Gladys Otero
Ilustrador Digital: Reinier Munquía

Tipografía: HRP Studio

ÍNDICE

ENSAYOS

De cuando la conciencia femenina despierta a la luz de la realidad en *Despierta, mi bien despierta,* de Claribel Alegría
Antonio Velásquez 7

Political Reform and Mary Shelley's Short Fiction
Arnold Schmidt 25

Cervantes and the Reinvention of the Picaresque Narrative in the *Novelas ejemplares*
Mark Mascia 33

Tangencias y divergencias: la literatura puertorriqueña de aquí y de allá
Carmen Dolores Hernández 49

Denial of Sexuality and Gender Roles in Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*
Meral Çileli 65

Parody, Intertextuality and Literary History in Reinaldo Arenas' *La loma del ángel*
Vivian Nun-Halloran 77

Juegos retóricos de la identidad puertorriqueña: la "renuncia" de Rodríguez Juliá y el "vaivén" de Rodríguez Vecchini como espacios de equilibrio discursivo
José E. Santos 91

The Anti-Carnivalesque Hamlet
Dominick M. Grace 101

Lope de Vega's tragedy *El Mayordomo de la Duquesa de Amalfi*
Ismael Rivera-Rodríguez 109

Jesús Díaz: El cine como texto y pretexto para la literatura
Ana María Rodríguez-Vivaldi 125

"I would have drowned to save you sinking": Emily Dickinson, Poetry and Women in Community
Roxanne Harde 137

"The Visit", de Merle Collins, y "The Bed Sitting Room", de Maureen Ismay: dos aproximaciones al tema del desplazamiento en la literatura Post-Colonial
Teresa Moralejo-Gárate 153

"Car of My Sleepless Nights": Mobility and Metaphor in Raymond Carver's Poetry
Robert Miltner 171

Dismantling Master Thought: Discourse and Race in Frederick Douglass' *Narrative*
Samantha Manchester Earley 179

Bodies in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Competing Discourses of Reality and Representation in Bioy Casares's *The Invention of Morel*
Wendy Ryden 193

POEMAS

Veinte poemas mínimos (Segunda serie)
Ricardo Krauel 209

Habituation; March 2; March 3; March 4; Jabr Citadel Meets Mari on her Birthday
Sandy Feinstein 213

DE CUANDO LA CONCIENCIA FEMENINA DESPIERTA A LA LUZ DE LA REALIDAD EN *DESPIERTA, MI BIEN DESPIERTA,* DE CLARIBEL ALEGRÍA

Antonio Velásquez

La poeta y crítica chilena Marjorie Agosín postula que "eventos recientes en Latinoamérica han llamado a las mujeres escritoras del apartamiento y les han exigido que no solamente escriban, sino que también hagan sus sentimientos públicos y políticos" [Recent events in Latin America have called women writers out of seclusion and demanded that they not only write but that they also make their sentiments public and political] ("Literature" 389).[1] En relación a *Despierta, mi bien despierta,* este punto es muy válido no sólo con respecto a la autora de la novela en sí, sino que también con respecto al personaje-autor principal, que está escribiendo una novela. Lorena, la esposa de Ernesto Quintero, un oligarca dueño del "único matadero con un serrucho eléctrico"[2] (*Despierta 39*) en todo el país, está escribiendo una novela cuya trama refleja su trágico drama personal dentro de una sociedad embrutecida por la incontenible violencia y la ignorancia de los que contribuyen a su decadencia.

A sugerencia de su hija Diana (65), Lorena se anima a tomar un curso de escritura creativa en la universidad y ahí conoce a Eduardo, un joven poeta revolucionario de quien se enamora y con quien entabla una relación que al final tendrá graves consecuencias. La historia de este amor prohibido se cuaja dentro del contexto histórico contemporáneo en El Salvador, es decir, cuando los problemas políticos empiezan a agravarse en las postrimerías de la década de 1970. El marco temporal de la novela es importante porque favorece la indagación de los eventos históricos que estaban tomando lugar

[1] Cualquier traducción del inglés al español será mía a menos que se indique lo contrario.

[2] Hacemos la mención del matadero aquí porque, como veremos más adelante, es algo que cobrará una importancia vital dentro de la narración.

en esa época. Gran parte del eje ficticio se replega en la evolución del proceso histórico y va demostrando cómo a la luz de la realidad se despierta una nueva conciencia, más específicamente la conciencia de la mujer burguesa a favor de la lucha proletaria en el nivel público. En el nivel privado se despierta una conciencia que rechaza las interdicciones sociales y los abusos de su marido para vivir una vida plena, para auto-realizarse como mujer y aplicar a su propia situación la filosofía horaciana del *carpe diem* que recuerda la brevedad de la vida y la necesidad de apresurarse a gozar de ella: "este ahora es más importante por el momento... debemos actuar en este ahora" (*Despierta* 65).

Es interesante notar cómo durante los años de 1970 brotó un inusitado fervor de parte de las mujeres que se unieron para formar organizaciones que velarían por los derechos humanos.[3] Norma Herrera confirma lo que Alegría trae a colación en su novela, ya que "como fenómeno masivo, cuantitativa y cualitativamente, la participación de la mujer se presenta a finales de la década del setenta, por el alto desarrollo de la lucha de clases en El Salvador, que determinó que la mujer también se integrara plenamente al proceso revolucionario" (8). Mujeres de todas las clases y profesiones se solidarizaron con el sufrimiento del pueblo y se unieron para bregar por el rejuvenecimiento de la sociedad. Lorena y su madre, siendo burguesas, no tienen por qué arriesgarse a las represalias del gobierno asociándose con miembros de la clase baja que son los mayormente afectados. Sin embargo, dentro de la novela ellas representan a ese sector minúsculo de la oligarquía salvadoreña que tenía conciencia humana y no participaba de la excentricidad de otras mujeres de su clase. En 1978, por ejemplo, se fundó la Asociación de Mujeres de El Salvador (AMES) que abarcó integrantes de diferentes sectores y, como documenta Brenda Carter, esta entidad se formó porque

> Había necesidad de una organización que trabajara por los derechos de todas las mujeres, organizadas o no. Mujeres obreras, campesinas, amas de casas, vendedoras de mercado, estudiantes, maestras y profesionales todas participaron en la formación de AMES. Su propósito no era solamente ser parte de la lucha por la liberación,

[3] Esto no quiere decir que anteriormente no se hubieran creado este tipo de organizaciones, pues las mujeres en El Salvador siempre han contribuido en la lucha de liberación de dictaduras y opresión. Por ejemplo en 1947 nace la Liga Femenina Salvadoreña, en 1956 se funda la Fraternidad de Mujeres Salvadoreñas, y así sucesivamente antes y después de estos años. Sin embargo, debido a la intensidad del conflicto entre el pueblo y el Estado a finales de los años setenta, las organizaciones de mujeres cobran una dimensión más profunda en este campo.

> sino también para alcanzar derechos específicos para las mujeres [There was a need for an organization that would work for the rights of all women, organized or not. Women workers, peasants, housewives, market vendors, students, teachers and professionals all participated in the formation of AMES. Its purpose was not only to be part of the struggle for liberation, but also to gain specific rights for women] (90).

Nuestro juicio es que *Despierta, mi bien despierta,* además de ser un mundo criptográfico cuyos misterios la autora va destejiendo en todas sus dimensiones a medida que progresa la narración, es otra de las novelas alegrianas que se edifica sobre las bases de nuevas técnicas estéticas pero sin dejar al margen las ya practicadas en sus trabajos anteriores y, desde luego, las heredadas en su trayectoria de escritora. Cada novela escrita por Claribel Alegría es un nuevo experimento que lanza públicamente para ponerlo en práctica y probar su autenticidad; cada novela presta algo de lo suyo a la que le sucede, incluso muchos de los personajes, pero lo que las diferencia es el magistral acercamiento que la autora sigue para cada uno de los temas y detalles estilísticos. Aunque muchas veces los temas se cruzan y se repiten, su trato es diferente en cada una de las obras y la estructura que las impregna de solidez artística es trazada siempre con herramientas novedosas.

En general, podemos afirmar que temáticamente *Despierta, mi bien despierta* es el despertar de una conciencia femenina a la luz de los problemas básicos que limitan su ser dentro de las relaciones familiares regidas estrictamente por códigos jerárquicos impuestos por una sociedad marcadamente machista y prejuiciosa. Es también un mosaico de los problemas colectivos que el pueblo entero vive diariamente y, aun más, es el predio donde se muestra la impotencia de cualquier entidad, religiosa o particular, por ayudar a los pobres cuando la avalancha de violencia maniobrada por los esbirros del Estado fatalmente arremete contra ellos. A pesar del medio inhóspito y peligroso, los esfuerzos del sector eclesial se mantienen en pie y pueden más la fe y la esperanza que el miedo a la tortura o a la muerte. El Arzobispo Oscar Arnulfo Romero lideró este valor de los eclesiásticos y aun conociendo los riesgos no desistió de denunciar al gobierno opresor y de llamar al diálogo y a la conciliación que, según él, abriría las puertas a la paz nacional. Sostenemos, entonces, que *Despierta, mi bien despierta* es una novela de coraje revolucionario, rompimientos con dogmas sociales, martirios, testimonio de lucha y sufrimientos, pero también es una obra que teoriza sobre el arte de novelar utilizando para sus propósitos técnicas complejas y avanzadas en diálogo con las de los grandes escritores latinoamericanos o de otros países.

La voz narrativa que predomina en *Despierta, mi bien despierta* es la voz acusadora en segunda persona. Es, por excelencia, un narrador extradiegético por ser anónimo y omnisciente por saberlo todo cuanto hacen los personajes. El hilo narrativo se desprende de las correlaciones que existen entre la novela que Lorena está escribiendo dentro de la novela, pero la diferencia es que su novela emplea el narrador en tercera persona, ya que después de revisar sus fragmentos, se dio cuenta de que "es muy peligroso usar la primera persona" (*Despierta* 7). El peligro está, sobre todo, en autoretratarse y quedarse estancado en lo que Doris Sommer llama "un espejismo de singularidad" [an illusion of singularity] (112), sin otra trascendencia más que la personal. Es natural que la autora exprese su postura al respecto a través de su propio personaje, que, además, comparte su profesión. Su auto-consejo lo aplica en la narrativa, y por eso ninguna de las obras alegrianas está narrada en primera persona. Sin embargo, es muy bien sabido que toda la narrativa de Claribel Alegría refleja su propia vida. Ella misma enfatiza que "Cualquiera que quiera saber la historia de mi vida debe simplemente dirigirse a mis libros. En realidad no necesito escribir una autobiografía. Alguien con un poco de paciencia puede encontrarla en mi poesía, pero principalmente en mis libros de narrativa" [Anyone who wants to know my life story should just go to my books. I don't really need to write an autobiography. Someone with little patience can find it in my poetry, but mostly in my books of narrative] (Phillips 235). Pese a estas declaraciones, no todo es obviado en sus novelas, porque eso desmantelaría la pureza de su arte novelesco y vedaría el placer del lector de participar en la totalidad de la obra narrativa.

En cuanto al papel que juega la escritura dentro de la escritura, es más estilístico que otra cosa, pero es notable la influencia que ejerce en la totalidad de la obra en sí. La autora emplea una doble discursividad a través de la cual su protagonista se va revelando y tomando vida ante los ojos del lector. Lorena se convierte en un ser bien logrado artísticamente mediante el discurso oral y escrito que agregan al contenido y forma de *Despierta, mi bien despierta.* Con respecto a la intriga amorosa, Lorena se da cuenta rápidamente de la similaridad que existe entre lo que escribe y su propia vida, tal como la autora se la ha esquematizado. De modo que, como dice Marjorie Agosín, "La que escribe recurre a lo único que conoce: ella misma; desde los secretos confines de su caja de Pandora que lentamente comienza a abrir, para explicarse a sí misma" (*Silencio* 7). A través de la escritura el sujeto-escritor se autolibera, se realiza al darse cuenta de que dentro de sí yacen vetas escondidas que

necesitan ser exploradas. Si la poesía tiene un efecto terapéutico para el autor que excarcela la voz de su alma, como proponía el gran amigo de Alegría, Robert Graves, la narrativa, la novela que Lorena está escribiendo, funciona como ejercicio de encuentros y reencuentros con su propio ser.

Apoyándonos en los comentarios de Agosín, podemos argumentar que Lorena intenta explicarse a través de su novela o, acaso, encontrarse a sí misma, pues ella misma lo confirma: "Me busco a mí misma. Empiezo a darme cuenta que me hago falta" (*Despierta* 65). En esta búsqueda de sí misma vía el arte de escribir tiene la oportunidad de reflejar sobre su vida y las circunstancias con que su creadora la ha investido. Los descubrimientos que hace y exterioriza se ramifican esencialmente del adentrarse en su ser para extraer de lo más profundo las resoluciones de su *alter ego* que quiere proceder y abrirse a la variedad de experiencias que la vida ofrece. Estas experiencias, desde luego, engloban los asuntos públicos y privados, es decir, los que conciernen a otros individuos y los que conciernen a lo personal. Lorena no sólo se interesa por hacer cambios radicales en su vida personal, sino que también se preocupa por contribuir a la causa del pueblo. Si bien no milita físicamente como cientos de mujeres lo hacen en ese momento crítico de la historia, su decisión de participar voluntariamente en la parte administrativa es ya un avance que demuestra un cambio de actitudes en algunas mujeres de su clase.

Arturo Arias observa que "las masas politizadas saben que la mayoría de ellos [los escritores] están martillando sus puntos de vista en la cabeza de ese pequeño pero poderoso lectorado que, hasta cierto punto, controla su destino" [The politicized masses know most of them are hammering their points of view into the heads of that small but powerful readership which, to some degree, controls their fate] ("Literary" 19). Es probable que al identificarse con miembros de su propia clase que luchan por los derechos comunes del pueblo, en la lectura de un texto como *Despierta, mi bien despierta* otros vayan a seguir los mismos pasos, y de este modo completar el proyecto último del escritor, es decir, escribir para agrupar las ideas del pueblo "con el propósito de presionar con sus perspectivas a la elite dominante, y para tratar de cambiar la conciencia de esas elites" [in order to press their views upon the ruling elites, and to try to change the consciousness of those elites] (Arias, "Literary" 18-19).

El cariz estilístico de *Despierta, mi bien despierta* se asienta en una variedad de procedimientos narrativos que Alegría utiliza para

articular la esencia de la historia. Como en todas sus otras novelas, la adaptación creativa de géneros literarios o extra-literarios no es ajena en esta novela. En ella la autora recurre a una serie de elementos que van desde los recortes de periódicos para validar algún argumento, como ocurre en otra de sus novelas, *Album familiar,* hasta el uso de estrofas de canciones populares para sugerir algo distinto. El título mismo de la obra se origina de la canción popular que se acostumbra cantar a los cumpleañeros. Doña Cata, la madre de Lorena, se la canta en el día de su cumpleaños: "Despierta, mi bien despierta ... mira que ya amaneció, ya los pajaritos cantan, la luna ya se escondió" (*Despierta* 68). Una lectura más acuciosa y detenida de esta estrofa musical revela la esencia primordial de la novela, a saber, el despertar de Lorena al alba de la realidad abrumadora. Su vida ha dado un giro total —abandonó a su marido por sus abusos, su inconciencia y para poder estar con Eduardo, un hombre que le enseñó a amar y a ser más consciente. El amanecer, después que la luna esconde su rostro, anuncia su renacimiento y su preparación para enfrentar la vida de manera distinta. La intertextualidad, la referencia a textos y autores también es un recurso que la autora adopta para inferir alguna perspectiva disfrazadamente. Los temas que trata no tendrían mayor trascendencia que la documentación de datos si no fueran mediados por las pinceladas artísticas y todos los ingredientes aquí mencionados.

Claribel Alegría sobresalta las barreras de los retos que implican el trato de temas políticos e históricos en su ficción, ya que, para no caer en politiquerío barato o periodismo, tiene que buscar y no parar hasta encontrar los medios artísticos más apropiados y así lograr cautivar el interés de su audiencia. Además, como propone Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "el texto político o periodístico sólo tiene sentido en la actualidad" (38) mientras que el literario se propone sobrevivir las pruebas del tiempo. En sus momentos de reflexión, Lorena recuerda lo que le dice Eduardo sobre literatura: "no es el *qué* sino el *cómo* lo que se cuenta en literatura. Por banal que sea el tema si sabes cómo tratarlo puede llegar a ser una obra de arte" (*Despierta* 73). Cabalmente esto es *Despierta, mi bien despierta,* una obra de arte que no excluye las posibilidades de abarcar los "géneros discursivos simples" (250), según las divisiones que hace Mikhail Bakhtin entre éstos y los géneros discursivos complejos para complementar y reforzar la base artística sobre la cual se edifica la narración central. La acaparación de diversos géneros discursivos es importante también porque éstos arrojan un sentido de veracidad en la ficción; funcionan como paratextos que prueban los hechos estadísticamente o los presentan tal como han evolucionado en la

historia. Claribel Alegría es, como diría Bakhtin, "una persona que maneja el discurso de diferentes esferas de la comunicación cultural" (270) y esto hace que sus obras cobren una solidez artística ya en su punto cumbre de la madurez.

Luce Irigaray declara que "Cuando las mujeres quieren escapar de la explotación, ellas no simplemente destruyen unos pocos 'prejuicios', ellas rompen el orden completo de los valores económicos, sociales, morales y sexuales dominantes" [When women want to escape from exploitation, they do not merely destroy a few "prejudices," they disrupt the entire order of dominant values, economic, social, moral and sexual] (165). Lorena quiere y se atreve a hacer todo esto y más, como demostraremos adelante. Es una mujer que ha vencido el miedo y que ha tomado fuerzas para enfrentar los desmanes de la vida rompiendo con un orden demasiado limitado para ella. Desde el principio la encontramos decidida a independizarse y a no prestar más importancia de la que tienen las prohibiciones de Ernesto. Está dispuesta a ir contracorriente por defender su recién adquirida confianza en sí misma y no permite que nada empañe esa seguridad en su ser. A diferencia de Natalia en *El detén*, —también novela de Alegría— Lorena no está dispuesta a tolerar el machismo ni los abusos físicos de su marido. Una de sus abiertas declaraciones convalida esta observación "Detesto el machismo. Ernesto se ha convertido en uno de sus más altos exponentes" (31) y es por eso mismo que la primera vez que él recurre a la agresión física ella lo abandona. Claro está, a Lorena el amor no la ha cegado como a Natalia y todavía hay esperanzas de que pueda rehacer su vida.

El camino que escoge Lorena es precisamente el que cree conducirla a su felicidad pero, para su desgracia, la venganza de su marido le niega esa posibilidad. Eduardo es decapitado (probablemente con el serrucho eléctrico del matadero de Ernesto) y su cabeza, "envuelta en un periódico" (74) fue colocada en el asiento del coche que Lorena manejaba. Interesantemente, cuando ya falta poco para que el suspenso de la obra llegue a su punto final aparece una "esperanza" (66) en el espaldar de la cama de Lorena. La llegada de este pacífico e inocente insecto simboliza la esperanza que Lorena adquiere al derrocar las barreras para rehacer su vida junto a Eduardo, pero más adelante, el lector es avisado de que "la esperanza había desaparecido. ¿Hacia dónde volaste bichito?" (68) se pregunta Lorena, y al día siguiente descubre que su esperanza fue truncada por la maldad de su marido y sus secuaces que también eran responsables por la muerte de los decapitados que Monseñor

Romero denunció en una de sus homilías a través de la cadena de radio YSAX, luego destruida con una bomba.

Las primeras señales de que Lorena ha despertado a la realidad destellan de los eventos caóticos y espeluznantes que se desarrollan en su ambiente y que, no obstante, llegan a su conocimiento por casualidad, ya que de ellos no se habla en el país, y los medios de comunicación parecen conspirar con el gobierno para mantenerlos en secreto. "¿Ya te diste cuenta", le pregunta Eduardo a Lorena, "que aquí ningún periódico ha dicho nada sobre los decapitados?" (*Despierta* 40). Más tarde, Lorena hace literalmente la misma pregunta a su madre (49), y esto demuestra la preocupación que existe por el silencio que se impone al manipular los medios de comunicación. En vista de todo, parece natural que el público en general no se dé cuenta exactamente de lo que está ocurriendo dentro del país. Los que tienen acceso a los medios de comunicación externos, como al periódico *Los Angeles Times,* son los acaudalados, y cuando se dan cuenta de las masacres no les conviene divulgarlas porque sería un detrimento para sus imperios personales. Como dice Lorena: "Todos los oligarcas aquí están cortados por la misma tijera. Lo único que les preocupa es hacer más dinero, no importa a costa de qué" (*Despierta* 32).

La blandeza de Lorena por la desventura de los reprimidos se va haciendo visible cada vez más porque las oportunidades no dejan de presentarse una tras otra. La violencia y la muerte se han anidado en las frágiles ramas de la vida diaria y merodean en perpetua misión hasta ensañarse con los más débiles. Los cadáveres aparecen tirados en las calles con señales de torturas, balaceados o decapitados, y al darse cuenta de algunos casos, Lorena se perturba y comenta que "es horrible lo que pasa en este país ... Lo peor es que todos fingimos no darnos cuenta" (*Despierta* 19). Un día, al leer la noticia en el periódico sobre un hombre que había sido muerto a balazos y dejado desnudo en la carretera de San Salvador a Santa Ana (15), Lorena se indigna porque era precisamente un hombre cuya vida hubieran podido salvar de no haber sido por la indiferencia de su marido. Dos noches antes, al regresar de una cena con su esposo, Lorena había visto a ese hombre que, aterrorizado como si alguien lo persiguiera, salió a la carretera para pedir ayuda a los automovilistas: "hizo gestos desesperados para que paráramos y Ernesto no quiso" (16). Los sentimientos de culpa la martirizan; siente rabia, impotencia y frustración (15), y empieza a cuestionar la frialdad de su marido a quien termina odiando porque es todo lo opuesto de lo que Eduardo, su amante, representa. Eduardo habría

ayudado a ese hombre porque su entrega a la lucha por el bienestar del pueblo es totalmente genuina y no es "un cobarde" (55) como Ernesto. Ella misma, si hubiera estado conduciendo sola, habría extendido su ayuda a ese individuo porque si está dispuesta a poner en peligro su vida y la de su madre para salvar a un perro que se les atraviesa por la carretera mientras está conduciendo hacia su casa, no habría hecho menos por la vida de un humano: "Hijita, por Dios —dijo tu madre todavía temblorosa—, por salvarle la vida a un chucho aguacatero por poco nos matamos" (20).

Cuando es imposible enterarse de los hechos a través del discurso escrito, a causa de la carencia de medios comunicativos que los transmitan dentro del país, la autora acude a otras opciones para que no pasen inadvertidos. El discurso oral, la voz de los campesinos que han vivido directamente el dolor de las experiencias, como en los testimonios, toma las riendas y expresa gráficamente lo que de otro modo no se supiera. Lorena se sorprende al escuchar la historia de una campesina que fue despojada de su marido por el simple hecho de que reclamaba compensaciones monetarias justas por su duro trabajo en las fincas. La campesina cuenta que su marido y otros trabajadores de la misma finca "se juntaron y llegaron tempranito. Ni machete llevaban. Allí nomás les cayó la Guardia con ametralladoras y jeeps y los capturaron ... Como quince eran los trabajadores. Tal vez más. Mi marido y otros dos se les dejaron ir a los guardias y allí los remataron y se jueron a botarlos quién sabionde" (*Despierta* 18). Esta escena nos recuerda a la masacre en la plaza de Izalco que la autora incluye en su gran novela *Cenizas de Izalco,* demostrando así que, a pesar de las sangrientas lecciones de la historia, el aparato represivo gubernamental parece no haber aprendido nada y permite que fechorías como tales se cometan en contra de la población para no quedar mal con la oligarquía. La novela explicita que tanto la oligarquía como el Estado y sus fuerzas represivas trabajan de par en par y colaboran para ocultar los crímenes infames. Con respecto a los nueve decapitados, individuos luchadores por la emancipación del pueblo, Lorena protesta que "ya las investigaciones están paradas, lo cual te prueba que los altos mandos están involucrados y ni a Ernesto ni al resto de los oligarcas les conviene estar mal con los militares" (*Despierta* 50).

Obviamente es la realidad misma la que se encarga de abrirle los ojos a Lorena, pero Eduardo tiene mucho que ver con su transformación. Éste agudiza la sensibilidad social de su amante como lo hace Armando con su prima Ximena en *Album familiar.* Pero Eduardo despierta más que eso en Lorena; despierta su sexualidad y le

enseña a gozar los placeres que se encierran en el cuerpo. Su renacimiento, entonces, es de doble filo: el social y el sexual o, en otras palabras, el público y el privado. "Nunca en mi vida", le confiesa Lorena a Eduardo, "había sido tan feliz como esta tarde, en mis más de veinte años de matrimonio nunca había sentido lo que sentí hoy contigo... vos me has enseñado a descubrir mi cuerpo, la maravilla que es mi cuerpo" (*Despierta* 23), y más adelante declara: "Jamás me había sentido tan mujer" (26). La relación ilícita que ambos llevan a escondidas amenaza con desbaratar la simetría de sus vidas al exponerse a que la mirada de otros los acusen y lancen una campaña en contra de lo que observan. A Lorena le inquieta pensar que Eduardo podría meterse en poblemas con sus compañeros revolucionarios: "Si los compas se enteran se armaría un lío" (26), pero no se le ocurre pensar en lo que pasará con ella si su marido se entera. Tal vez sea conscientemente que no le dé mucha importancia a las consecuencias que se pudieran desatar si el rumor se esparce porque, en todo caso, como ella se defiende, "Qué me importa Ernesto" (19). Cuando Fernando, uno de los matones asalariados por Ernesto, quiere chantajearla utilizando sus amoríos con Eduardo como arma, Lorena se muestra impaciente, pero cuando todo sale al aire, trata de apaciguar la situación inventando excusas que sólo provocan los insultos y las prohibiciones que Ernesto le impone. "Lo siento, Ernesto", le responde ella, "pero no estoy dispuesta a obedecerte" (53).

El drama que se desata después que Ernesto recibe el anónimo (52) que le dice detalladamente sobre las andanzas de su esposa se escenifica con una elocuencia expresiva que permite al lector acercarse más a la acción. Lorena llega al punto en que tiene que tomar decisiones que afectarán su vida futura. Después que termina la discusión con su marido se encierra en su cuarto y ensimismada evalúa las opciones que tiene: "Estúpido de mierda, ¿quién se cree que soy? Debo mantenerme firme. O sigo haciendo lo que me da la gana o me voy de esta casa. Esto último será lo mejor" (53). Su decisión se materializa sólo cuando Ernesto irrumpe en la habitación y, sin decirle nada, le "dio una bofetada en la mejilla con la mano abierta ...—Puta —gruñó—, sos una puta" (54). Encolerizada, pero sin poder hacer nada más que irse de la casa para volver al refugio de su madre, Lorena musita: "Desgraciado ... qué suerte que por lo menos te puse bien los cuernos" (54). Como típica representativa de un orden anticuado, su madre trata de convencerla que regrese al hogar, a la prisión de la que quiere escapar, pero ella le argumenta que no volverá y su resolución ha sido separarse de él para vivir su amor con Eduardo. "La bofetada estuvo bien", comenta,

“Acabó de despertarme” (71). Es el amor por Eduardo lo que la ha impulsado a liberarse, la ha convertido en otra persona con fuerzas y dispuesta a romper consigo misma y con la sociedad. Como declara Octavio Paz en torno a este tema, “el amor hace otra a la mujer, pues si se atreve a amar, a elegir, si se atreve a ser ella misma debe romper esa imagen con que el mundo encarcela su ser” (178).

La situación que Lorena atraviesa sirve de parangón para abordar la situación de la mujer en general marginada a través de la historia. Sus reflexiones en relación a este tema sirven para desenmarañar experiencias silenciadas y manifestar, a través de su prisma óptico, perspectivas que provocan la indagación. Tal parece que es la sociedad la que dicta las normas de cómo criar a las mujeres, pero es evidente que Lorena está dispuesta a sacudir los pilares que tenazmente sostienen esas ideas. “Increíble cómo nos criaron de pazguatas”, se dijo Lorena para sí, “Bacinicas para nuestros maridos, eso es lo que somos. Cuando a ellos les da la gana y nada más” (26). La propugnación de sus derechos, la repulsión que evidencian sus comentarios con respecto a la situación de la mujer en general y a la suya propia en particular conforman el tono y el tenor feminista de la obra, porque en ella otras voces buscan romper el silencio que el machismo y la ignorancia han fomentado para degradar su posición como ser humano libre.

En cuanto a Eduardo como personaje esencial de la narración, debemos puntualizar que es el modelo típico de los poetas revolucionarios que surgieron durante las oleadas de terror y genocidio sustentados por las dictaduras latinoamericanas. La combinación de su amor por la poesía y el amor a su pueblo es una cualidad distintiva que lo emparentó con los personajes histórico-reales como Roque Dalton, Otto René Castillo y toda una generación de poetas que se unieron a las filas revolucionarias militando físicamente o comprometidos a través de su arte con la lucha del proletariado. Su caso nos recuerda más específicamente al poeta Roque Dalton, quien se formó en las aulas de la Universidad Nacional como la mayoría de jóvenes que forjaron sus destinos paralelamente al de los sufridos. Eduardo le confiesa una vez a Lorena que la “mayor ilusión es poner mi poesía al servicio del pueblo” (45). Su sensibilidad artística y revolucionaria es como un eco de aquélla por la que Dalton estuvo dispuesto a dar su vida. Eduardo lucha y sabe que puede morir pero el pueblo necesita de hombres de valor como él y está dispuesto a no frenarse.

El medio en que se encuentra le ha brindado una lección importante a Eduardo: no hay por qué soportar la injusticia si se puede

hacer algo para que las cosas sean diferentes. Es en la Universidad donde él toma conciencia y decide unirse a la lucha común del pueblo salvadoreño. Por tanto, la Universidad ha sido siempre considerada como una institución muy peligrosa para los intereses del Estado y de ahí que no sea sorprendente que hayan tratado de destruirla o cerrarla en varias ocasiones. Comenta Francisco Andrés Escobar que la Universidad de El Salvador, más específicamente la Facultad de Derecho donde Roque Dalton estudió, es un "semillero de vocaciones literarias y políticas disidentes" (88). A través del contacto con los libros, literarios o legales, y otras experiencias, éstos aprenden, se informan y se arman de ideas que les dan fuerza y seguridad moral para bifurcarse del estado pasivo que hasta el momento de resolución han llevado. La mentalidad que la propaganda anti-democrática se encarga de tallar en la gente para ponerlos en contra de los que luchan es absurda y sin fundamento. Con respecto a la Universidad, Fernando, un individuo que según las sospechas de Lorena es un asesino por haber trabajado con la Policía de Hacienda, le advierte que debe tener "cuidado con la gente que va allí ... la universidad es un nido de subversivos" (*Despierta* 34). Pero la universidad no es la única institución que se ataca por educar e investir de conciencia a sus educandos; la iglesia también, célula vital de toda una estructura social, ha sido ultrajada y puesta irremediablemente al filo de la guillotina.

El contenido religioso de la novela se encarna en el centro de lo social. La iglesia de los pobres asumió la responsabilidad de acercarse más a un plan que ayudaría a mitigar el dolor de los que se encontraban en el mar de la tragedia socio-política. Al salirse de su acostumbrado papel del conservadurismo eclesiástico, los representantes de la iglesia se expusieron a las represalias más agudas del gobierno, pero no había más opciones que enfrentarlas. Dice Germán R. Rosa Borjas que "al estar la iglesia al lado de las mayorías empobrecidas y desenmascarar la injusticia estructural, en un contexto de polarización, la iglesia se convirtió en el blanco de persecución y víctima de la violencia" (17). Los religiosos estaban conscientes de que al oponerse a las fuerzas estatales estarían entrando al abismo entre Escila y Caribdis, es decir, entre dos peligros, de modo que no podrían evitar uno sin caer en las garras del otro, pero el tiempo y las circunstancias no demandaban menos de los voceros de Dios en la tierra. Podían optar por quedarse tranquilos e indiferentes y dejar que ante sus propios ojos la muerte consumiera a los feligreses a destiempo, o apoyarlos y darles esperanza, acción que también los llevaría al abismo de sus propias muertes. No obstante, como se proyecta en la novela, la solución era tomar partidos

y la opción preferencial de la iglesia fue la de simpatizar con los pobres que componían el mayor número de seguidores religiosos.

En una de sus cartas pastorales Monseñor Romero expuso que: "A la iglesia le compete recoger todo lo que de humano haya en la causa y lucha del pueblo, sobre todo de los pobres. La iglesia se identifica con la causa de los pobres cuando éstos exigen sus legítimos derechos. En nuestro país, estos derechos, en la mayoría de los casos, son apenas sólo derechos a la supervivencia, a salir de la miseria" (32-33). En estas cartas pastorales, Monseñor Romero a menudo justificó la nueva conciencia que había tomado la iglesia basándose en pasajes de la Biblia y en las resoluciones acordadas en la Conferencia Episcopal Latinoamericana de Medellín en 1968. Lo que predominó después de esa reunión fue la prioridad de emancipación de los pueblos oprimidos a través de la denuncia pública, pero más importante, a través de la educación y organización para que todos pudieran ayudarse o consolarse unos a otros sin egoísmos ni discordias embrutecedores. Uno de los personajes en *Despierta, mi bien despierta* enfatiza esta manera de acercarse a la vida: "era necesario que organizaran mejor el colectivo para el cuido de los niños y que nunca se olvidaran que se trataba de ayudarnos los unos a los otros, puesto que ante los ojos del Señor todos éramos hermanos" (19).

El meollo de la teología de liberación estuvo constituido por este tipo de orientación y sus proyectos de evangelización no fueron postergados ni traicionados porque todavía se cumplía la misión religiosa de la iglesia, es decir, aún se predicaba la palabra de Dios y lo único que difería era la aproximación hermenéutica a dicha palabra. Una de las obras testimoniales que mejor explican este planteamiento es *Don Lito del Salvador: proceso de una fe martirial* (1982), transcrito por María López Vigil. En ese libro se demuestra claramente el cambio que experimentó la iglesia y cómo ese cambio favoreció a la población positivamente. La Biblia ya no era algo que se estudiaba sin más objetivo que para reprochar o sermonear, sino un instrumento que podía influir en el aprendizaje que los campesinos desarrollaron. En las comunidades cristianas la Biblia se interpretaba con la ayuda de los curas y se discutía en el lenguaje que todos, mujeres, hombres y niños, letrados o no, entendían. En las discusiones éstos comparaban las experiencias de su propia realidad a aquellas acaecidas en los tiempos de Cristo y sacaban conclusiones que revelaban claramente el estado embrionario de una nueva conciencia.

El impacto que las comunidades de base o comunidades

cristianas, como se les llama en *Despierta, mi bien despierta,* tuvo en las diversas sociedades latinoamericanas fue, a pesar de los obstáculos, de resonancia positiva. La gente empezó a organizarse y a formar talleres educativos que desempeñarían funciones que eran responsabilidad del Estado. La escasez de recursos económicos y la beligerancia de entidades militares no impidió, aunque sí limitó, el alcance de las labores programadas para construir una nueva sociedad a través del combate en contra del analfabetismo y la falta de entrenamiento para profesiones manuales o domésticas. Cuando este tipo de comunidades comienza a manifestarse en Latinoamérica, más específicamente en Brasil, consisten en "agrupaciones de personas que provienen de las clases populares como característica fundamental, las cuales se reúnen para leer la palabra de Dios" (Rosa Borjas 120). Como se demuestra en *Despierta, mi bien despierta,* el enfoque de estas comunidades y la limitación de membresía cambiaron dinámicamente. Aunque no sería difícil de imaginar, resulta absurdo creer que el Estado hubiera lanzado campañas de persecución en contra de esas comunidades por el simple hecho de leer la Biblia. Algo más poderoso tenía que estar detrás de todo para provocar el antagonismo de los que eran felices con el *statu quo*, particularmente los oligarcas y los militares. En efecto, la gente se politizó, se educó tomando como guía de aprendizaje la realidad misma en la que se ubicaba el colectivo sufrido. Aprendieron que no tenían que soportar la injusticia, que lo que el Estado hacía en contra de ellos era injustificado y que algo tenían que hacer para cambiar radicalmente esa situación. Como es de esperar, el gobierno pronto se dio cuenta de que esto no era de interés para la sobrevivencia del sistema patrullado por ellos y procedieron a institucionalizar la violencia en contra de las comunidades cristianas.

Un punto que importa señalar aquí es la importancia que las mujeres tuvieron en la formación de las comunidades cristianas. En la novela, doña Cata, la madre de Lorena, es feliz haciendo obras de caridad para el beneficio de un colectivo al que ella, por ser burguesa, no pertenece. Lorena misma participa llevando comida y ropa a la gente pobre cuando acompaña a su madre y más tarde con Monseñor Romero en la iglesia. Dice Germán R. Rosa Borges que "una característica sobresaliente de las comunidades de base, es la participación activa de la mujer que a veces es muy protagónica ya sea como miembro o como animadora" (120). No cabe duda de que Alegría está al tanto de esto y lo tiene que expresar enfáticamente para reivindicar a la mujer como ser esencial en todas las ramas de la lucha colectiva. Ya sea participando en las labores de las comunidades cristianas o en el campo de guerra, la mujer latinoamericana,

centroamericana, salvadoreña se ha desempeñado con la misma capacidad que su sexo opuesto. Lorena admite la dificultad de todo esto cuando exclama que "Qué difícil ser mujer ... Si obedeces acabas embruteciéndote, si empiezas a desobedecer las consecuencias son duras" (*Despierta* 45). Sin embargo, cuando Ernesto le prohíbe que frecuente la iglesia donde ella coopera con la comunidad cristiana, sabiendo las consecuencias, ella opta por desobedecer. En una sociedad plagada por el machismo, su desobediencia no es vista con buenos ojos, pero su proceder la libera y la voz narrativa se encarga de martillar sus observaciones al respecto: "Eras libre, libre, te habías salido de la línea recta por la que te habían enseñado a caminar y descubrías que las desviaciones eran peligrosas, pero mucho más estimulantes" (61).

Una de las aberraciones más deplorables de la oligarquía salvadoreña y de la gente que se adhiere a sus lavados de cerebro, es la visión que tienen sobre temas de los cuales no saben nada. Las voces más ignorantes de la sociedad repiten y viven creyendo lo que se les dice sin saber de lo que se está hablando o lo que los términos quieren decir. Esta verdad es representada en la novela a través de Fernando, "Indio de mierda" (35), lo llama Lorena con desdeño por su ignorancia y su odio hacia los curas que, según él, son comunistas sin saber lo que el término implica. Lastimosamente, ideas absurdas como éstas y más graves aun, se almacenan en la mente de estas personas que han sido condicionadas a atacar a través de la manipulación que de ellas ha hecho el aparato político. Fernando le dice a Lorena que los "curas están pagados por Moscú. Por Cuba y por Moscú. El gobierno los debía echar a todos, comenzando con Monseñor Romero" (*Despierta* 35). La consigna popular que se adoptó para esparcir el odio por los curas y las comunidades cristianas que guiaban fue, como recuerda Lorena a Ernesto y sus amigos repitiéndolo: "Haga patria, mate un cura" (*Despierta* 16). Por ende, no es de extrañar que Lorena sienta un miedo por la vida de Monseñor Romero; la ira contra él y los otros curas que denuncian la opresión y ayudan al pueblo a forjarse un destino distinto, se desata incontrolablemente, pero Romero está seguro de que "si me matan resucitaré en mi pueblo" (42). Durante los años más difíciles de la guerra, Monseñor Romero se convirtió en símbolo espiritual de la lucha y los campesinos lo veneraban como un santo, tanto que muchos perdieron su vida por tener un retrato del cura en sus hogares.

La preocupación más grande de Monseñor Romero era que si los eventos criminales que tomaban lugar en el país no eran denunciados, el mundo jamás llegaría a saber la triste realidad de

los salvadoreños. Por ello mismo, y para que el pueblo entero estuviera al tanto, el sacerdote preparaba sus homilías dominicales alrededor de acontecimientos sociales y violentos que eran transmitidos radialmente por todo el país. Cuando Lorena llega a preguntarle si él sabe algo de los nueve decapitados que aparentemente fueron exterminados en uno de los mataderos de su marido, Monseñor le responde que sí, "en mi homilía del domingo lo voy a denunciar" (*Despierta* 42). Lorena pertenece al medio burgués que tanta aversión siente por los curas y, porque sabe de la voracidad de ellos, le advierte que tenga cuidado, pero Monseñor le expone que algo se tiene que hacer: "La violencia y el crimen se han desatado en el país y es nuestro deber denunciar estos hechos que no se pueden tolerar" (42). Fue esta posición de valor y coraje la que llevó a Monseñor Romero a la muerte. Sus verdugos se empecinaron en silenciar su voz, pero la lucha colectiva por la ansiada liberación continuó porque él, como todos los que perecieron injustamente, resucitaron en el pueblo que se encargó de llevar dicha lucha a sus últimas consecuencias.

Despierta, mi bien despierta es una obra multidimensional que encierra en sus páginas experiencias que llaman a la reflexión y a la insoslayable participación del lector. Como hemos visto, la autora desencadena la acción que envuelve una serie de temas vitales de la realidad salvadoreña y, por extensión latinoamericana, sin eludir la importancia que tiene representarlos artísticamente. El tema de la mujer y su rebeldía en contra de un sistema patriarcal que limita su trascendencia íntegra como ser humano; su despertar al albor de una conciencia renovada dado a las circunstancias político-sociales que atormentan la vida de miles de seres humanos, son elementos esenciales en su narratividad. La iglesia como guardiana y defensora de los derechos del campesino, del pobre, del marginado, es otro de los temas importantes que sale a relucir para recalcar los intentos de una institución por reiterar las faltas cometidas en el pasado, es decir, su reconocimiento de que el hombre es un ser social y, como tal, expuesto a conflictos sociales que tiene que conciliar para poder vivir en paz y con los debidos derechos constitucionales y naturales. La iglesia se dio cuenta de que un acercamiento más genuino, de mayor significado y valor para el pueblo que pelea por lo que Francisco Andrés Escobar llama "descrucifixión social" (66), era tan importante como predicar a favor de la salvación del alma. Además de todo esto, la novela presenta un espacio en el que se teoriza sobre cómo escribir bien a través de la práctica de Lorena y la pericia de Eduardo, poeta y revolucionario comprometido con los seres que comparten su época y territorio ensangrentado por la violencia.

En pocas palabras, *Despierta, mi bien despierta* se reduce al despertar de una doble conciencia, pública y privada que se subvierte de lo comúnmente aceptado por una sociedad todavía en transición hacia el progreso.

La religión, como tema esencial en esta novela, se muestra como entidad interesada en el dolor del hombre supeditado a las más violentas olas de represión. El Arzobispo Oscar Arnulfo Romero, seguidor de las nuevas normas ideológicas que se desarrollaron mediante la teología de liberación, supo definir muy bien el papel de la iglesia sin apartarse de su prístina misión. En una de sus cartas pastorales explicó que "lo que, de verdad, interesa a la Iglesia es ofrecer al país la luz del Evangelio para la salvación y promoción integral del hombre, salvación que comprende también las estructuras en que vive el hombre para que no le impidan, sino que le ayuden, a llevar una vida de hijo de Dios" (81). Los temas que trata la autora en todas sus novelas son diversos, y su sobrevivencia trascendental es avalada por el genuino uso que hace de cualquier recurso estilístico que pueda darle autenticidad artística a su creación. Las novelas, arquitectónicamente construidas con un lenguaje que pinta, que muestra gráficamente y que hace vivir las experiencias vocalizadas, sin duda alguna, caben perfectamente dentro de las corrientes de la nueva narrativa centroamericana, ya que, como dice Arturo Árias en uno de sus ensayos más citados, "Nueva narrativa centroamericana",

> la nueva narrativa rompe literariamente de manera significativa con el discurso literario tradicional, al incorporar todos los lenguajes de su tiempo y construir un microcosmos plurilingüístico, plenitud de puntos de vista orquestados estéticamente para explorar nuevas formas de percibir, expresar y ubicarse frente a sus respectivas sociedades desde una dimensión transcendental. (22-23)

Antonio Velásquez
University of Toronto

Obras citadas

Agosín, Marjorie. "Literature." Trad. Cola Franzen. *Latinas of the Americas.* Ed. K. Lynn Stoner. New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1989. 389-409.

_____. *Silencio e imaginación: metáforas de la escritura femenina*. México: Editorial Katún, S.A., 1986.

Alegría, Claribel. *Despierta, mi bien despierta.* San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1986.

Arias, Arturo. "Literary Production and Political Crisis in Central America." *International Political Science Review* 1.12(1991): 15-28.

_____. "Nueva narrativa centroamericana." *Centroamericana: Studi di Letteratura Ispanoamericana.* Editor, Giusseppe Bellini. Roma, Italia: Bulzoni Editore, 1990. 9-23.

Bakhtin, M.M. *Estética de la creación verbal.* Traducido por Tatiana Bubnova. México: Siglo XXI, 1982.

Carter, Brenda *et al*. A *Dream Compels Us: Voices of Salvadorean Women.* Boston: South End, 1989.

Escobar, Francisco Andrés. "Pueblos en cruz: la sociedad civil en la cultura." *Sociedad participativa en El Salvador.* Editado por Rafael Guido Béjar y Stefan Roggenbuck. San Salvador: Imprenta Criterio, 1995. 63- 100.

Herrera Norma. *La mujer en la revolución salvadoreña.* México: Mexicana de Impresos y Papelería, 1983.

Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which Is Not One.* Trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Paz, Octavio. *El laberinto de la soledad.* México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1986.

Phillips McGowan, Marcial "Closing the Circle: An Interview with Claribel Alegría." *Claribel Alegría and Central American Literature: Critical Essays.* Eds. Sandra M. Boschetto-Sandoval and Marcia Phillips McGowan. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1994. 228-245.

Rodríguez Monegal, Emir. *El boom de la novela latinoamericana.* Caracas: Editorial Tiempo Nuevo, S.A., 1972.

Romero, Oscar Arnulfo. *Morir por Jesús.* Editado por Rafael Cedeño. Buenos Aires: Edigraf, S.A., 1983.

Rosa Borjas, Germán R. "La opción de la Iglesia frente a la sociedad civil y la política." *Sociedad participativa en El Salvador.* Editado por Rafael Guido Béjar y Stefan Roggenbuck. San Salvador: Imprenta Criterio, 1995. 103-154.

Sommer, Doris. "Not Just a Personal Story: Women's Testimonies and the Plural Self." *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography.* Eds. Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenk. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988.

POLITICAL REFORM AND MARY SHELLEY'S SHORT FICTION

Arnold Schmidt

"I have been so often abused by pretended friends for my lukewarmness in 'the good cause'...of the advancement of freedom and knowledge...that, though I disdain to answer them, I shall put down here a few thoughts on this subject" (Shelley, *Letters* (Jones) 204).[1] Thus begins Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley's Journal entry for 8 March 1831. Anyone who has ventured into Shelley scholarship has read excerpts from this Journal and been perplexed by critical response to it.

Some critics, like Anne Mellor and William Veeder, quote this entry as evidence of Shelley's conservatism (Mellor 211, Veeder 11), while others, like R. Glynn Grylls, cite the identical lines to prove the author of *Frankenstein*'s liberalism (207-8). This dichotomy of opinion illustrates the tenacity of Shelley's centrism, for the author resists easy categorization as either liberal or conservative. Moreover, this critical disagreement serves to highlight the tenuousness of the moderate position Shelley strove to occupy, a position which says much about her thinking on political reform.

For Shelley, political reformers fall into two categories. Her Journal continues: "Some have a passion for reforming the world." These include her parents, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, and her husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley, people who reform with "disinterestedness, toleration, and a clear understanding." In the second category, Shelley places demagogues who corrupt ideals for selfish motives. Her Journal goes on: "I am not for violent extremes, which only bring on an injurious reaction" (Jones 204). As a Whig moderate, Shelley navigates through a political geography that includes

[1] Please note: In this article, "Shelley" refers to Mary Shelley, unless otherwise indicated.

ideal reformers and potentially violent radicals, yearning to trust the first, while feeling dismay at the prospects of the second. According to Mellor, Shelley's critique of nineteenth century politics offers an "ideology grounded on a new conception of the bourgeois family as ideally egalitarian" (xii). I agree, but would extend Shelley's model of the ideal family to the public at large. Doing so sheds light on Shelley's vision of political reform, both the dangers she saw and the more democratic monarchy she advocated.

As we will see, in both her politics and fiction, Shelley collapses distinctions between private and public spaces as a way of underscoring the dangers implicit in all hierarchies, those in the family as well as those in the monarchy. As her Journal quote above indicates, Shelley remains cognizant that reformers can be either ideal or demagogues. She recognizes that the distance between the two can be small, with the constant danger of one turning into the other. Attentive reading of such short fiction as "The Sisters of Albano" and *Mathilda* reveals Shelley's anxieties about violence like the Pentridge Rising and the Peterloo Massacre, about demagogues like Napoleon, and about reformers—or, as she sees them, radicals—like the Chartists.

Shelley favored the Reform Bill of 1832, the Whig call for a more democratized monarchy. In a 22 March 1831 letter to Edward John Trelawny, she wrote: "The Whigs triumphed gloriously in the boldness of their measure—England will be free if it is carried" (Shelley, *Letters* II 133). The letter reveals much about the moderation of Shelley's politics. The reform bill, not particularly "bold," doubled the number of voters. It extended the franchise to male owners of ten pounds property, eliminated some rotten boroughs, and distributed votes more equally according to population (Briggs 261-5). While Ultra-Tories resisted any change, radicals wanted universal male suffrage. Shelley's position falls in the middle.

Frequently, Shelley's tales and stories present conflicts between pairs of characters, with a third mediating between them. Those narratives which involve triangulations of characters dramatize the difficulties of centrism and focus on the dangers inherent in maintaining middle positions. I believe that Shelley uses this strategy in her short fiction to draw parallels between the public and private spheres and to emphasize the risks of political confrontation. For example, in Shelley's tales, we see Domenico mediating between the two "Sisters of Albano." A woman mediates between two men in "The Swiss Peasant," the story of a 1787 Swiss rebellion against the Napoleonic French, in "Fernando Eboli: A Tale," which takes place

during the Napoleonic wars in Italy and Russia, and in "Euphrasia," set during the 1821 Greek Revolution and reflecting Shelley's fears about the Chartist movement and its potential for violence. For me, the significance of these triangulations lies in the fact that the mediation takes place between the public and private spaces: erotic, familial, governmental. As a case in point, consider Domenico's mediation between the two "Sisters of Albano."

Shelley's 1828 tale "The Sisters of Albano" reveals her apprehensions about popular insurrection. While the author does not exactly date the action, I believe that the story takes place in Napoleonic Italy between 1797 and 1799. The French invaded Rome on 15 February 1797 (Doyle 338). Shelley sets the story at a time when France controlled Rome, so we know it takes place after that date. Napoleon came to power and changed France's anti-Catholic stance early in January-February, 1800 (Herold 130). Since the story specifies that the soldiers lack respect for the clergy, I see it as likely set before Napoleon's ascendancy, thus between 1797 and 1799.

The tale tells of two sisters: Maria, who joins a convent, and Anina, who falls in love with Domenico, a bandit. When French troops surround the bandits and try to starve them into surrender, Anina risks her life to bring them food. The French discover Anina and condemn her to death. Maria visits her, exchanges her nun's habit for her sister's clothes, and allows Anina to escape. The soldiers then capture Maria and sentence her to death. The bandits fight a futile battle to rescue her, but the French execute her and kill all the bandits. In the end, Anina takes Maria's place in the convent.

"The Sisters of Albano" opens with a stanza from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (Shelley, *Tales* 51), in which Byron describes his travels through the same regions of Italy where Shelley has set her tale. More significantly, the quoted stanza (IV.174) follows close after Byron's elegiac remembrance of the popular Princess Charlotte, who died in childbirth. P.B. Shelley also wrote a response to her passing, "On the Death of Princess Charlotte." Since Charlotte's death coincided with the trial and execution of the Pentridge Rising conspirators, however, he elegizes those hanged and not the princess (Holmes 384). In 1817, about three hundred men initiated an insurrection in Nottingham in hopes of precipitating a national revolution. Arrests followed, with thirty-five men being charged with high treason. The prosecution had ten lawyers, while the defense had only two. The prosecution's hand-picked jury found four rebels guilty and sentenced them to be hanged; the others confessed their guilt to escape capital punishment (Thompson 663-4).

Shelley's citation of Byron, her awareness of her husband's writings, and her own political concerns suggest that we might search fruitfully for parallels between the Pentridge Rising and her tale "The Sisters of Albano." First, note the intertextual parallels. In Shelley's tale, the virtuous Maria displaces her imprisoned, subversive sister Anina, who brings food to her bandit beloved. Similarly, in P.B. Shelley's poem, the revolutionary leaders of the Pentridge Rising displace Byron's Charlotte, "the fair-hair'd Daughter of the Isles... / The love of millions!" (*Childe Harold* IV. 170). Intriguingly, the sisters in the tale displace each other as well. Initially, the narrative identifies Maria and Anina with spiritual and erotic love, respectively. The similarities in the names Maria and Anina and the ease with which they exchange roles, however, makes them seem malleable to the point of being unable to retain essential identities. The sisters' narrative interchangeability leads readers to see their identities not as inherent, but as stemming from the context of their social roles as nun or lover. Furthermore, like Princess Charlotte's death in childbirth, which gains resonance only when displayed in the public space of Byron's poem, the sisters' acts of love and sacrifice gain resonance only when introduced into the public sphere of civil insurrection.

Another parallel between Shelley's tale and the government prosecution lies in their mutual challenge to the distinction between law and criminality. For example, in "The Sisters of Albano," the law-enforcing "French are merciless" (Shelley, *Tales* 57) and their cruel punishments more arbitrary than the bandits' thefts. The law, lacking justice and mercy, seems more criminal than the actions of the bandits. When Maria begs for Anina's freedom, the officer in charge responds, "were she but nine years old, she dies...and were the criminal his own daughter he must enforce his orders" (Shelley, *Tales* 59). The officer compares Anina with a nine year old, locating her in the private world of childhood, at the same time thrusting his own daughter into the public sphere of marshal law and execution. In the same way, the British government's use of a spy and agent provocateur named Oliver to motivate and then convict the Pentridge radicals violated their private space. The government's actions so smacked of entrapment that outraged jurors subsequently acquitted conspirators in the related Glasgow and Folley Hall risings (Thompson 662). In both the tale and the trial, distinctions between justice and criminality no longer seem viable.

Further, both Shelley's tale and the Pentridge Rising revolve around material concerns, predominantly hunger. In "The Sisters of Albano," one villager discussing the bandits laments that "it is horrible

to think what these men suffer; they...are literally starving" (Shelley, *Tales* 57). During the Rising, which has been called a "Levelution" intending to level social distinctions and equally redistribute wealth, rebel leader Bandreth sang: "No bloody soldier must he dread, / He must turn out and fight for bread." After their arrest, the prisoners were "held for weeks on bread and water" (Thompson 660, 663-4). Finally, the tale and the Rising also echo the same imperial dynamics, where there seems little inherent connection between national identity and military policy. In the story, the French, fighting to extend Napoleonic control to Italy, attack the bandits. During the Rising, Hussars, Germans fighting for Britain, captured the Pentridge rebels.

As we see in "The Sisters of Albano," war and rebellion destroy any hopes Anina has of happiness with Domenico. With his death and that of her sister Maria, Anina retreats to a convent. For these characters, changing events force the reevaluation of existing belief systems. These tales dramatize the choices people face in situations in which neutrality becomes impossible and show the difficulties of negotiating between absolute ideological positions.

Shelley's 1819 novella *Mathilda* raises similar issues, but instead of relying on triangulation, employs an intricate pattern of literary and political allusion to connect private sexual relations with public events and consequences. *Mathilda's* references to 1790's anti-war poetry introduce a political dimension into a family tragedy of incestuous desire. The novella tells the story of a father struggling to resist incestuous feelings for his daughter, Mathilda, who reminds him of his deceased wife. Fearing he will be tempted to abuse her, he runs away. She follows, but arrives too late to prevent his suicide. Distraught, she fakes her death, disappears from society, and eventually dies. Shelley alerts the reader to the ways incest destabilizes the social fabric in a series of allusions to *Oedipus Rex* and *Hamlet.* Mathilda compares herself directly with Oedipus and describes herself as "a living pestilence" (Shelley, *Reader* 176, 239), calling to mind the plague which struck Thebes because of Oedipus's maternal incest. Like the murdered King Hamlet, Mathilda has had the poison of "unlawful and detestable passion" poured into her ear (Shelley, *Reader* 229). The sufferings of both Oedipus and Hamlet result from the violation of a sexual taboo, and both put the body politic at risk.

Mathilda's discussion of her dead father in terms of Prime Minister William Pitt directs the reader's attention to the ways power relations in the private sphere reproduce those in the public sphere.

Shelley introduces these ideas by incorporating lines from Coleridge's 1798 poem, "Fire, Famine and Slaughter: A War Eclogue." The poem condemns Pitt for Britain's war against revolutionary France and for reprisals against Irish rebels (Holmes 175). After her father's death, relatives console Mathilda, characterizing her father as mad. They do not say this directly, but rather, in lines adapted from Coleridge, "Whispered so and so / In dark hint soft and low" (Shelley, *Reader* 217). Her relations whisper to Mathilda about her father as Famine whispers to Slaughter about Pitt. Like Mathilda's father, whose feelings changed from paternal love to incestuous desire, Pitt's political views changed from reformist to reactionary in the face of the French Revolution. Here, Shelley concerns herself primarily with the danger of betrayal: as the good father can become incestuous, so the good reformer can spawn political reaction. Further, in the face of repression, peaceful reformers like those who demonstrated at St. Peter's Fields could turn insurrectionary, like the Irish rebels mentioned in Coleridge's poem.

Thematic connections link her novella *Mathilda*, completed 9 November 1819, with the Peterloo Massacre, which occurred 16 August of the same year. In both, we see the potential instability inherent in hierarchical power, and the danger possible when chaos erupts. Both evidence failures of public sphere paternalism, where the social elite look out for the lower classes as a parent would for a child, and private sphere patriarchy, where fathers supervise wives and children, presumably for their own good. In the same way that the benevolent monarch can become a tyrant in the public sphere, however, so too the good father can become the incestuous desirer in the domestic sphere. If incestuous behavior in *Mathilda* exemplifies an abuse of patriarchy, the violence at Peterloo also stems from an abuse of political paternalism. In both cases, the supposed protector—the father or the king—becomes the aggressor. In both, the domestic space becomes politicized and violated. The Shelleys, though in Florence in 1819, kept informed of British political activism and remained aware of the enormous gatherings supporting parliamentary reform and expanded suffrage. When the newspaper reports arrived, they read with horror about the Peterloo Massacre, in which forty yeomen cavalry disrupted one of those gatherings, riding into a crowd of more than thirty thousand peaceful demonstrators, wielding their sabers, killing eleven and injuring four hundred. Peterloo caused outrage and became a compelling national symbol, not least because the massacre was witnessed by the representatives of the press. Newspaper reports emphasized the women and children in the crowd, and coverage of Peterloo became gendered.

Periodicals carried "a flood of caricatures showing fat, drunken soldiery hacking down a defenseless throng of women and children" (Reid 221-35). Whigs and Tories alike felt that Britain verged on revolution. Mary Shelley would have been reading about Peterloo in those newspapers as she finished copying a draft of Mathilda (Jones 124), shortly before P.B. Shelley completed his poetic response to Peterloo, "The Mask of Anarchy."

Mary Shelley's writing, neither naive nor utopian, underscores the dangers of hierarchical power generally. In "The Sisters of Albano," war and rebellion destroy any hopes Anina has of happiness with Domenico, and with his death, she retreats to a convent. *Mathilda* too ends tragically. In these and other tales, the causes of ideal reformers fail outright or become corrupted by demagogues. Radical reform seems impossible, and all revolutionary solutions lead to destruction. The outcomes of Shelley's tales reflect her political reservations about radical reform and reinforce her belief in slow, incremental change. If her politics advocate government modeled on an idealized bourgeois family, these tales critique that ideal and show how difficult it may be to achieve that ideal. In these and other tales, Shelley refuses to acknowledge stable distinctions between erotics and power, between the public and the private. The themes of these works illustrate the social instability that Shelley feared, and help to explain her anxiety about political innovation that leads her to support the Reform Bill, but to distrust reformers.

Arnold Schmidt
Department of English
California State University,
Stanislaus

Works Cited

Briggs, Asa. *The Age of Improvement 1783-1867*. London: Longman Group, 1987.

Byron, George Gordon. *The Works of Lord Byron.* Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1994.

Doyle, William. *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Grylls, R. Glynn. *Mary Shelley A Biography*. London: Oxford University Press, 1974.

Herold, J. Christopher. *The Age of Napoleon*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1987.

Mellor, Anne. *Mary Shelley Her Life. Her Fiction. Her Monsters*. New York: Routledge, 1989.

Reid, Robert William. *The Peterloo Massacre*. London: Heinemann, 1989.

Shelley, Mary. *Mary Shelley: Collected Tales and Stories.* Ed. Charles Robinson. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.

_____. The *Journals of Mary Shelley 1814-1844*. Ed. Paula Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert. Oxford: Clarenden Press, 1987.

_____. *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley.* Ed. Betty Bennett. 3 vols. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980, 1983, 1988.

_____. *Letters of Mary W. Shelley*. Ed. Frederick L. Jones. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1944.

_____. *The Mary Shelley Reader.* Ed. Betty Bennett and Charles Robinson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Thompson, E.P. *The Making of the English Working Class.* New York: Vintage Books, 1966.

Veeder, William. *Mary Shelley & Frankenstein: The Fate of Androgyny.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

CERVANTES AND THE REINVENTION OF THE PICARESQUE NARRATIVE IN THE *NOVELAS EJEMPLARES*

Mark Mascia

Miguel de Cervantes' *Novelas ejemplares* fictionally chronicle various aspects of Spanish life in the *Siglo de Oro,* a time in which Cervantes bore witness to a number of problems and conflicts in Spain's economy, foreign relations, and daily life. As numerous literary genres flourished during the *Siglo de Oro,* Cervantes, in the *Novelas ejemplares* as well as in other works, experimented with the variety of literary genres available to him. One such genre was the picaresque narrative, well-developed in Spain at the time and oft-studied by scholars since. Cervantes openly incorporated many elements of the picaresque genre into his works, perhaps especially so in the *Novelas ejemplares.* However, Cervantes did not merely copy standard picaresque forms and notions that were prevalent; rather, he incorporated picaresque elements into his literature with alteration and modification. In the proceeding analysis, I shall use three *novelas ejemplares, La gitanilla, La ilustre fregona,* and *El casamiento engañoso,* and *El coloquio de los perros*,[1] to demonstrate that Cervantes is not a purely canonical picaresque author; he is, I believe, a quasi- or semi-picaresque writer in the *novelas.* Cervantes invents what might be called Cervantine picaresque literature.

Conventional picaresque literature offers a variety of salient characteristics. Most picaresque novels are written in autobiographical form, presenting one view of the world as seen through the eyes of the first-person narrator. This character leads a rather unfortunate life, experiencing many trials and tribulations during the course of a hard existence. He or she is most often of very humble origins, if

[1] I will refer to this as one story, partly in order to facilitate my analysis and the quotes from these stories which I will mention, and partly because one is the frame story of the other.

such origins are known.[2] He often resorts to a life in which crime and corruption become the means to survive, as a character operating on the margins of society. The *pícaro*[3] is not always taken aback by the immorality of some of his actions, since he acts in the interests of his own survival. Immorality surrounds him and he is aware of it, but he becomes immersed in it through the lifestyle which he must necessarily lead. In addition, in the course of his life, he lives with and serves various masters, lacking a permanent home or locus of action for the extent of the tale or for very long periods of time. The picaresque novel thus presents a certain harsh realism, one in which the very underside of life is exposed, and in which idealistic notions of how to live cannot function. Consequently, there is usually no place for love—emotionally and socially constructive love, idealized love—in the life of the picaro.

In contrast to the characteristics of standard picaresque literature, Cervantes maintains a pattern of his own picaresque traits throughout the *Novelas ejemplares.* With Cervantes, the autobiographical narrative form is not always present, and is often replaced by a dialogue or by simple third-person narratives that contain individual dialogues within them, resulting from Cervantes' well-known trait of multiperspectivism.[4] The lives of his apparently picaresque characters, though at times beset by hardship, are not completely defined by hardship. Nor are their origins universally humble, as they are in, for example, *Lazarillo de Tormes.* Often, Cervantes' characters are of noble or at least generally stable families, and intentionally place themselves on the margins of society. Absent is the predeterminism of life that one finds in typical picaresque narratives. Although these picaros do serve or live with various masters, there often is a home from which these picaros come in the beginning of the story, and to which they may even return at the end. Additionally, these narratives evince more fixed loci of action, such as an inn. Finally, though these stories do indeed incorporate elements of realism, they often do not fail to include idealistic elements. As a result, social integration and constructive love become elements of the

---

[2] Although I recognize the presence and importance of female *pícaras* in Spanish literature, the ones presented in this analysis are principally male.

[3] The word *pícaro* shall henceforth be written in regular text, as if it were an English word, and without the written accent. One term in English used to refer to the *pícaro* is "picaroon", which has been less frequently used in scholarship.

[4] For further elaboration on narrative form and Cervantine perspectivism, see, for example, Carlos Blanco Aguinaga, "Cervantes y la picaresca: notas sobre dos tipos de realismo." *Nueva revista de filología hispánica* tomo XI, núm. 2 (1957): 313-342.

Novelas ejemplares. In sum, Cervantes is "picaresque" more in motifs and themes than in pure technique.

La gitanilla is by no means a pure picaresque work as such, though it does possess a number of picaresque characteristics. It is only certain surface characteristics, in my view, that are picaresque. Firstly, *La gitanilla* uses the third-person narrative, and as a result Cervantes places more distance between the reader and the events in the story than there would be in a picaresque narrative with an autobiographical point of view. Although the question of whether it presents picaresque characters and lifestyles is not so quickly settled, *La gitanilla* still deviates from the normative picaresque. Determinism is absent in this tale for the most part, in spite of its seemingly deterministic opening line: "Parece que los gitanos y gitanas solamente nacieron en el mundo para ser ladrones: nacen de padres ladrones, críanse con ladrones, estudian para ladrones" (1983: 7). The fixedness of people's fortunes is missing, as is seen in much of the life of the title *gitanilla*, Preciosa. She is an individualistic, sensible, and content young woman, who describes herself and her life in the following ways: "Yo me hallo bien con ser gitana y pobre, y corra la suerte por donde el cielo quisiere... mi alma... es libre, y nació libre, y ha de ser libre en tanto que yo quisiere" (14, 26). One of the elder Gypsies also states similarly about his group: "tenemos lo que queremos, pues nos contentamos con lo que tenemos" (25). Here, one does not observe the almost fatalistic, cynical determinism that one finds in traditional picaresque tales; the characters here, though marginalized—as Gypsies most certainly are—make do with what they have, and feel a sense of independence and isolation from a corrupt and dangerous world. Preciosa, above all others, is the one who shows this the most.

In addition, despite the acts of thievery that Gypsies are generally said in this story to perpetrate, there is also room for virtuous characteristics, again above all on the part of Preciosa, who "antes, con ser aguda, era tan honesta" (7). Shortly thereafter, an old Gypsy woman who has taken care of her for many years says of her, "a mi nieta [Preciosa, who in the old woman's eyes is like her own grandchild] la he criado yo como si fuera hija de un letrado" (11). Preciosa is honest, a characteristic one would not usually demand from characters such as Lazarillo de Tormes or Guzmán de Alfarache, and much less from a typecast community of Gypsies in Seventeenth Century Spain. She has willfulness and independence of spirit, which leads Ruth El Saffar to note that it "makes her stand out as unique, for it does not reflect the background in which she has been brought

up" (95). Additionally, Preciosa's suitor, who renames himself Andrés Caballero, chooses freely to associate with the Gypsy community and enter into its life to the point of becoming a member. The narrator demonstrates that Andrés clearly is responsible for marginalizing himself, as he was "criado casi toda su vida en la Corte y con el regalo de sus ricos padres,... y se vino a postrarse a los pies de una muchacha, y a ser su lacayo" (27). As a result of these characteristics, Manuel Durán offers that *La gitanilla* is "a joyous celebration of the freedom that comes from a wandering life and of Preciosa's beauty" (60). Regardless of the degree to which this *novela* may be considered joyous, it certainly does not conform to the canonical picaresque notions of a life full of constant hardships or of a lack of choice.

Other aspects must also be considered. Preciosa is not forced to follow the picaro's life of wandering from master to master and encountering continuous malice or moral degeneration along the way. The only people that can be considered her "masters" are the members of the Gypsy camp with whom she lives. The relation between them and Preciosa, however, is not what one would expect from a typical master-servant relationship; they appear to function well together, without the notion of Preciosa as their servant. As a result of living together in a solid, albeit marginalized community, there is a central locus of action for essentially the entire story: the Gypsy camp itself. Though Gypsy lifestyles have most often been itinerant and lacking permanent housing, the action revolves principally around the camp, wherever it may be. Finally, love is a very evident element in the story. In addition to the fact that the love here is seen as an integrating force (since Andrés and Preciosa are married at the end and live together as an established part of Spanish society), it is seen also as wise and not merely passionate. Preciosa values and guards her virginity, something admirable for Cervantes' contemporary readers, as she says of it, "no la tengo de vender a precio de promesas ni dádivas" (16). This is clearly not something one would find in Lazarillo's heart; as Juan Bautista Avalle-Arce aptly notes, "El amor... el buen amor, es ajeno, más aún, antitético a toda novela picaresca" ("*La gitanilla*" 12). He even states that it ends as a "novela amorosa, en la cual resuenan decididos ecos del *omnia vincit Amor* virgiliano" (12), and describes the world of *La gitanilla* as "one of romantic love and travel" ("*Novelas ejemplares*" 137). It seems as though Cervantes has developed a *novela* more along the lines of a romance than a picaresque novel, and in fact even incorporates certain characteristics of the "Greek romance," such as nomadism, anagnorisis, and a happy ending. Cervantes chooses to write a

novela that does not conform to standard notions of the picaresque—as well as one whose main character is really neither a *pícara* nor a Gypsy.

One final element to be noted before closing the discussion of this particular story is that whatever generic elements Cervantes incorporates in *La gitanilla*, the narrator appears to contradict himself in the story, in the apparent views on Gypsy life. Through Preciosa, Cervantes seems to be offering an idealized, nonconformist view of Gypsies, suggesting that they are not all thieves and morally bankrupt people. However, at the end, it is revealed that Preciosa is not a Gypsy at all; her identity as a Gypsy is shed, and her real identity—she is the daughter of the Corregidor, and thus ethnically Spanish—comes to light. Preciosa's kind statements on behalf of the Gypsies, a people to whom she thought she had belonged, become less relevant at the end, including even her emphatic statement where she says, "¡Pues en verdad que no somos ladronas ni rogamos a nadie!" (21). The reader (especially the reader in Cervantes' day) is allowed a sigh of relief at the end because of these revelations about Preciosa's ancestry. Though some positive qualities were mentioned regarding Preciosa and her Gypsy community, the question of why Cervantes ended his *novela* this way remains unanswered. El Saffar sensibly notes that "Never... is it suggested that Gypsy society is preferable to that of the Spanish nobility" (90). Admittedly, one can logically assume that because of this twist in the plot, Cervantes is not necessarily trying to assert that Gypsies must now universally be seen as immoral. One can easily discern legitimate, positive features about the Gypsies and their lifestyles, perhaps because of Cervantes' multiperspectivism. Still, the positive assertions regarding Gypsies earlier in the story carry less meaning at the end for the central characters, since Preciosa is found not to be a Gypsy; thus, her justifications and defenses of Gypsy life are no longer needed. It is also significant to note that the identities of both Preciosa and Andrés are ultimately fixed: in reality, they belong to mainstream Spanish society, not to the underworld of the Gypsies. As a result, for Preciosa at least, "only in the discovery of her nobility is the church marriage possible" (El Saffar 100). Cervantes, regardless of how marginalized or independent he allows his characters to be, changes the tone of his story at the end by revealing that the "good Gypsy," Preciosa, is in fact not a Gypsy at all.

In *La ilustre fregona*, like *La gitanilla*, Cervantes makes use of the third person to relate events. Additionally, there is often an ongoing

dialogue between the two main characters, don Diego de Carriazo and don Tomás de Avendaño, two young friends recreating their lives. There is no singular perspective here of one picaro addressing his reader. Carriazo and Avendaño maintain one essential difference as to their views: Avendaño is more scholastically oriented and confines some of his activities to interior spaces, whereas Carriazo is more ready to initiate adventure and carry out action in exterior spaces. In any event, it is the third-person narrator who assumes the most authority here, in the absence of one sole character to forge an autobiography. El Saffar observes this phenomenon: "Cervantes allows the narrator's voice to dominate the scene... The narrator takes time to add his own feelings regarding the main characters' actions and shows a strong propensity to include his own voice in the story" (87).

It is this narratorial voice which will at times show perhaps the most picaresque aspects of the story, however: the lifestyles and personal characteristics of Carriazo and Avendaño. Their origins are not lowly at all, as the two grow up in structured, mainstream families, the sons of "dos caballeros principales y ricos" (1974: 297). But, as initiated by Carriazo, they voluntarily decide to leave their families in search of adventure, as noted at the beginning of the story: "Trece años, o poco más, tendría Carriazo cuando, llevado de una inclinación picaresca, sin forzarle a ello algún mal tratamiento que sus padres le hiciesen, sólo por gusto y antojo, se desgarró, como dicen los muchachos, de casa de sus padres" (297). Strictly speaking, what Carriazo does is by choice; however, his choices are influenced by his "inclinación picaresca" noted above. This is an explicit reference by Cervantes to the picaresque, even though Carriazo exercises free will and is not forced to do so by a difficult life at home. He was simply bored with the life of noblemen, as "[n]i le entretenía la caza, en que su padre le ocupaba, ni los muchos, honestos y gustosos convites que en aquella ciudad se usan le daban gusto" (300). In fact, this self-made picaro even chooses to go to the tuna fisheries, as Cervantes' third person narrator declares: "no os llaméis pícaros si no habéis cursado dos cursos en la academia de la pesca de los atunes" (298).

Cervantine scholarship has appreciated the use of one's own volition in this "picarization" of the young Carriazo as well. Carlos Blanco Aguinaga observes that "La *inclinación* y no los rasgos hereditarios—bíblicos o no—ni sólo el medio ambiente, es lo que lleva a los individuos a sus actos" (339). Similarly, Durán indicates that *La ilustre fregona* "narrates the adventures and misadventures

of two sons of noble families who have become picaroons out of love for adventure" (73). These young men are picaros by choice and not by necessity, thereby making themselves conform only in part to the standard model of a picaresque character, and neatly fitting them into Cervantes' usual design for a voluntary and transitory picaro. These characters see positive elements in what they do as well; as Cervantes notes about the new-found picaresque identity of Carriazo in the tuna fisheries, "Allí campea la libertad y luce el trabajo" (299). The lifestyles of these two principal actors is picaresque up to the point of such lifestyles being voluntary constructs, as it is "el individuo siempre por encima del tipo" (Blanco Aguinaga 339).

Carriazo and Avendaño do not stay picaresque forever, though, as the story's characters and narrative elements do not conform to standard picaresque models such as *Lazarillo* or *Guzmán.* The inn is the central locus of action, in which Carriazo or Avendaño are not placed in anyone's service. Carriazo can be said to have something of a pseudo-master prior to the inn, a lackey to govern both him and Avendaño in the short episode involving his journey to Salamanca to study alongside the latter. However, the two youths conspire to rob the unsuspecting lackey of his money—a non-picaresque trait in that they malign those who have not maligned them. Outside the inn, the two have more freedom to act out whatever picaresque or other fantasies they wish. Yet, inside the inn the reader discovers a much more complex reality in which the independence of Carriazo and Avendaño is maintained, though without the same possibility of being wandering picaros in search of adventure. Some surface elements that seem picaresque are maintained inside the inn, it should be noted, such as the reference to the dances known as *zarabandas*, which the editor, Fernando Gutiérrez, notes as a "danza picaresca" (322n), as well as a reference to a well-known place for picaresque youngsters in Seville, "el Compás de Sevilla" (321), in a song sung by Carriazo.

La ilustre fregona continues to deviate from traditional picaresque canons also in that it introduces, not unlike *La gitanilla*, the element of love. This takes place precisely at the inn, where Avendaño is smitten by Costanza, the "ilustre fregona" of the story, with "la amorosa pestilencia" (306). This love, not unlike Preciosa's, is sincere and mature, as Avendaño explains to his companion: "yo la quiero bien, y no con aquel amor vulgar con que a otras he querido, sino con amor tan limpio" (319). At the same time Costanza herself is not a picara either. Though she was necessarily prevented from growing up with a stable mainstream family, being the product of a

rape (born at the inn of an anonymous mother, who was victimized by Carriazo's father, no less, as the reader learns at the end), she does have the innkeeper care for her and provide her with employment at the inn. As El Saffar observes, as for "the innkeeper and his wife, the motives of financial gain as well as the opportunities for free labor compete and lose out against the more noble instincts of love for the child born in such mysterious circumstances and concern for her well-being" (105). Costanza's admirable qualities include being "devotísima de Nuestra Señora" (343), as well as literate and honest, like Preciosa. Love, in different types, is present in this *novela*, in both Avendaño and the innkeeper; and it is this that once again sets off the story from the more bleak environment of the true picaro.

This story includes characteristics of other genres as well, such as the pastoral romance. William Clamurro adds that this story, though not "the full-blown, conventional Renaissance pastoral of Cervantes' own *Galatea...* seems to belong to that group of more open-ended and ambiguous forms wherein the 'pastoral' space exists within the text and does so in a way that reveals its edges, both its separateness from and its points of contact with contingent and surrounding societies" (43). Robert M. Johnston stresses the Platonic love that Avendaño has for Costanza, and even mentions that the very tuna fisheries in which Carriazo works—"famous center[s] for picaresque life"—are described positively, almost as a *locus amoenus* for the self-made picaro involved (170, 171). These characteristics seem to give *La ilustre fregona* a certain relationship to the pastoral romance. Not unlike *La gitanilla*, there is also anagnorisis as well as a happy and productive ending.

Finally, the love story leads to an idealistic conclusion: all the identities of the characters who have either lost or changed theirs are recovered, and a number of marriages—socially integrating forces—take place. Blanco Aguinaga even implies that this story is a "novela idealista," and that it is "en ningún sentido una novela picaresca" (338). Though I would not typify this as a wholly idealistic story, the theme of recovered identities is important; Carriazo's and Avendaño's ending is not like Lazarillo's, in that the latter character is forced to live with an identity of poverty that his parents left him. Lazarillo also marries the concubine of a clergyman—something not bothersome to Lazarillo, as his only concern is to ascend the social ladder. Lazarillo's concern is evident when he says of himself, "yo determiné de arrimarme a los buenos" (1987: 175)—the term "buenos" meaning outwardly respectable people. The fact that Carriazo and Avendaño willingly reintegrate themselves into their families and into

the rest of the society at the end (as well as the fact that Carriazo returns to his family for a while after the first time he had left) demonstrates that they do not want to break with the past. Carriazo, as El Saffar notes, is "willing to maintain ties with his family" (87). Maintaining family ties is a privilege for a picaro, and hence, *La ilustre fregona* evinces some idealism. In all, the picaresque is a backdrop which Cervantes chooses to utilize but to alter as well, thus allowing for a rather idealistic ending that cannot be expected from typical picaresque literature.

The last *novela ejemplar* of this study is *El casamiento engañoso* and *El coloquio de los perros.* The former, which frames the latter, involves a third-person narrator and a continuous dialogue between the two main characters of the story, Ensign Campuzano and Peralta. *El coloquio de los perros*, more importantly, involves a complete reliance upon a dialogue between two talking dogs, Cipión and Berganza. This combination of stories does allow for autobiographical elements, since the characters (Campuzano in *El casamiento engañoso* and Berganza in *El coloquio de los perros*) essentially provide their interlocutors with oral histories. It is still quite evident, though, that the basic narratorial form of the *novela is* not technically autobiographical, because of the dependence upon dialogue mentioned above. This, in turn, leads finally to the same characteristic noted in the narrative technique of the other stories: Cervantine multiperspectivism. Blanco Aguinaga considers this view of reality "una realidad filtrada... una realidad dual sobre la cual es posible meditar y hasta vacilar", and believes that "la forma autobiográfica se convierte en pura apariencia" (331).[5]

---

[5] There has been some interesting discussion regarding the autobiographical elements of this story. Avalle-Arce suggests that *El casamiento engañoso* and *El coloquio de los perros* are an autobiography in dialogue form, stating that Cervantes "invented a new literary genre of such extraordinary novelty that it has had no followers: the autobiography in dialogue form" ("*Novelas ejemplares*" 149). Indeed, a symbiotic relationship between the autobiographical narrator and his interlocutor is forged, though it must be remembered that the Cipión/Berganza and Campuzano/Peralta pairings are still pairings of separate voices.

For further study of the relationship between the self and the other in autobiography, see Karl Joachim Weintraub, *The Value of the Individual. Self and Circumstance in Autobiography,* and Julia Watson, "Shadowed Presence: Modern Women Writers' Autobiographies and the Other". The former has an especially insightful and useful commentary on Petrarch's *Secretum*, in which dialogue, though possessing "only a limited capability for fulfilling central autobiographic demands", is also the poet's "instrument for self-investigation, self-clarification, and ultimately for self-orientation" (106). The relationship between dialogue and self-exploration which characterizes Petrarch's discourse can also be found in Cervantes. Regarding autobiography and

If not in form, however, it is in precisely the content that Cervantes most approximates the picaresque genre in *El casamiento engañoso* and *El coloquio de los perros.* The adventures of Campuzano, for example, resemble picaresque adventures to a limited extent, in that his lifestyle manifestly relies on learning via empirical means. It is because of his ignorance and ease at being duped that he comes to learn from his mistakes—and perhaps on a greater scale than some picaros. Lazarillo, being a child, suffers physical abuse and poverty, whereas Campuzano, being an adult, suffers something more: venereal disease. Campuzano's intent was to marry an attractive woman, doña Estefanía, and thus tie himself to her fortune. However, it is Campuzano who gets deceived at the end—she runs off with his wealth, which, though admittedly modest, proves that Campuzano has lost. Insult is added to injury, since he contracts a venereal disease from her and is forced to seek treatment at the hospital mentioned in the story (the locus of Cipión's and Berganza's conversation). Campuzano's exploits and lessons are summarized in a short saying of Peralta's, one which can potentially be made for any picaro in literature: "'que el que tiene costumbre y gusto de engañar a otro, no se debe quejar cuando es engañado'" (1983: 283).

More significantly, the dog Berganza proves himself to be quite picaresque. First of all, his origins *are* humble, as Cervantes has chosen a picaro who had been marginalized from the start, rather than by his own volition. According to the story that Berganza had heard about his origins, the witch Camacha had turned him into a dog when he was an infant, out of a complaint against his mother. This picaro's life begins rather unusually, in that the he is marginalized by lycanthropy and evil intent on the part of a witch. Even so, Berganza does begin his life in an unfortunate state, and must fend for himself as a dog, lacking the physical capabilities of humans. There are other marginalized people throughout Berganza's life, if one considers witches as denizens of the borders of society. Berganza is the perfect example of the individual forced to use his wits to survive from the start; hence, he does not fall into the

---

the issue of authority, Peter Dunn offers that the "place where Cervantes brilliantly outmaneuvers and deconstructs the picaresque autobiography is in the location of authority... he makes narrators doubt other narrators, makes his readers believe, doubt, question his narrators" (130, 131). In sum, in Cervantes' *novela*, the true form of the tale remains dialogue and third-person narration, with the autobiographical elements as part of the *content* of the tale. However, it can also be said that *El casamiento engañoso*/*El coloquio de los perros* is easily the most autobiographical of the *novelas* presented within this study.

Cervantine pattern of allowing the individual to choose his destiny, as has been noted in the previous *novelas ejemplares.* With this idea in mind, one can say that Berganza "tells his life according to the picaresque formula" (González-Echevarría 110).

Berganza's life after having been turned into a dog provides many other picaresque experiences as well. He leads a large portion of his life in Seville, a well-known place for picaros in Cervantes' day. Berganza describes Seville as "amparo de pobres y refugio de desechados; que en su grandeza no sólo caben los pequeños, pero no se echan de ver los grandes" (292). More importantly, Berganza also serves a wide variety of masters throughout his life—much more so than the "semi-picaros" observed earlier—and he explicitly details the evil nature of his masters. For example, he recounts how, early in his life, he lived with several slaughterers. He describes his visceral reaction to them as follows: "ninguna cosa me admiraba más, ni me parecía peor, que el ver que estos jiferos con la misma facilidad matan a un hombre que una vaca: por quítame allá esa paja, a dos por tres, meten un cuchillo de cachas amarillas por la barriga de una persona, como si acocotasen un toro" (287). These same slaughterers try to kill him later, though Berganza escapes alive. Perhaps an even more significant episode in which Berganza is able to expose the extreme vice of his masters occurs when he lives with several shepherds. He is initially optimistic about being a shepherd's dog, as one sees when he says that he found it "propio y natural oficio de los perros guardar ganado, que es obra donde se encierra una virtud grande, como es amparar y defender de los poderosos y soberbios los humildes y los que poco pueden" (288). Such virtue, however, not only goes unrewarded but is actually the antithesis of what the shepherds themselves are doing, as they kill animals from their own flock and make it appear as though a wolf had been the culprit. Not only does Cervantes show the underside of Spanish life for his canine picaresque character, but in so doing he also deconstructs pastoral romances through this same character. As Berganza says of pastoral novels, "todos trataban de pastores y pastoras, diciendo que se les pasaba toda la vida cantando y tañendo con gaitas, zampoñas, rabeles y churumbelas, y con otros instrumentos extraordinarios... [Pero] todos aquellos libros son cosas soñadas y bien escritas, para entretenimiento de los ociosos, y no verdad alguna" (289, 290). Additionally, as Blanco Aguinaga observes, what Berganza says "parece arremeter... directísimamente contra la novela pastoril" (330).

From all these experiences, Berganza learns about life much as

a picaro would necessarily do and learns to formulate opinions about others. He tells his companion about the suffering in life when he says, "cuando las miserias y desdichas tienen larga la corriente y son continuas, o se acaban presto con la muerte o la continuación de ellas hace un hábito y costumbre en padecerlas, que suele ser su mayor rigor servir de alivio" (295). Berganza also has had experiences dealing with Gypsies, and speaks of their marginalized lives (and, as the reader might interpret, picaresque life conditions): "desde que nacen hasta que mueren se curten y muestran a sufrir las inclemencias y rigores del cielo; y así verás que todos son alentados, volteadores, corredores y bailadores" (314). Nevertheless, he is as opinionated as he is observant—he speaks of "sus muchas malicias, sus embaimientos y embustes, los hurtos en que se ejercitan, así gitanas como gitanos, desde el punto casi que salen de las mantillas y saben andar" (314)—and his opinion supports the notion of Cervantes' seemingly negative, or at least mixed, attitude towards the Gypsies. Berganza even goes so far as to speak of "la insolencia, latrocinio y deshonestidad de los negros" (298). His observations, prejudiced though they may be, come from years of experience living a life of mostly misfortune. Berganza concludes his life story for Cipión when he tells him, "¿Ves cuán larga ha sido mi plática? ¿Ves mis muchos y diversos sucesos? ¿Consideras mis caminos y mis amos tantos? Pues todo lo que has oído es nada comparado a lo que te pudiera contar de lo que noté, averigüé y vi de esta gente" (318).

Durán's opinion of Berganza's tale is essentially the same; the life that the poor dog has led is not a particularly happy one and can, in effect, be construed as picaresque. As he states, what "the dog Berganza tells his friend, the dog Cipión, is a sad tale about corruption, folly, [and] virtue unrewarded" (75). Berganza, admittedly, is not a perfect animal, and he is aware of it; however, he is even more intensely aware of the imperfection of the human beings whom he has observed in his difficult life (and as it is, such acute awareness leads him to commit unethical acts from time to time). With this exposition of vice and hypocrisy in men, Cervantes adds an interesting ironic note in this narrative: the dogs here are perceptive and can detect the vice in people more easily than people themselves can. The "brute animal" becomes astute. As Durán also notes, the dogs really "turn out to be much wiser than the human being who listened to them [Campuzano, who fell for Estefanía's ruse] and even presumably than the human being who reads about this conversation or the other human beings who now read it in the text published by Cervantes" (74). In all, the notion of the picaro's existence as its own

learning process is maintained throughout both Campuzano's and Berganza's lives, as both are capable of giving vivid expression to their experiences and to the meanings found therein.

El casamiento engañoso/*El coloquio de los perros* is probably the most realistic and generically picaresque of all the *novelas ejemplares* examined herein. There does not seem to be much of a place for constructive love in *El casamiento engañoso* or *El coloquio de los perros*, not even in Campuzano's short-lived relationship. Nor is there an inn or living quarters that occupies half of the story as a centralized locus of action, as there is in some of the other stories. It is true that there is an interesting reference to *Rinconete y Cortadillo's* don Monipodio in *El coloquio de los perros*, whom Berganza describes as an "encubridor de ladrones y pala de rufianes" (302), but whose house is really just a temporary stopover for the dog. Perhaps most of all, this *novela* appears to portray a kind of gritty realism not often found in other stories of the same collection. There is no pure autobiography, but more significantly there is not the Cervantine trait of allowing characters to step out of their original social roles—to make themselves picaros—or to step back in them, either, as one sees from the other tales. Cervantes has gone beyond his own usual limits for using the picaresque genre, without actually conforming to all of its canons.

One might question Cervantes' possible intentions for writing these *novelas* the way he did. Was he trying to parody the pastoral genre, for example, as had been noted above? This is seen in the fact that shepherds (such as in *El coloquio de los perros*) can be terrible people, while picaros or thieves elsewhere are capable of possessing a kind heart.[6] Cervantes may also have had the intention of simply showing the underside of Spanish society in the early Seventeenth Century, a time when Spain's political and economic status in the world was declining, with the literary goal of fashioning a new realism. This argument could be used to bolster the theory of breaking a collective idealism of the Spanish mind, created perhaps in part years earlier by overseas conquest and a heritage of idealistic and heroic literature; or, it might bolster a new notion of individualism, as can be seen from the self-determination of many of Cervantes'

---

[6] Dian Fox believes that Cervantes had similar intentions in the *Novelas ejemplares,* with respect to one story not presented in this study, *Rinconete y Cortadillo*: "Whether or not Cervantes is taking direct aim at the pastoral or simply participating in the literary response to that type of literature, *Rinconete y Cortadillo* is a compendium *a lo grotesco* of conventions also found in the *Eglogas* of Garcilaso, Montemayor's *Diana*, and his own *Galatea*" (146).

picaros. It is possible to speculate that Cervantes may have wanted to parody even the picaresque genre itself, if one looks at his variations of it as a parody or criticism.

In conclusion, Cervantes did experiment with various literary genres, the picaresque naturally being one of them. Undoubtedly, this can be seen in most of his works—most notably in *Don Quijote*—but he does show some variety in the *Novelas ejemplares* as well. The intention of this study was to concentrate on several of these *novelas* and, more particularly, their picaresque aspects. It can be fairly said, though, that "Cervantes was fascinated by all literary forms" (Dunn 130), and that he also felt an "intellectual need... to experiment with the picaresque genre" (Avalle-Arce, "*Novelas ejemplares*" 144). I would not only say, as Roberto González-Echevarría has suggested, that Cervantes engaged in the "deconstruction of picaresque formulas" (113), but also that, in effect, he has become a unique picaresque creator. In sum, Cervantes is able to combine positive and negative elements in life, while allowing his picaros to see life as such and enabling them to exercise free will at the same time that they must use self-reliance. What emerges is something unique: the Cervantine picaresque mode. It is hoped that future study of Cervantes' treatment of this and other genres might further illuminate readers regarding the intersection between a genre in the abstract and its more concrete examples.

Mark Mascia
Sacred Heart University
Fairfield, Connecticut

WORKS CITED

Avalle-Arce, Juan Bautista. "*La gitanilla*." *Cervantes* vol. I, nos. 1 and 2 (Fall 1981): 9-17.

_____. "*Novelas ejemplares*: Reality, Realism, Literary Tradition." *Cervantes. Modern Critical Views.* Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987, 135-149.

Blanco Aguinaga, Carlos. "Cervantes y la picaresca: notas sobre dos tipos de realismo." *Nueva revista de filología hispánica* tomo XI, núm. 2 (1957): 313-342.

Blecua, Alberto, ed. *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes, y de sus fortunas y adversidades*. Madrid: Editorial Castalia, S.A., 1987.

Cervantes, Miguel de. *Novelas ejemplares.* Ed. Sergio Fernández. México, D.F.: Editorial Porrúa, S.A., 1983.

_____. *Novelas ejemplares*. Ed. Fernando Gutiérrez. Barcelona: Editorial Juventud, S.A., 1974.

Clamurro, William H. "Identity, Discourse and Social Order in *La ilustre fregona*." *Cervantes* vol. VII, no. 2 (Fall 1987): 39-56.

Dunn, Peter. "Cervantes De/Reconstructs the Picaresque." *Cervantes* vol. II, no. 2 (Fall 1982): 109-131.

Durán, Manuel. *Cervantes.* TWAS 329. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1974.

El Saffar, Ruth. *Novel To Romance*: *A Study of Cervantes' Novelas ejemplares*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974.

Fox, Dian. "The Critical Attitude in *Rinconete y Cortadillo*." *Cervantes* vol. III, no. 2 (Fall 1983): 135-147.

González-Echevarría, Roberto. "The Life and Adventures of Cipión: Cervantes and the Picaresque." *Cervantes. Modern Critical Views.* Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987, 99-114.

Johnston, Robert M. "Picaresque and Pastoral in *La ilustre fregona*." *Cervantes and the Renaissance*. Ed. Michael D. McGaha. Easton, PA: Juan de la Cuesta—Hispanic Monographs, 1980, 167-177.

Watson, Julia. "Shadowed Presence: Modern Women Writers' Autobiographies and the Other." *Studies in Autobiography.* Ed. James Olney. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, 180-189.

Weintraub, Karl Joachim. *The Value of the Individual. Self and Circumstance in Autobiography.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.

TANGENCIAS Y DIVERGENCIAS: LA LITERATURA PUERTORRIQUEÑA DE AQUÍ Y DE ALLÁ

Carmen Dolores Hernández

La literatura que escriben los puertorriqueños emigrados se ha problematizado sobremanera porque está escrita desde los Estados Unidos y en inglés. En el caso de Puerto Rico —dada su constitución política, que equivale a la de una colonia— tal práctica representa, a primera vista, un desafío al concepto tradicional de que el español define la irredenta nacionalidad puertorriqueña. No se concibe, por lo tanto, que sus producciones literarias puedan ser escritas en otro idioma que no sea ése, so pena de que se considere que tal práctica equivale a un intento de socavar esa nacionalidad por medio de un asimilismo cultural al idioma de nuestra metrópoli actual. La historia cultural de Puerto Rico en el siglo XX ha sido una de intentos continuos por dejar sentada una independencia cultural que se refiere al idioma, a las costumbres y a las artes, tanto las llamadas artes cultas como las populares. La historia de la educación también se ha visto enfrascada en una lucha ya centenaria por salvaguardar el español como el idioma de enseñanza en las escuelas.

Quisiera afirmar, en primer lugar, que no hay duda —no puede haberla después de más de un siglo de defender la lengua, insistir en su uso y librar incontables batallas por el derecho a la instrucción en ella— de que el español dulcemente sazonado del trópico negro o mestizo (el "idioma blando y chorreoso" que dijera Palés) es nuestra lengua. Modificado, también, en su léxico por el sustrato del mundo indígena y por unas realidades sociales e históricas que no hubieran podido adivinar siquiera aquellos castellanos de tierras secas y centrales que nos llevaron, en primera instancia, nuestra lengua, el español es el idioma en el que hemos hablado, rezado, cantado y creado desde hace ya cinco siglos.

Pero en relación con la literatura de los puertorriqueños en los Estados Unidos hay que tomar en cuenta algo más que el lugar

donde se origina y el idioma en que está escrita. Esas dos circunstancias que han suscitado tanta controversia no son, después de todo, sino un accidente geográfico el primero y, la segunda, una práctica lingüística referentes a un cuerpo literario susceptible a —y merecedor de— un escrutinio crítico más enfocado hacia particularidades, modalidades, contextualidades y también tangencias y diferencias con la literatura que se origina en la Isla misma y se escribe en español.

El primer afinamiento de la visión que habría que poner en práctica sería una toma de consciencia de que —a pesar de que generalizamos y hablamos de 'literatura puertorriqueña de los Estados Unidos' o de 'literatura de la diáspora'— no se trata en absoluto de un cuerpo literario homogéneo que se pueda considerar en bloque ni en su historia, ni en su estética, ni en su temática y ni siquiera desde el punto de vista de la lengua. Literatura puertorriqueña de los Estados Unidos es la que han escrito muchos de nuestros compatriotas en aquel país. Tendríamos entonces que incluir bajo esa denominación a los "Nocturnos de Nueva York" de Clara Lair (que vivió en esa ciudad 22 años); la gran novela "En Babia" de José I. De Diego Padró, no sólo escrita allí en algunas de sus versiones sino con la ciudad como su centro (es una novela olvidada que en cierto sentido prefigura la gran novela urbana hispanoamericana que tanto estruendo hizo a partir del llamado 'Boom') y la mayor parte de la poesía de Emilio Delgado, de Graciany Miranda Archilla y de Clemente Soto Vélez. Julia de Burgos, como es sabido, también vivió durante largas temporadas en los Estados Unidos y no sólo escribió allí una parte importante de su poesía en español sino que también compuso algunos poemas en inglés. Esto lo cito sólo para dar algunos ejemplos de escritores que entran plenamente dentro del 'canon' puertorriqueño universalmente aceptado pero que pertenecerían también —si aplicamos estrictamente las condiciones de lugar— a la literatura puertorriqueña de los Estados Unidos.

Por otra parte, tampoco puede ser la lengua un criterio exclusivo para definir a los 'de allá'. Muchos, como David Cortés Cabán, Pedro López Adorno y Celestino Cotto Medina, escriben exclusivamente en español mientras que hay casos —que serán cada vez más frecuentes dada la debilidad de nuestra industria editorial— de puertorriqueños de la Isla que escriben en inglés. El fenómeno, además no es tan nuevo como se imaginan los que sólo están familiarizados con las recientes novelas de Rosario Ferré, "La casa de la laguna" y "Vecindarios excéntricos", publicadas por primera vez en aquella lengua. Data, por lo menos, del texto autobiográfico

de Pedro Juan Labarthe, “Son of Two Nations”, del 1931. Es Labarthe autor también poemario “The Seventh Door” (1960) y de “Mary Smith” (1958) novela de corte autobiográfico escrita asimismo en inglés. (¿Y qué decir, por otra parte, de un puertorriqueño quinta-esencial como Ramón Emeterio Betances, quien escribió la mayor parte de su obra de creación en francés? Ahí está, por ejemplo, su novela ‘Les deux indiens’ recientemente rescatada y el relato ‘La Vierge de Borinquen’). Por otra parte, la ‘guagua aérea’ —‘guagua’, para quienes no estén familiarizados con el caribeñismo, es un autobús y el modificador ‘aérea’ se lo dio nuestro escritor Luis Rafael Sánchez al comparar el continuo ir y venir del puertorriqueño a los Estados Unidos con los viajes en autobús que se hacen frecuentemente en la ciudad— indica eso, un vaivén físico entre las comunidades boricuas del continente y de la isla que podría aplicarse también al tránsito continuo entre idiomas. Julio Marzán, Alba Ambert, Jaime Carrero, para nombrar a sólo tres, han escrito en ambas lenguas. Los refiero para ampliar esta nómina y ahondar más en estas variadas geografías e idiomas de la creatividad puertorriqueña, a los ensayos de Efraín Bastadas en el libro “Partes de un todo”, particularmente “North of the Caribbean” y a la excelente antología de la poesía puertorriqueña en Nueva York, “Papiros de Babel” editada por Pedro López Adorno.

En cualquier caso, el conocimiento y el aprecio que se tiene en la isla de la literatura escrita en inglés en los Estados Unidos —particularmente de la publicada a partir del 1967, cuando Piri Thomas sacude el mundo editorial norteamericano con su novela autobiográfica “Down These Mean Streets”— es relativamente reciente aunque una bibliografía crítica creciente da fe de cuán rápido ha evolucionado el interés en ella. Entre los académicos que han trabajado el tema desde la Isla han estado Juan Gelpí; Efraín Barradas, pionero en la isla de estos estudios con su antología “Herejes y mitificadores”, Arcadio Díaz Quiñones, Alfredo Matilla, Eugene Mohr, Gerald Guinness y Manuel Hernández, para nombrar sólo a algunos. Gracias a sus enfoques cada vez más amplios estamos percibiendo esta literatura escrita por puertorriqueños en los Estados Unidos como un desarrollo fascinante que puede esclarecer muchos aspectos de la identidad nacional puertorriqueña.

Es posible, sin embargo, que aun no se perciba bien el alcance de este fenómeno. Se suele insistir en ciertos autores, como el mencionado Piri Thomas, como el muy conocido y apreciado Pedro Pietri, como Nicholasa Mohr, Miguel Algarín, Miguel Piñero, Sandra María Esteves y Esmeralda Santiago, quizás porque han sido ellos

los que con más frecuencia han regresado a Puerto Rico y cuyos nombres resuenan más en la Isla; además, claro está, de Víctor Hernández Cruz, que vive ahora en Aguas Buenas. Nombres como el de Ed Rivera, autor de una magnífica novela, "Family Installments", una saga familiar acerca de la migración que no se publicó hasta el 1982 pero que desde el 1971 se había serializado en diferentes publicaciones periódicas y algunos de cuyos capítulos habían aparecido en antologías; otros, como Louis Reyes Rivera, un excelente poeta con un uso brillante del ritmo y un pensamiento muy profundo sobre las relaciones entre la cultura puertorriqueña y la afroamericana, no son igualmente conocidos. Tampoco lo es —aunque lo debía ser por su posición contestataria respecto a lo que significa Puerto Rico para los emigrados— Abraham Rodríguez Jr., uno de los narradores jóvenes más talentosos, ni lo es Martín Espada —cuyos poemas documentales han iniciado nuevos derroteros estéticos— ni Irene Vilar, nieta de Lolita Lebrón (la líder nacionalista que participó en el tiroteo en el Congreso en el 1954), autora de "The Ladies' Gallery" unas memorias que se publicaron originalmente en el 1996 con el título de "A Message from God in the Atomic Age". Quiero recalcar con esto que estamos hablando de un vasto universo literario que se yergue desde el otro lado del océano que divide físicamente las dos comunidades puertorriqueñas. Los que habitamos en la Isla aún no hemos reconocido a los de la diáspora como interlocutores válidos en el terreno literario. En términos generales, y con las honrosas excepciones de los críticos y estudiosos citados y de un puñado de otros, no existe todavía un diálogo abarcador y ampliamente legitimado con esta literatura, ni aun en el plano más elemental de responder a sus alegaciones más violentas. Por mucho menos de lo que dijeron algunos de mis entrevistados en el libro "Puerto Rican Voices in English" se hubiera suscitado en nuestro ambiente literario y cultural una gran controversia y los refiero a la entrevista que me concedió Abraham Rodríguez, Jr., en la que habla de los escritores puertorriqueños que le precedieron en los Estados Unidos, de los gobiernos puertorriqueños y de la historia de la isla en términos que denotan una cierta ira y a la vez una gran decepción. Y cuando el poeta Miguel Algarín dice que le parece muy peculiar la actitud de los puertorriqueños de que no quieren que en las decisiones políticas de la isla participen los que viven en los Estados Unidos ya que Puerto Rico no es una nación soberana sino un país que tiene que importar el 99% de todos sus comestibles de los Estados Unidos, el punto que plantea hubiera ameritado un diálogo, al igual que cuando dice: "los puertorriqueños de la isla deberían reconocer que los que estamos en Nueva York no somos

enemigos, sino que estamos, por la naturaleza del momento, en una frontera electrónica, que nuestra mentalidad se está desarrollando a una gran velocidad. Estamos acelerados por causa de nuestra situación en el hemisferio: porque no estamos en el Caribe aunque nuestras raíces son caribeñas. Somos norteamericanos y por lo tanto no tenemos que ver con la polémica de si somos o no puertorriqueños. En último término, yo soy un norteamericano, pero también soy un hombre caribeño por nacimiento y en mi mentalidad llevo la emoción de un pueblo isleño que ha llegado a la frontera electrónica y científica del norte. No podemos volver a las consideraciones de un Puerro Rico taíno e idealizado. Eso es completamente irrelevante. No tiene nada que ver con nada".

Ignorar, dentro del diálogo cultural perenne de la isla, a estos escritores y negarles la posibilidad de ser unos interlocutores, aunque sea de manera crítica y contestataria, es una forma de ningunearlos, de cerrarles efectivamente un acceso al espacio local de resonancias literarias, como si no pertenecieran para nada a este ámbito. Y, sin embargo, se podría y debería construir una alegación —con miras, justamente, a que se deconstruya luego de maneras creativas, críticas e innovadoras— a base de la relación entre dos tradiciones literarias puertorriqueñas, la de aquí y la de allá, con ciertos paralelismos, tangencias y también divergencias. Se trataría de una relación que haría necesaria una mayor comprensión mutua.

Una de las visiones más sugerentes en este sentido la ha apuntado Juan Flores en los ensayos de "Divided Borders", muchos de los cuales aparecen en español en su libro "La venganza de Cortijo". Al señalar, en el que se titula "National Culture and Migration: Perspectives from the Puerto Rican Working Class", ciertas filiaciones entre la literatura surgida del movimiento obrero puertorriqueño de principios de siglo y la literatura que escribieron algunos puertorriqueños en los Estados Unidos —empezando con Bernardo Vega y Jesús Colón— abre Flores toda una nueva avenida de estudio y exploración que resulta particularmente interesante. La visión convencional del patriotismo y de la construcción de la identidad, según la expresaban escritores como José de Diego y Luis Llorens Torres, encuentra en escritores de otro signo, como Rafael Romero Rosa —y me refiero de nuevo a señalamientos de Flores— un rechazo a la tradición canónica que se fundamenta sobre el aprecio a la hispanidad. Rechazos parecidos se encontrarán luego en la obra de muchos de los escritores de la diáspora después del año sesenta. El paralelismo podría surgir de una experiencia compartida a un nivel aún más profundo. ¿Qué móvil —en uno u otro caso, el de los

obreros de la Isla y el de los emigrados— llevó a la práctica de la literatura a un grupo de personas sin una tradición literaria, sin una proyección académica, sin contactos directos y personales con el mundo prestigiado de la llamada alta cultura? En el caso de la literatura obrera de principios de siglo ese estímulo surgió de su contacto con dos industrias en particular: la del tabaco, como establecedora no sólo de pautas políticas y sociales, sino también literarias[1] y la tipográfica.

En 1865 y en el taller *El Fígaro*, de La Habana, se había iniciado —así lo consigna Leví Marrero en su obra "Cuba, economía y sociedad" —la práctica de leerles a los obreros mientras despalillaban tabaco.[2] Luego se generalizó por todas las Antillas y llegó hasta las fábricas de Nueva York, según consigna Bernardo Vega en sus memorias. Dice: "Al principio, el lector de la fábrica, por su cuenta, escogía las obras. Predominaba entonces la literatura de puro entretenimiento: novelas de Pérez Esrich, Luis Val, etc. Pero con el desarrollo político de los tabaqueros, éstos comenzaron a intervenir en la selección. Se impuso la preferencia por las doctrinas sociales. Se leía a Gustavo Le Bon, Luis Buchner, Darwin, Marx, Engels, Bakunin.... Al final de los turnos de lectura se iniciaba la discusión sobre lo leído. Se hablaba de una mesa a otra, sin interrumpir el trabajo...". Estos trabajadores, por lo tanto, eran relativamente cultos, aunque algunos fueran analfabetas. Leían textos anarquistas y estaban al tanto de las publicaciones obreras —libros y periódicos— de España. También se les leían en ocasiones novelas de Dumas y Víctor Hugo, de Balzac, Flaubert, José María Vargas Vila, Pérez Galdós y otros escritores europeos, incluyendo a los rusos, como consigna Norma Valle en su libro sobre Luisa Capetillo.[3]

En un país donde no hubo universidad hasta el 1903, tales prácticas convertían a ciertos obreros —entre los que también se conta-

---

[1] La importancia de la clase obrera para el desarrollo político, social y económico de Puerto Rico desde mediados del siglo pasado ha sido asiduamente estudiada por historiadores y sociólogos puertorriqueños desde la década del 70. Una buena síntesis de los orígenes del movimiento obrero en Puerto Rico se encuentra en la Sección II de *Historia critica, historia sin coartadas,* de Gervasio García. San Juan: Ediciones Huracán, 1985, pp. 67-96.

[2] Leví Marrero, *Cuba: economía y sociedad.* Tomo XI, p. 80. El tabaquero puertorriqueño, Bernardo Vega, habla de esa práctica en Nueva York. *Memorias de Bernardo Vega*, ed. por César Andreu Iglesias. Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1988, pp. 10-41.

[3] Norma Valle Ferrer, *Luisa Capetillo. Historia de una mujer proscrita*. San Juan: Editorial Cultural, 1990, pp. 60-61.

ban los tipógrafos, cuyo contacto con el mundo editorial, los libros y las revistas era muy cercanos—[4] en seres privilegiados con oportunidades insólitas, más aún si consideramos que desde finales del siglo XIX algunos grupos de obreros habían establecido casinos en donde se le daba mucha importancia a la alfabetización. Tenían también sus propios periódicos, como *El Eco Proletario* y *El Obrero*.[5]

La actividad no decreció, sino que más bien se acentuó con el cambio de soberanía y el acercamiento del líder obrero Santiago Iglesias Pantín —español de nacimiento, por cierto— al movimiento obrero norteamericano, sobre todo a la American Federation of Labor, dirigida por Samuel Gompers. A esa entidad se afilió la puertorriqueña Federación Libre de Trabajadores fundada por el mismo Iglesias.[6]

Tras el 1898, apuntan Lydia Milagros González y Ángel Quintero Rivera en su libro "La otra cara de la historia", "muchos trabajadores publicaban libros, panfletos, poemarios, manifiestos políticos, obras de análisis y de divulgación de sus ideas. Fue en estos primeros años del siglo XX, efectivamente, que más escritos de obreros se publicaron".[7] La figura de una mujer —estudiada por Julio Ramos en su libro "Amor y anarquía" resulta especialmente interesante dentro de este panorama. Luisa Capetillo (1879-1922) —a quien se suele conocer en Puerto Rico porque desafió todas las convenciones de la época, incluso las de la vestimenta, siendo encarcelada en La Habana por usar traje de hombre— había sido lectora en una fábrica de tabacos y empezó a escribir ensayos en el 1904. El suyo es un caso verdaderamente excepcional. "Me atrae de un modo irresistible la literatura, escribir es para mí la más agradable y selecta ocupación, la que más me distrae, la que más se adapta a mi pensamiento", escribió en una ocasión, enfatizando una singularidad que se refería no sólo a su activismo obrero, sino también literario.[8]

Entre sus libros hay un relato utópico que parece de ciencia ficción a lo George Orwell, *La humanidad en el futuro* (1910). Del 1911 es un libro importante de ensayos inmensamente retador: *Mi opinión sobre las libertades, derechos y deberes de la mujer como*

---

[4] Lydia M. González y Ángel Quintero Rivera, *La otra cara de la historia, Parte I.* San Juan CEREP, 1984 p. 80.

[5] Gervasio García, *Historia crítica, historia sin coartadas*, pp. 68, 71. 76.

[6] Ibíd., p. 78.

[7] Lydia M. González y Ángel Quintero Rivera, p. 146.

[8] *Amor y anarquía. Los escritos de Luisa Capetillo.* Ed. de Julio Ramos, Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1922, pp. 74-75.

compañera, madre y ser independiente. Aunque podría parecer, por el título, un tratado a la manera del de Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1972), el de Luisa Capetillo es un libro curioso, una amalgama de pensamientos, ensayos y hasta cuentos (*El cajero* es una especie de 'ejemplo' del poder corruptor del capitalismo y de la solidaridad de las clases obreras).[9] En el 1916 escribió un drama en tres actos, *Influencia de las ideas modernas*, y tiene otros textos llenos de máximas y pensamientos además de diálogos y versos. Sus escritos, aun los de tipo aleccionador y proselitista, poseen una cualidad directa, persuasiva, que los distingue.

No obedece su literatura —ni la de otros escritores obreros, como Ramón Rivera Rosa, José Ferrer y Ferrer, Ramón Morell Campos y Eduardo Conde— a los cánones estéticos vigentes en su día. Escribe ella, como ha dicho Julio Ramos, desde la periferia de una cultura letrada".[10] Por eso, también, se trata —en el caso de todos ellos— de "una literatura sin lectores",[11] es decir, sin los lectores de clase media —con acceso a los medios de comunicación masivos, a las instituciones de enseñanza y de prestigio cultural— que tradicionalmente dominan el ciclo de producción literaria. A diferencia de la corriente literaria principal, en estos escritos no se trabaja un ideario de resistencia nacional ni se utiliza como símbolo la figura del jíbaro. Se dirigen más bien hacia un entorno justamente contrario, un universalismo cuya meta es la identificación de los proletarios de todos lugares, sin distinciones nacionales y con ideales algo utópicos de hermandad y progreso espiritual universal.[12] (Y resuenan aquí, sin duda, los ecos de la cita de Miguel Algarín que les he leído antes).

Presentan estos escritos un panorama literario mucho más heterogéneo del que habitualmente se contempla en los estudios tra-

---

[9] La industria del tabaco incorporó desde muy temprano a la mujer en las fábricas, como lectora o como despalilladora. Fueron ellas quienes encabezaron en Puerto Rico varios movimientos en pro de mejores salarios y condiciones de trabajo. Las mujeres tabaqueras estuvieron, pues, a la vanguardia tanto del feminismo como de las reivindicaciones obreras en Puerto Rico.

[10] Entrevista a Julio Ramos, 24 de junio del 1993.

[11] Gervasio García, *Armar la historia.* San Juan: Ediciones Huracán, p 86.

[12] Es por eso que, según Julio Ramos en la entrevista que le hicimos (ver arriba), "Tal ausencia de la reflexión sobre la nacionalidad la sitúa en un lugar problemático para la historia del pensamiento crítico en Puerto Rico que fue, hasta mediados de los setenta, un campo intelectual definido en torno a las preguntas *¿qué somos*? *¿cuál es nuestra identidad*?".

dicionales de la literatura puertorriqueña. La yuxtaposición de ambas vertientes le presta a nuestras letras de principios del siglo pasado una singular complejidad, una cualidad indefinible e indemarcable que la hace más rica, dinámica y diferente y cuyo estudio completo está aún por hacer.

Algunos de los escritores puertorriqueños de los Estados Unidos que se destacaron en la primera mitad del siglo XX provenían de ese mundo laboral. Tanto Arturo Alfonso Schomburg como Bernardo Vega y Jesús Colón habían estado ligados a la industria tabaquera en la isla. Otros, posteriormente, llegaron a la literatura por rutas fortuitas que no necesariamente pasaban por los estímulos académicos, aunque no hay duda de que la escolarización primaria y secundaria que todos recibieron en los Estados Unidos y el ingreso de muchos a las universidades les abrió las posibilidades de esa vía de expresión. También habría que mencionar —porque muchos de ellos mismos lo han mencionado expresamente en su escritura autobiográfica— el estímulo de la lectura propiciada por la existencia de un excelente sistema de bibliotecas públicas en los Estados Unidos que implicó la posibilidad de un acceso temprano y agradable al mundo de los libros y que se encuentra ausente, como sistema de igual envergadura, en la Isla.

Pero quizás el estímulo mayor a la escritura vino, para muchos de estos escritores, por la vía oral, por la necesidad de recoger los cuentos e historias de las familias, por la afición al radio o por vía de la música. Como ha dejado absolutamente sentado Ruth Glasser en su libro "My Music is My Flag", Nueva York fue (y sigue siendo, desde luego) un centro importante de grabaciones para los compositores e intérpretes puertorriqueños, muchos de los cuales, como Rafael Hernández o Pedro Flores, vivieron allí durante años. Más aún, un número significativo de estos escritores eran los hijos de un sector social desplazado en los cuarenta y los cincuenta por la rápida industrialización de la Isla y tenían raíces campesinas fuertes en las que tiene que haber estado presente la tradición de los improvisadores. Resulta ya icónica la imagen del llamado "padre de la poesía Nuyorican", Jorge Brandon, quien se solía pasear por las calles del Lower East Side con un carrito lleno de cachivaches, recitando poemas para quienes los quisieran oír. Esta estrofa de su poema "El astro de Carolina" dedicada a Roberto Clemente, remeda, sin duda, el talante de las décimas cantadas por los mencionados improvisadores: "Al astro de Carolina/ en espíritu presente,/ a ti Roberto Clemente,/ vaya la gracia divina./ Llevo clavada una espina/ dentro de mi corazón,/ y aquí en esta triste ocasión,/ a pesar de mis

pesares,/ yo te ofrezco mis cantares/ con mucha resignación". Otros, como Miguel Piñero, Miguel Algarín y Pedro Pietri, utilizaban el idioma mestizo, mezcla de inglés y español, que entendía mejor su público. Estos poetas —junto con Tato Laviera— resultan un ejemplo inigualable de esa simbiosis entre el bardo o rapsoda y su pueblo, entre los temas del poeta y las preocupaciones y circunstancias de la comunidad para la que compone, entre la lengua hablada por el público y la poética.

Más o menos al mismo tiempo, la literatura de la isla estaba reincorporando una oralidad que había sido desechada por una generación —la del 30— empeñada en hacer valer sus reclamos a un hispanismo que se afirmaba en gran parte en la corrección del lenguaje y su fidelidad a las normas generales. Las obras narrativas de Pedro Juan Soto, Emilio Díaz Valcárcel, también algunas de José Luis González y, en ocasiones, las de René Marqués, recogían una oralidad que en la generación posterior se asumió no como recurso expresivo accesorio, sino como la perspectiva central del texto. Hablo, sobre todo, desde luego, del Luis Rafael Sánchez de los cuentos de "En cuerpo de camisa" y de "La guaracha"; de los cuentos de Ana Lydia Vega en "Vírgenes y mártires" y "Encancaranublado" y de los textos de Juan Antonio Ramos sobre Papo Impala.

Aún más allá de tales tangencias —que habría que examinar, desde luego, mucho más a fondo— podríamos aludir también a las metáforas organizadoras de una y otra tradición literaria puertorriqueña, la de acá y la de allá. Juan Gelpí, en "Literatura y paternalismo en Puerto Rico" ha caracterizado la tradición central de la literatura puertorriqueña como paternalista y excluyente, señalando hacia metáforas recurrentes y organizadoras que han prevalecido en la literatura isleña: la enfermedad, por un lado, es decir, la visión del pueblo como conjunto herido, enfermo (concepto naturalista que ha tenido una vigencia prolongada en la Isla) y, por el otro, la imagen de la casa, de la familia a cuya sombra se reúne y restaura lo disperso. Constituyen esas dos metáforas el anverso y el revés de dos movimientos: la ruptura vista como un mal y la unión señalada como un bien. En uno y otro caso son imágenes que indican un talante introvertido, obsesionado con los problemas sociales y que muestran una actitud defensiva y por lo tanto insisten en una reafirmación constante de lo que se cree amenazado: el idioma, las costumbres, la trianera rural y patriarcal de vida, erigiendo entonces al Otro —los Estados Unidos, claramente— en antagonista.

En cierto sentido la literatura puertorriqueña ha estado en pie de guerra perenne, reafirmando los límites sin quebrarlos. Se echan de

menos en ella las grandes visiones panorámicas que superen los estrechos confines culturales insulares, incluso las obras que tomen en cuenta y expresen no una posición trillada sino las complejidades —que no son pocas— de nuestra vida política. Hablo en general, desde luego, porque hay excepciones notables. Sin hacer mucho esfuerzo vienen a la mente casos como el de "En Babia", la novela que mencioné antes, de gran envergadura y de gran alcance temático; "Ardiente suelo, fría estación", que explora una situación especialmente ligada a la circunstancia puertorriqueña pero con amplitud de visión: la del emigrante que vuelve; "Las caricias del tigre", de José Luis González, que rebasa los límites nacionales como también lo hace "Todas las suecas son rubias", de Manuel Abreu Adorno al contraponer la diferente procedencia cultural y sus efectos sobre las relaciones amorosas. A pesar de ésas y muchas otras excepciones, me aventuro a decir que la tónica general de nuestra literatura es una de perspectiva limitada por una especie de deber que se han auto-impuesto los escritores: el de encarnar a su patria o, mejor, el de definirla constantemente mediante la escritura. Al caso viene sin duda, lo expresado por Ana Lydia Vega en su ensayo "Sálvese quien pueda: la censura tiene auto" cuando dice: "De Manuel Alonso para abajo, pasando por las generaciones del 30 y el 50 para continuar con la del 70, la literatura nuestra —esto lo digo sin la menor intención de restar mérito a su calidad— constituye una variación constante sobre el mismo tema obsesivo: la sinfonía de la identidad nacional, con sus dos vertientes melódicas de la lucha anti-imperialista y la lucha de clases. Nuestro subconsciente literario nos dicta tiránicamente el arte poética del 'compromiso histórico'".

Ahora bien, la literatura puertorriqueña en los Estados Unidos parece tener también sus metáforas organizadoras. La imagen de un pueblo desplazado y de un paraíso perdido abundan. (La manera misma de aludir a la emigración como 'diáspora' confirma la intención bíblica, paradigmática, de esa visión). La búsqueda de un lugar común de origen y de una identidad reconocible como propia se encuentran en Piri Thomas, Judith Ortiz Cofer y también en Esmeralda Santiago. La diferencia del puertorriqueño y sus experiencias y costumbres respecto al entorno en que se encuentra es un elemento esencial en "Nilda" de Nicholasa Mohr, en "A Perfect Silence" de Alba Ambert y aun en "Carlito's Way" de Edwin Torres. Abundan las narraciones que podrían caracterizarse como 'bildungsroman' y las memorias en las que no sólo se da testimonio de una expresión individual y familiar, sino que también se construye la identidad personal en oposición a un mundo que resulta no sólo

extraño sino adverso y aun amenazante. Se establece entonces una dialéctica entre el desarrollo de la personalidad, el entorno cultural actual y el del origen (ya sea el origen real porque se haya nacido en Puerto Rico, ya sea éste el lugar originario de la familia o la cepa). Esas nociones de hogar, familia, el paraíso y su pérdida —vistas desde una perspectiva que es a veces justamente contraria a la de la Isla— organizan, hasta cierto punto, esta literatura que adquiere —como la de los puertorriqueños de la isla— un tono personalista y localizado contra el que se expresó Abraham Rodríguez, Jr. fuertemente cuando dijo: "No veo qué utilidad puedan tener esos cuentos acerca de la bendita Diáspora de hace veinte años ni aquéllos sobre la primera vez que vi un copo de nieve. Creo que ya tenemos que seguir adelante. Estamos viendo cómo muchachitos de 14 años se están matando con armas automáticas en el Sur del Bronx y el mismo problema lo tienen en la Isla. Creo que éstas son situaciones importantes y tenemos que encontrar una manera de reflejarlas. ... Esto no tiene que ver en absoluto con la política. Se trata de la dinámica de la escritura, pero desde luego que la política también tiene que ver con eso". (Traducción mía).

Pero a pesar de las similitudes en este sentido, hay en la literatura de los puertorriqueños en los Estados Unidos un gran reconocimiento, un hallazgo, un avance que no se da de la misma manera en la de la isla salvo en contados —aunque muy importantes— casos (y pienso en Luis Palés Matos y en José Luis González). Es, en primer lugar, el reconocimiento de una proyección afroamericana que provee un anclaje en una tradición cultural que es a la vez alterna y propia, diferente de la hispanofilia tradicional y alejada también del llamado "mainstream" americano. Esto lo ha comentado también, con acierto admirable, Juan Flores en varios ensayos del citado libro, "Divided Borders" y en los de "La venganza de Cortijo".

El reconocimiento cabal del escritor puertorriqueño de los Estados Unidos de que tiene una comunidad de cultura y de intereses con el ámbito de lo negro se expresa con fuerza en las obras de Piri Thomas, en parte de la poesía de Sandra María Esteves y en muchos otros, pero sobre todo en la obra de Louis Reyes Rivera, que conscientemente explora —en los ritmos y alusiones de su poesía, en su fondo mismo— una identidad porosa, abierta, a la vez negra y puertorriqueña. Este reconocimiento que ensancha en la escritura la percepción de la base cultural de lo puertorriqueño no es, desde luego, algo nuevo. Identificado desde principios de siglo por Arturo Alfonzo Schomburg, fue el factor que le permitió ser americano

—en su versión negra— sin dejar de ser puertorriqueño. Es lo que expresó inigualablemente Palés Matos y lo que propuso analíticamente José Luis González en "El país de cuatro pisos".

La magnitud de este reconocimiento cultural y sus proyecciones para el futuro de la cultura puertorriqueña en los Estados Unidos, como bien ha visto Juan Flores, constituyen, quizás, el punto neurálgico de la articulación entre el aquí y el allá. Mediante esa articulación se soslaya, efectivamente, tanto la problemática del idioma —inglés o español— como la del lugar: aquí o allá.

Al igual que los ritmos, las actitudes, las entonaciones, las perspectivas de lo negro africano no sólo han sobrevivido, perdurado, animado y transformado las culturas con las que han entrado en contacto estrecho abriéndose a través de ellas nuevos caminos de expresión aun sin que se conservaran las lenguas africanas y aun cuando los africanos se encontraban alejados perennemente de sus lugares de origen y se fundieran dentro de otras culturas, así lo puertorriqueño puede permanecer a través de su paso por el tiempo y el espacio de la cultura anglófona, transformándose sin perder su núcleo particularizante. También puede devolver, tanto a los del aquí isleño como a los del allá continental, una imagen mucho más amplia de nuestra faz donde es aún posible reconocernos sin buscar identidades restrictivas.

Pero hay otra condición de la literatura puertorriqueña en los Estados Unidos que resulta profundamente divergente de la literatura de la Isla y que podría enriquecerla notablemente. Es la consciencia de diferentes tradiciones literarias y la habilidad de no sólo incorporarlas a la propia escritura sino también de innovar las ajenas con tradiciones propias.

La novela de Piri Thomas, *Down These Mean Streets* (1967) está escrita desde una sensibilidad puertorriqueña reconocible en la importancia de los ámbitos familiares, en la religiosidad evidente, pero se inscribe también en una tradición de literatura autobiográfica negra y estadounidense que cobra nuevas fuerzas precisamente en los años sesenta, con obras como *Manchild in the Promised Land*, de Claude Brown (1965) donde se documentan las vidas de los afroamericanos en una comunidad urbana y como *The Autobiography of Malcolm X as Told to Alex Haley* (1964), con su carga de violencia. Esta tradición viene, a su vez, desde mucho antes: de las narraciones de esclavos, tradición ésta que como literatura no tiene equivalente que conozcamos en las letras puertorriqueñas, aunque, efectivamente, la esclavitud fue también una experiencia nuestra.

Las novelas del *ghetto* neoyorquino, a veces llamadas las *ghetto-Rican novels,* han producido varios textos sobresalientes. Uno relativamente reciente, la novela *Spidertown*, de Abraham Rodríguez, Jr. (1993), está ambientado entre jóvenes mayormente puertorriqueños que sirven como soldados de fila para la distribución de las drogas en el South Bronx. Tal ambiente, tan alejado —aparentemente— del mundo convencional y legítimo, resulta ser, paradójicamente, la muestra cabal de una adaptación perfecta (dentro de los canales que tienen a su alcance los personajes) a una sociedad regida por el ansia de lucro, por la competencia, por el consumo desmedido y la codicia de posesiones materiales. Si cambiáramos lugares y nombres y sustituyéramos las drogas por las acciones de Bolsa, la novela podría describir con bastante fidelidad la lucha por el éxito y la preeminencia, el conflicto entre la satisfacción personal y la necesidad de acción continua, el afán de poder de los sectores centrales de la sociedad norteamericana. Abraham Rodríguez nos da aquí, pues, una imagen especular de una adaptación al espíritu de un entorno social que, al llevarse a cabo con los medios y los métodos de los desposeídos, se convierte en un modo de vida ilegal.

Pero además de expandir y darle nuevos contenidos a ciertos géneros, algunos escritores puertorriqueños en los Estados Unidos han "cruzado" de una literatura a otra con un tino tan certero que sólo les puede venir de esa larga costumbre de mestizaje literario que se origina en las letras españolas con las jarchas, que prosigue con la profunda influencia de la espiritualidad árabe en los grandes místicos del Siglo de Oro[13] y con la otra cara de la moneda, la literatura híbrida de los últimos árabes de España. Ese profundo mestizaje literario se muestra en Hispanoamérica en textos como los de Guamán Poma de Ayala en Perú,[14] textos que utilizan y yuxtaponen dos códigos expresivos.

En el Caribe la tendencia se manifiesta no sólo en los ritmos e insistencias onomatopéyicas de la poesía afroantillana sino aún más en las creaciones musicales caribeñas, verdadera fusión de tradiciones melódicas y rítmicas que se interpretan con una variedad de instrumentos de diversa procedencia.[15]

---

[13] Ver Luce López Baralt (1985) *Huellas del Islam en la literatura española.* Madrid: Hiperión y (1985) *San Juan de la Cruz y el Islam.* México: Colegio de México.

[14] Mercedes López Baralt, (1985) *Ícono y conquista. Guamán Pérez de Ayala*. Madrid: Hiperión y (1991) *Iconografía política del Nuevo Mundo.* Río Piedras: Editorial de la UPR.

[15] Ver Gerard Béhague (1983), *La música en América Latina.* Caracas: Monte Ávila Editores, pp. 152-156 y Pedro Malavet Vega (1992), *Historia de la canción*

Ese "cruce" aflora de manera insólita en una novela como *Carlito's Way* (1975), escrita por un juez puertorriqueño del Tribunal Supremo de Nueva York, novela que también fue llevada al cine, con Al Pacino como protagonista. Este texto combina la fórmula de la novela del *ghetto* puertorriqueño con la de *gangsters* o hampones y con la que realza una delincuencia callejera procedente de un lugar y un tiempo muy diferentes: la España del siglo XVI. Fue allí y entonces que se desarrolló la novela picaresca, un tipo curioso de narración se pone en boca de su protagonista a manera de un relato autobiográfico. Aquél suele ser un hombre (casi siempre joven) en las márgenes de la sociedad, cuya vida errante lo pone en contacto con una gran cantidad de sectores de la sociedad establecida, realzando contrastes dramáticos entre ricos y pobres y entre la realidad y las ilusiones colectivas de un país cuyas estrategias mundiales grandiosas contrastaban con las condiciones decadentes de sus ciudades. El pícaro suele ir de amo en amo —como va Carlito de banda en banda de hampones— y pasa, en algunos textos, de una vida licenciosa a la prisión final.

Aparte de los paralelismos sugerentes que podrían hacerse entre dos naciones hegemónicas cuyas directrices conformaron una época, pero cuyas disposiciones económicas hicieron surgir una población flotante de derelictos y desempleados, hay similitudes fascinantes entre obras como *Carlito's Way y El Lazarillo de Tormes*, el *Guzmán de Alfarache* o *El Buscón*. En todas prisma un tono filosófico y desencantado. Son descarnadamente realistas —hasta naturalistas— en su descripción de ambientes. La novela picaresca española provee, pues, un espejo en el que la novela urbana de la Diáspora puertorriqueña se puede reconocer.

De los otros maridajes literarios insólitos surgidos dentro de la literatura puertorriqueña en los Estados Unidos, uno de los más interesantes podría ser el intento de Jack Agüeros de recrear el auto sacramental en el contexto de la vivencia norteamericana actual, enfatizando sus implicaciones morales, aunque el concepto mismo de lo que es o no moral se defina ahora de manera diferente.[16]

Ante la fuerza y originalidad de esta literatura, que es nuestra también, no podemos, no debemos permanecer indiferentes y mucho menos podemos desecharla. No hay cuerpo —ni siquiera

---

popular en Puerto Rico 1493-1898. Ponce, pp 91-126 para un trasfondo del 'mestizaje' musical.

[16] Ver la entrevista con Jack Agüeros incluida en *Puerto Rican Voices in English. A Book of Interviews. (*Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1997).

literario— que no cambie y se desarrolle y se regenere, so pena de anquilosarse. Nuestra literatura es también algo vivo y no debe olvidar, en su horizonte de referencias literarias, a esa variante de gran importancia e impacto: la escritura de los puertorriqueños en los Estados Unidos. De ellos, que han demostrado la fuerza de nuestra cultura cuando está bajo asedio directo, podemos aprender estrategias de sobrevivencia. No hablo sólo, desde luego, de la sobrevivencia literaria.

Carmen Dolores Hernández
El Nuevo Día

DENIAL OF SEXUALITY AND GENDER ROLES IN LESSING'S *THE GRASS IS SINGING*

Meral Çileli

Doris Lessing's first novel *The Grass is Singing* has been accepted as one of the best novels of our time since its publication in 1950. It has been welcomed as the most successful colonial novel since *The Story of an African Farm*, of 1883, by Olive Shreiner. *The Grass is Singing* displays the oppressive structure of the South African society, which imposes its values forcing individuals to yield to the collective at the expense of their individual fulfilment. The novel adopts a case history approach to the divisions of race and class and unfolds the mechanisms of suppression in terms of gender roles according to the norms of patriarchal society resulting in denial of sexuality which in turn leads to disturbance of healthy functioning and disintegration of the individual.

The novel opens with a news clipping paragraph that announces the murder of Mary Turner, the wife of a farmer, by a houseboy who was caught and confessed to the crime. After telling the emotional collapse of the husband, Dick Turner, Lessing displays the whole community's response in the form of silence through the attitude of Charlie Slater, the successful owner of the neighboring farm and the Police Sergeant.

Tony Marston, a newcomer from England, poses questions the collective insistently ignores. Tony Marston believes that to understand the murder: "the important thing ... is to understand the background, the circumstances and the characters of Dick and Mary, the patterns of their lives" (17). As an outsider:

> he wondered how all this had began, where the tragedy had started. For he clung obstinately to the belief, in spite of Slater and the Sergeant, that the causes of the murder must be looked for a long way back and that it was they, which were important. What sort of woman had Mary Turner been before she came to this farm and had been driven slowly off balance by heat, loneliness and poverty. (24-25)

Along with these questions Tony Marston puts foward, the narrator notes the reactions of the newspaper readers, to the account of Mary Turner's murder, the woman "who got herself killed."

> People all over the country must have glanced at the paragraph with its sensational heading and felt a spurt of anger mingled with what was almost satisfaction as if some belief had been confirmed, as if something had happened which could only have been expected. When natives steal, murder or rape, that is the feeling white people have. And then they turned the page to something else. (1)

The narrator also reports that the Turner murder was not discussed among the whites of the country, although normally "people would have been positively grateful for something to talk about" (2).

> To an outsider it would seem perhaps as if the energetic Charlie Slater had traveled from farm to farm over the district telling people to keep quiet, but that was something that would have never occurred to him. The steps he took, (and he made not one mistake) were taken apparently instinctively and without conscious planning. The most interesting thing about the whole affair was the silent, unconscious agreement. Everyone behaved like a flock of birds who communicate—or it seems—by means of a kind of telepathy. (2)

The narrator clearly demonstrates the enslavement of the individual by the will of an impersonal cultural demand and Tony Marston is shocked that the Sergeant and Charlie Slater have no intention of learning the facts concerning the murder and that they block the presentation of evidence:

> It wasn't a formal occasion this, Tony clung to the thought. There was a court case to come yet which would be properly conducted.
>
> "The case will be a matter of form of course," said the Sergeant as if thinking aloud. (20)

As Connel asserts in his book *Gender and Power*, Charlie Slater, the successful farmer and the police Sergeant, as agents of social order posses the ability to impose a definition of the situation, to set the limits in which events are understood and issues discussed; to formulate ideas and define morality, in short, assert hegemony as an essential part of social power (107).

Lessing switches away from the collective view of chapter one and begins a chronological account of Mary's life in the line of the questions posed in chapter one. Mary, as a representative of one of the epigraphs of the novel which says "It is by the failures and misfits of a civilization that one can best judge its weaknesses," is introduced to the reader as a type and the reader is invited to consider the individual and the society together. Lessing, who is sensitive to

the "tyranny of the family", unfolds the structure of Mary's family since "in no other institution are relationships so extended in time, so intensive in contact and so dense in their interweaving of economics, emotion, power and resistance" (Connel 121), and in more ways than one the family can be a trap. The structural reproduction of society, the interlocking of socio-economic structure with the society's attitude toward gender roles and sexuality take place in the first four or five years in the family. The family becomes a factory in which the state's structure and ideology are molded. Internalization of cultural norms of gender roles works through in the dynamics of parenting and the mother, due to child rearing practices, is more active in transferring sex-role behavior made up of performances and attitudes that coincide with cultural stereotypes of masculinity and femininity.

In Mary's case, identification with her mother refers to internalization of her personality characteristics along with unconscious reactions similar to her mother's. Mary's identification with her mother results in poor identification with the typical female sex-role generally because the parent Mary is identified with, is herself poorly identified with the typical gender role. The dynamics of the family Mary comes from not only makes it impossible for her to achieve an autonomous female identity but also furnishes her with the problems of basic identification with the mother in terms of sex-role identity in the resolution of Oedipal conflict. The narrator tells us that the things were poisoned for her from the start. Her mother, "a tall scrawny woman with angry unhealthy brilliant eyes ... made a confidante of Mary early. She used to cry over her sewing while Mary comforted her miserably, longing to get away, but feeling important too, and hating her father" (30).

Everything the child learns and thinks about the parent's sexual life carries importance for the resolution of the Oedipal conflict as the narrator informs us "... she [Mary] throughout her life feels a profound distaste for sex ... there had been little privacy in her home and there were things she did not care to remember, she had taken care to forget them years ago" (38). Since the quantity of excitement is beyond the child's capacity to handle, the witnessing of parents' sexuality is experienced as traumatically painful and arguments between parents are often equated with sexual scenes and thus create a sadistic idea of sexuality and as the narrator tells us: Her mother and father fought over bills twelve times a year ... her mother remarked drily ... she had only three mouths to fill" (31), not seven like Mrs Newman who had seven children.

> It was a long time before Mary saw the connection between these phrases, then there was only one mouth to feed her own for ... her brother and sister both died of dysentery ... and the loss was more than compensated by the happiness of living in a house where there were suddenly no quarrels. (32)

Mary not only internalizes a negative image of femininity but also a sexual aversion from her mother which she associates with children who are extra mouths to feed.

As Wilhelm Reich asserts in *The Invasion of Compulsory Sex-Morality*, authoritarian society's fight against the sexuality of children and the consequent struggle of one's ego takes place within the framework of the family. The tie to the mother is the basis of all family ties which forms the barricade to sexuality, since sexual desires naturally urge a person to enter into all kinds of relations with the world, to enter into close contact with it in a vast variety of forms. When they are suppressed they have but one possibility to vent themselves within the narrow framework of the family, which leads to an indissoluble sexual fixation and to an incapacity to enter into other relationships (99-105).

The sexual misery Mary inherits from her family is closely related to the economic and social form of the family, however Mary has none of the analytic perspectives necessary for a realistic evaluation of her family background as well as her father who "... called visiting officials 'sir', and shouted at the natives under him; he was on railway working as a pumpman" (31). Mary unconsciously uses a basic type of repression about the conditions of her family in which the details, instead of being forgotten, are deprived of their affective cathexis so that what remains in consciousness is nothing but its content which is perfectly colorless and is judged to be unimportant:

> It had never occurred to her that her father, too, might have suffered "About what" she would have retorted, had anyone suggested it. He is a man isn't he? "He can do as he likes." She had inherited an arid feminism, from her mother which had no meaning in her own life at all. (33)

In Connel's terms "hegemonic masculinity" and "emphasized femininity" (167) do not correspond at all closely to the actual personalities of the members of Mary's family, however, she has assimilated the cultural attributes of gender roles which institutionalize men's dominance over women, and this hegemony prevents alternatives from gaining cultural definition and recognition. What most women support is not necessarily what they are. The maintenance of emphasized femininity is practice that prevents other models from gaining cultural articulation and recognition in the society. The

narrator tells us the alternative form of existence for Mary, had she remained single:

> If she had been left alone she would have gone on, in her own way, enjoying herself thoroughly, until people found one day that she had turned imperceptibly into one of those women who have become old without having been middle aged: a little withered, a little acid, hard as nails, sentimentally kind hearted, and addicted to religion or small dogs. (37)

Mary, having managed to repress her past and her feeling related to her personal history, has a perfectly pleasant life as an efficient secretary, well arranged to avoid the personal intimacy that is so distasteful to her. She prefers being treated "like a good pal ... with none of this silly sex business" (36), when she dates. However, dressing like a young girl at the age of thirty and not getting married is not tolerated in the society Mary lives because "she was not playing her part" (36). The economic and sex-economic rules of the patriarchal society is at work and femininity is organized as an adaptation to men's world and Mary is forced into marriage, into the narrow confines of traditional patterns of gender-role relationships and as the narrator notes:

> But all women become conscious, sooner or later, of that impalpable, but still strong pressure to get married, and Mary, who was not at all susceptible to atmosphere, or the things people imply, was brought face to face with it suddenly, and most unpleasantly. (39)

Her life as an efficient secretary is destroyed when she overhears some of her friends criticizing her childish clothes and laughing because sexuality seems so far from her. "She just isn't like that; isn't like that at all. Something missing somewhere" (39). This is almost the first time she sees herself through the eyes of others and since she has no objective view of herself, she is shocked by the gossip she overhears about herself because:

> At the age of thirty ... [she] knew so little about herself that she was thrown completely off her balance because some gossiping women had said she ought to get married ... she was hollow inside, empty, and into this emptiness would sweep from nowhere a vast panic as if there were nothing in the world she could grasp hold off. (43-44)

Mary, becoming oversensitive to what others are thinking, and out of a desperate need for a husband, marries Dick Turner who, also lacking self knowledge, looks for a wife because "it was essential for him to love somebody," and in the society Mary lives a woman has identity if she is attractive enough to obtain a man and thus a home, so Mary acquires a surname only after she marries Dick Turner. Mary, in her denial of sexuality, approaches sexuality in

marriage in the same detached manner, and on her wedding night she thinks:

> It was not so bad ... not so bad as that. It meant nothing to her, nothing at all. Expecting outrage and imposition, she was relived to find she felt nothing. She was able maternally to bestow the gift of herself on this humble stranger and remain untouched. Women have an extraordinary ability to withdraw from the sexual relationship to immunize themselves against it in such a way that their men can be left feeling let down and insulted without having anything tangible to complain of. Mary did not have to learn this, because it was natural in her, and because she had expected nothing in the first place. (57)

However, marriage disturbs the pseudo-balance Mary has created because it functions as a sexual stimulus which makes it more difficult for her to repress her instinctual demands and at the same time intercourse increases the aversion she has built to maintain her denial of sexuality. Other secondary mechanisms of defense come into being when repression threatens to lose efficacy because Mary is no longer in the environment of the office routine where "things happen safely one after another in pattern" (32) and which helped her to keep her instinctual demands under control. She tries to repress her drives in the same manner and works hard but; "A month after she had arrived she walked through the house and saw there was nothing more to be done." ... She was restless, so restless she did not know what to do with herself (64-66).

The danger of a breaking through of the repressed impulses and the necessity to develop new and more effective means of defense, an alternation in the earlier equilibrium between warded off impulses and warding off forces becomes inevitable. Mary finds herself in the state of being flooded with unmastered excitation which is subjectively felt as being very painful and which leads to stages of rage rooted in situations of frustration, because the insatiable vegetative yearning produced by sexual inhibition and banned from natural gratification is accessible to muscular sadistic discharges.

The natives who work in her house one after another become the targets of her rage. Even the boy who does not look at her face out of the native code of politeness enrages her and as the narrator tells us: "She felt she would like to pick up a plate and throw it in his face as to make it human and expressive with pain" (73).

Along with stages of rage to maintain her denial of sexuality, Mary tries to "spit off" the emotions and excitations which her ego tries to ward off and perceives the offensive impulses in the native boys who work in her house:

> ... all the time at the back of her mind was the thought that the new servant was alone in the house and probably getting up to all sorts of mischief. He was certainly stealing, while her back was turned; he might be handling her clothes, looking through her personal things! (74)

She projects much of her unconscious unto the natives in her environment and then reacts to this projection in an attempt to deal with an inner painful and unacceptable feeling, her sexuality. Mary prefers to feel dangers as threats from without rather than from within, because it is easier to set in motion certain mechanisms of projection against overtly intense stimuli than acknowledging instinctual drives. Mary's use of projection in an attempt to negate her sexuality and her hatred of being female, is manifested most vividly in her hatred of the native women:

> If she disliked native men, she loathed the women. She could not bear to see them sitting there on the grass, their legs tucked up under them in that traditional timeless pose ... peaceful, uncaring ... Above all she hated the way they suckled their babies with their breasts hanging down for everyone to see, there was something in their calm satisfied maternity that made her blood boil. (105)

Mary's rage against the natives represents discharges of excitations which enable her to experience a feeling of victory and satisfaction which in turn brings an increase in the instinctual demands instead of diminishing them and she becomes more rigid, punitive and tyrannical. As the narrator tells us, she starts viewing all her relationships as a battle of wills. Even her relationship to the farm is viewed as a battle of wills by her. She likes "the sensation of pitting her will against the farm" (125). When she whips Moses, while working on the farm, though frightened of his look she feels "a satisfaction that she had in this battle of wills," and "she felt as if she had won a battle, it was a victory over these natives, over herself and her repugnance of them over Dick and his slow foolish shiftlessness" (137).

The fear Mary feels after whipping Moses marks a turning point in her struggle in denial of sexuality. Mary, who has introjected the cultural attributes of male dominance, feels attracted to Moses who represents the masculine power that could allow him to dominate her physically:

> She was unable to treat this boy as she had treated all the others, for always at the back of her mind was the moment of fear she had known just after she had hit him and thought he would attack her. (163-164)

Her loss of self-control starts with her seeing him half naked washing himself from a tin basin in the back yard:

> She was arrested by the sight of the native under the trees a few yards off. He was rubbing his thick neck with soap and the white lather was startlingly white against the black skin. (165)

Afterwards, although the memory of "that thick black neck with the lather frothing whitely on it, the powerful back stooping over the bucket, was like a goad to her" (166). Mary again represses the sexual element of the encounter and believes that her intrusion on the native's privacy was unintentional: "She had forgotten it was his time to wash" (165), and once more projects her sexual interest and the resulting shame felt as anger unto the native for resenting her interest in him.

> She was furious that perhaps he believed she was there on purpose, this thought was of course not conscious, it would be too much presumption, such unspeakable cheek for him to imagine such a thing, that she would not allow it to enter her mind, but the attitude of his still body as he watched her across the bushes between them, the expression on his face, filled her with anger. She felt the same impulse that had, once made her bring down the lash across his face. (166)

The sexual implications of the encounter is expressed vividly by the narrator: "She felt as if she had put her hand on a snake" (166). She was shaking, the blood throbbed in her ears, her mouth was dry" (167).

Mary no longer has the energy to repress her instinctual desires; her longing to be dominated by a strong male as the society introjected in her and her wish to disprove that she is asexual, "She just isn't like that" (39), all intensify the sexual attraction she feels for Moses and she gradually loses her dominance over him:

> There was a new relation between them, for she felt helplessly in his power, and: She was being forced into contact and she never ceased to be aware of him. She realized daily that there was something in it that was dangerous, but what it was she was unable to define. (179-181)

The danger she feels is the danger of pent-up sexual urges she has denied all her life and she is no longer able to keep them under control since she is attracted to and is obsessed with Moses: "... the knowledge of that man alone in the house with her lay like a weight at the back of her mind ... as a soft aching blank" (171-172) and when he wants to leave the farm she bursts into tears and begs him to stay. Moses not only triggers the release of repressed violent

emotions, but also offers Mary for the first time the opportunity to act out the traditional female role and she regresses to the weeping child helpless and dependent on Moses completely till "she felt helplessly in his power" (179).

Frustrations in the realm of adult sexuality increase the intensity of sexual longings and reactivate childhood conflicts. Mary's conflicts in the realm of sexuality and her attraction to the dark strong male with whom she cannot have the sexual relationship she longs for—since the natural relationship of dominant man and submissive woman becomes unacceptable when the man is black and the woman white, in the society Mary lives—all reactivate her infantile Oedipal conflicts and these are manifested in the dreams she has.

When Dick has another attack of malaria, Moses insists on staying overnight so that Mary may sleep. That night, conscious of the proximity of Moses —"he was there, just through the thin wall, so close if it had not been there, his back would have been six inches from her face! Vividly she pictured the broad muscular back and shuddered" (187)— Mary dreams her father and the native joined as a source of fear and attraction; "on each occasion in her dream he had stood over her powerful and commanding, yet forcing her into a position where she had to touch him" (181). Earlier she had seen him "firm and kind like a father commanding her" (176).

Mary's conflicts in the realm of sexuality manifested in dreams as regressions to infantile sexuality, to orally fixated stage, express her genital Oedipal wishes in the fantasies of fellatio and in a dream, her father, in play, forces her to perform fellatio.

In the next dream Dick is dead. Mary feels relieved, happy and guilty and the merging of the native and her father becomes explicit.

> He approached her slowly, obscene and powerful and it was not only he, but her father who was threatening her. They advanced together one person and she could smell, not the native smell, but the unwashed smell of her father. It filled the room musty like animals and her knees went liquid ... It was the voice of the African she heard. He was comforting her because of Dick's death, consoling her protectively; but at the same time it was her father menacing and horrible who touched her in desire. (192)

When Tony Manston sees Moses buttoning Mary's dress, she triumphantly shouts: "They said I was not like that... not like that..." (122). She has at last disproved the judgement that she is asexual. However, Tony's observing Moses dressing Mary leads to Moses's dismissal and Mary's planned departure which create the sense of rejection and betrayal Moses feels and leads to subsequent murder.

Mary, aware of the social taboo against her relationship with Moses, blames Tony: "You sent him away! He'll never come back! It was all right till you came" (223).

Mary, who had always turned for outside help to save her from herself, to help her master her instinctual drives, again hopes a young man. Tony Marston will save her from herself, from her relationship with Moses, but while "searching through the past" (237) in trying to understand the reasons behind her disintegration, Mary realizes that she had always depended on outside help for her problems, transferring responsibly to others to save her from herself, from her instinctual demands and to fill the gap created in her psyche by denial of sexuality.

> She wondered searchingly through her past. Yes, long, long ago, she had turned towards another young man, a young man from a farm, when she was in trouble and had not known what to do. It had seemed to her that she would be saved from herself by marrying him. (237)

Mary realizes she had taken the wrong course and had indulged in outward action at the expense of the forces within herself:

"She would walk out her road alone, she thought. That was the lesson she had to learn (238). She is at last able to locate her problems: "I've always been ill, ever since I can remember. I'm ill *here*" (241). However, she lacks the ability to face and accept her inner self as a whole and is overcome by fear and torment at her inability to understand the roots of her problems, "Mary Turner as she had been, that foolish girl travelling unknowingly to this end. I don't understand, she said again. I understand nothing" (230). Mary arrives at the end of her journey conscious of her conflict but engulfed by fear and torment of the unknown forces she has denied all her life and realizes that "there was no salvation unless she would have to go throught with it" (237). "And then the bush avenged itself; that was her last thought" (243).

In this first novel Doris Lessing suggests that the world within us has its own dynamics and shows that it is Mary's inability to face and accept her inner self, her sexuality that should have been at the core of her existence, that drives her to her tragic end. Mary, incapable of thinking about and reflecting on experience, while trying to respond to events through social requirements, never acquires a mind that is free since denial of sexuality leads to severe psychological conflicts that inhibit rational thinking. However *The Grass is Singing* looks ahead to other novels; it contains within itself the ideas explored fully in the *Martha Quest* series and in *The Golden Notebook* with

protagonists all of whom face the challenge of facing the inner self and achieve a certain degree of "freedom" with varying degrees of success with persistent self-examination, analysis and a profound concern with female sexuality.

Meral Çileli
Middle East Technical University
Ankara, Turkey

References

Counel, R.W. (1987) *Gender & Power*. Calf. Stanford Univ. Press.

Lessing, Doris. (1978) *The Grass is Singing*. U.S.A. Plume Books.

Reich, William. (1975) *The Invasion of Compulsory Sex-Morality*. Great Britain, Penguin Books.

PARODY, INTERTEXTUALITY AND LITERARY HISTORY IN REINALDO ARENAS' *LA LOMA DEL ÁNGEL*

Vivian Nun-Halloran

Through parody and intertextuality, Reinaldo Arenas addresses the history of *literary* depictions of slavery in the Caribbean in *La loma del ángel* rather than challenging the adequacy of the historical record.[1] Arenas takes the subtitle of what is generally considered as "the most important novel written in nineteenth-century Cuba," Cirilo Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés*, as the title of his own text; by invoking the work of his predecessor, Arenas writes himself into the very literary tradition he seeks to revise.[2] By acknowledging his debt to Villaverde as a nineteenth century forefather, Arenas constructs a literary genealogy and also suggests the context in which the two novels should be read. *La loma del ángel* plays with the echoes that result from such intertextuality to highlight the profound artificiality of any contemporary work of fiction that seeks to speak for formerly marginalized groups such as slaves and their descendants who were left out of the pages of "official" historiography. Although Arenas finds inspiration in previous novels about slavery, in his postmodern text, the 'peculiar institution' serves more as a literary trope than as a historical reality.

By providing a literary and historical context in which to understand *La loma del ángel*, Arenas's allusion to Villaverde's work constitutes a brief Caribbean literary history. Linda Hutcheon suggests in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, that literary history as it is currently practiced, "is not an attempt to preserve and transmit a canon or a tradition of thought; it bears a problematic and questioning relation

---

1 Reinaldo Arenas, *La loma del ángel* (Barcelona: Dador, 1987).

2 William Luis, *Literary Bond: Slavery in Cuban Narrative* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1990). 100.

to both history and literary criticism."[3] Hutcheon argues that after French thinker Michel Foucault "we are no longer to deal, therefore, with either 'tradition' or 'the individual talent,' as Eliot would have us do" (97). While Foucault's criticism of discourses and master narratives may have changed the nature of literary history in countries with an already established literary tradition and a canon of literary works, the Caribbean islands for the most part lack such an established and recognized body of literary works they can legitimately call their own. Brian McHale recuperates Eliot for postmodernism by seeing his influence in the work of French structuralists. In *Postmodernist Fiction*, he reads Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," as allowing for an intertextual zone or space.

> It has become commonplace since Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," and even more so since French structuralists' work on intertextuality, to picture literature as a field, or better, a network whose nodes are the actual texts of literature. By this account, an intertextual space is constituted whenever we recognize the relations among two or more texts, or between specific texts and larger categories such as genre, school, period.[4]

La loma del ángel constitutes just such a "network" of literary texts by invoking the work of its literary predecessor instead of merely alluding to or reproducing specific historical events. I read the intertextual space created by this novel as a commentary upon and recognition of a tradition of Caribbean literature. Although it acknowledges its place within this tradition, Arenas clearly views himself as an individual talent with stature enough to challenge the assumptions implicit in the work of his predecessors. *La loma del ángel* constitutes Arenas's personal revision of the tradition; rather than parodying Cuba's most famous abolitionist novel *Cecilia Valdés, o la loma del ángel*, Arenas undertakes the task of writing *Cecilia Valdés* as he would have written it himself. He addresses the reader directly in the prologue: "Así pues no presento al lector la novela que escribió Cirilo Villaverde (lo cual obviamente es innecesario), sino aquella que yo hubiese escrito en su lugar." This postmodern authorial claim recalls Borges's Pierre Menard, who wrote *Don Quijote* word for word, a feat all the more remarkable, the narrator claims, precisely because Menard was writing so much later than Cervantes. Where Borges insists on the exact correspondence between an original text

---

[3] Linda Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988). 91.

[4] Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1987). 56-57.

and its later reproduction, Arenas delights in drawing a distinction between his work and Villaverde's.

Although his novel is considerably shorter than its nineteenth century namesake, Arenas claims that *La loma del ángel is* not a summary of *Cecilia Valdés.* He acknowledges being influenced by "ciertas ideas generales, ciertas anécdotas, ciertas metáforas, dando luego rienda suelta a la imaginación." Thus, Arenas finds in Villaverde's novel the inspiration for his own work of fiction. He does not deny that *La loma del ángel* parodies *Cecilia Valdés* even though Arenas insists in this preface that his novel is an imaginative work in its own right and not merely a criticism of Villaverde's text.

> En cuanto a la literatura como escritura o parodia, es una actividad tan antigua que se remonta casi al nacimiento de la propia literatura (o por lo menos al nacimiento de su resplandor). Baste decir que eso fue lo que hicieron Esquilo, Sófocles y Eurípides en la antigüedad y luego Shakespeare y Racine, para sólo mencionar a los autores más ilustres de todos los tiempos. La ostentación de tramas originales —ya lo dijo brillantemente Jorge Luis Borges— es una falacia reciente. Así lo comprendieron Alfonso Reyes con su Ifigenia cruel, Virgilio Piñera con su Electra Garrigó y hasta Mario Vargas Llosa en La guerra del fin del mundo.
>
> De manera que con antecedentes tan ilustres ni aun una torpeza tan desmesurada como la mía necesita mayor justificación (10).

In his defense of parody as legitimate literary genre, Arenas constructs a genealogy of "illustrious antecedents" for himself and his work that juxtaposes "the most illustrious authors of all time," all western icons, with four Latin American writers of varying renown: the internationally acclaimed Borges and Vargas Llosa, and the lesser known Alfonso Reyes and Virgilio Piñera. Unlike Reyes and Piñera, however, whose work parodies the ancient Greeks, Reinaldo Arenas set his sights on a Cuban icon.

Whereas Villaverde's novel addresses and portrays slavery as a contemporary evil, *La loma del ángel* depicts both slavery and the discourse of abolition as literary constructs and criticizes the way writers impose their own sensibilities upon the subject matter of their text. Arenas "signals" the difference between his work and Villaverde's by downplaying most of the abolitionist didacticism while also exaggerating what particularly interests him, the incestuous relationships at all levels of society. Just as in the preface to his novel Arenas argues that Western writers' use of parody has influenced Latin American and Caribbean literature, J. Michael Dash contends that parody is a popular genre in Caribbean letters and argues that:

> This parodic vein in Caribbean writing ... calls language and the literary act into question and reduces everything to matter. This view of the world as absolutely material, absolutely carnal, undercuts any idealistic dualism separating the literary from the real, consciousness from matter, mind from body. It is not surprising that this tradition should result in a rejuvenation of language, making it more immediate and sensory.[5]

La loma del ángel's parody makes *language* "more immediate and sensory," but it also renders *narrative* more abstract. The more language describes "carnal" or "material" events in these novels, the more fantastic the narrative becomes, excluding any reference to the world (be it novelistic or extradiegetic) at large. Thus, *La loma del ángel* "call[s] the literary act into question" as a matter of form; Arenas's novel is primarily a literary exercise in metafiction.

Historiographic Metafiction

Due to its emphasis on intertextuality and its reexamination of the past genres like abolitionist novels and novels about slavery, *La loma del ángel* can best be described as "historiographic metafiction," a genre Linda Hutcheon outlines in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*:

> In most of the critical work on postmodernism, it is narrative—be it in literature, history, or theory—that has usually been the major focus of attention. Historiographic metafiction incorporates all three of these domains: that is, its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (historiographic metafiction) is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past (5).

Rather than criticizing historiography for promoting some ideologies while discounting or effacing those of more marginal groups, *La loma del ángel* emphasizes its own status as a literary construct by including overtly metafictive components. *La loma del ángel* challenges the characterization of slaves in both recent and nineteenth century abolitionist novels.

Hutcheon draws a parallel between fiction and the writing of history, claiming that "The intertextual parody of historiographic metafiction enacts, in a way, the views of certain contemporary historiographers: it offers a sense of the presence of the past, but a past that can be known only from its texts, its traces—be they literary or

---

[5] J. Michael Dash, *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1998).

historical" (125). Although she discounts Eliot's influence after Foucault, Hutcheon very much echoes "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in her insistence of the "presence of the past," which the poet calls "the historical sense." However, although the past is present in *La loma del ángel* through its references to earlier texts, the historical past of slavery to which the originals refer is not really the novel's concern. The novel presents an anachronistic world view: Arenas openly imposes a late twentieth century perspective onto a purportedly historical tale. Hutcheon argues that "what postmodernism does is to contest the very possibility of our ever being able to *know* the 'ultimate objects' of the past" and it is because Arenas is profoundly aware of his inability to empathize with the lot of slaves one hundred years after their emancipation that he does not attempt a realistic narrative.

Arenas deploys a narrative strategy of continuous interruption in this novel. His brief note "sobre la obra" is the first of many direct appeals to the reader; it becomes particularly important" because *La loma del ángel* features a character named Reinaldo Arenas who both is and is not the implied author of the text as well as the fictional counterparts of earlier Cuban writers on the slavery theme, such as Lydia Carrera and even Cirilo Villaverde himself. McHale uses Umberto Eco's concept of "transworld identity" to describe the movement "between characters in their projected worlds and real-world historical figures."[6] Arenas deploys this device repeatedly in *La loma del ángel* by including other "borrowed" historical figures such as Cirilo Villaverde, the author of *Cecilia Valdés,* and the painter Goya, to name a few.[7] At other times, characters comment on their status within the novel as a fictional text. Nemesia Pimienta, the lovelorn black female companion of the heroine, Cecilia Valdés, is a case in point. Since she is a minor character whose woes occupy a relatively small portion of the narration, the third person omniscient narrator reveals Nemesia's thoughts about her dependence on the author:

> Y en cuanto a su discurso (su queja) de un momento a otro tendría que ponerle fin, pues ni al autor de la novela en la cual era ella una insignificante pieza le interesaba su tragedia.

---

[6] McHale 16. Umberto Eco elaborates this concept in "Lector in Fabula: Pragmatic Strategy in a Metanarrative Text," *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington and London: Indiana UP, 1979). 200-266.

[7] See William Luis, "Present and Future Antislavery Narratives: Reinaldo Arenas's *Graveyard of the Angels"* in *Literary Bondage* for a more detailed discussion of the many instances of "transworld identity" or intertextual borrowing of characters or historical figures in Arenas' novel.

> Más bien Nemesia Pimienta le era indiferente y (como el resto) sólo la utilizaba. Ni siquiera un amor como el suyo, tan vasto y desesperado como su propia vida, ocupaban un lugar (aunque fuese pequeño) en la pretenciosa serie de capítulos titulados precisamente Del Amor que el susodicho escritor había redactado. Y a pesar de ello, su amor, protestaba Nemesia, era mucho más grande que el de todos los demás personajes reunidos. ¡Muchísimo más! ... Pero ya ella veía cómo el desalmado autor de la obra se le acercaba amenazante. No, no podía ni siquiera agregar una palabra más; a nadie le podría seguir contando su tragedia, su amor, su desamor. No sería ni siquiera un grito al final de un capítulo. Nada. De un momento a otro le taparían la boca y los demás ni cuenta se darían de que ella había sido vilmente amordazada, liquidada. Y toda su pasión, todo su furor, toda su ternura habrán quedado en ... (50).

I pause on this long passage because of its ambiguity; Nemesia's complaint against the "desalmado autor de la obra" could conceivably refer *either* to Villaverde or to Arenas, or even to both of them simultaneously. Since this segment is in the third person, it could be read as Arenas' condemnation of Villaverde's treatment of his minor characters. Then again, it could be Arenas' criticism of his own style, or mere narrative play. Whatever the referent, the "author" becomes a sinister presence within his own text when Nemesia compares the act of narration to physical violence, especially given the context of slavery.

By equating the white male writer with the white slave master, Arenas criticizes not only the cruel mistreatment of the slaves that took place in Cuba during the nineteenth century, but also the patronizing abolitionist rhetoric that sought to correct this injustice. Villaverde is as guilty of not treating his black subjects fairly, in the narrator's view, as the Spaniards were for continuing to safeguard the prosperity of the slave economy. Although admittedly a rewriting of a nineteenth century novel, *La loma del ángel* stands on its own as an independent text reflecting the ideologies of the time of its production and not attempting to recreate the past in any serious way. Thus, I take issue with William Luis's claim in *Literary Bondage*: *Slavery in Cuban Narrative* that:

> Following *Cecilia Valdés, Graveyard of the Angels* describes life in nineteenth-century Cuba and reproduces characters and scenes which have become familiar in Villaverde's novel. In so doing, he reaffirms Villaverde's position regarding the theme of slavery and joins him in denouncing a system of oppression which excludes blacks from the mainstream of society (240).

La loma del ángel does not "describe" but rather parody "life in nineteenth-century Cuba." For Arenas to join Villaverde in denouncing slavery would be anachronistic. Nemesia's chapter illustrates the

intrusion of contemporary attitudes and mores into what claims to be a fictional historical narrative; it is neither a denouncement of racial discrimination nor a criticism of slavery. Instead, Arenas's portrayal of the all-controlling author could be read as a commentary on Cuba's tradition of repressive government, especially since both Cirilo Villaverde and Arenas himself had to flee the island to escape political persecution.

Minor characters are not the only ones at the mercy of the implied author in this novel. Cirilo Villaverde, the author of *Cecilia Valdés*, shows up as a character in an eponymous chapter. Unlike poor Nemesia, who succumbs to the power of the implied author, the matriarch doña Rosa runs Villaverde out of town, where he had been teaching local children how to read since he believed there was a lack of Cuban readers for his work and attributed this fact to the low rate of literacy on the island. Through a clever use of dialogue, the implied author leaves it up to the reader to decide if Villaverde lives or dies.

> —Me pregunto —dijo entonces doña Rosa— si al fin habrá muerto ese imbécil [Cirilo Villaverde].
>
> —¡Ah! —respondió don Cándido tomando galantemente una de las regordetas manos de su esposa—. Eso queda para el curioso lector... (124)

Thus, Arenas reverses the power dynamics of the earlier instance of metafiction. Here, the reader is in a position to act violently by killing off the author in his or her imagination, whereas in Nemesia's chapter, she rages against the implied author's attempt to forcibly silence her.

By calling the authorial position into question in *La loma del ángel*, Arenas emphasizes his double role as both a reader of the antislavery works of the past and a writer defined by the trends of his day, namely, postmodernism. Instead of refusing to judge any one reading of a text above another, the overtly explicit instances of metafiction in this novel call attention to the fact that *La loma del ángel is* itself a reading of and commentary upon Villaverde's text. The narrator therefore emerges as a figure closer to the reader than to the two implied authors in the novel—Arenas and Villaverde.

Slavery

Reinaldo Arenas's *La loma del ángel* parodies the genres of abolitionist novels as well as traditional historical novels about

slavery. Although it briefly alludes to the Middle Passage, the novel does not recreate any specific historical event. By purposefully drawing slave characters that do not rise above the status of types, Arenas criticizes the racist and dehumanizing rhetoric that the European powers used to justify their involvement in the slave trade. *La loma del ángel* avoids describing life in bondage with any degree of verisimilitude. Rather than creating yet another sympathetic or heroic slave character, Arenas readily admits his inability to imagine what it must have been like to live and work as a slave in the Caribbean.

Even when discussing slavery and presenting slave characters, Arenas insists on the textual nature of our knowledge of the past. In the nineteenth century, slavery itself was hotly debated and discussed through competing discourses: both abolitionist or antislavery novels, such as *Cecilia Valdés*, as well as pro-slavery tracts sought to sway public opinion. By parodying this text through stereotypical or widely exaggerated descriptions of slaves and of life in bondage, *La loma del ángel* pokes fun at the ways both abolitionists and slave owners manipulated language to fit their own particular agenda. Since the discourse of slavery did not consider slaves to be human beings, Arenas's caricatures of slaves imply that realistic or verisimilar characters in contemporary historical novels about slavery are an anachronistic conceit which reflects only current attitudes about self-determination and fractured subjectivity as well as our interpretation of slave narratives. Abolitionist novels, according to this logic, impose their notions of either white subjectivity, most evident in the preference for octaroon damsels in distress, or their stereotypes of noble savages, as in the slaves descended from African kings, upon the slave characters so as to elicit the greatest possible sympathy for bondspeople and condemnation of the system of slavery.

Absent from this consideration, of course, is a parody of slaves' own representation of their experiences. Unlike was the case in the United States and even in some of the Anglophone islands, the Hispanophone Caribbean produced only one slave narrative, Juan Francisco Manzano's *Autobiografía de un esclavo*; it was first published in its English translation in Great Britain.[8] In his reading of American slave narratives, Leonard Cassuto points to the paradox facing slave narrators as they write about their experiences: having achieved their freedom and wishing to persuade others of the evils of

[8] Juan Francisco Manzano, *Autobiografía de un esclavo*, ed. Ivan A. Schulman, trans. Evelyn Picon Garfield (1840; Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1996).

slavery, they must write about something their audience can't imagine—being treated as things. In *The Inhuman Race*, Cassuto explains how the slave narrators constructed their discourse of complete disenfranchisement.

> it might be possible to describe one's own objectification from memory, but the experience has to be retrospective, for to be objectified in one's own mind would necessarily mean losing one's own consciousness. By subjecting themselves to objectification within their narratives, slave narrators use rhetorical artifice to make their readers feel what they cannot say.[9]

The paradox Cassuto discusses comes about because slaves wrote their narratives only after they secured their own freedom while they were still living in bondage. In writing about their past experiences, the slave narrators also impose their current cultural identity as people—which was only acknowledged to any degree in the North—upon their previous life as slaves. These narrators also speak *for* others who are still slaves and therefore are treated like objects. If even slave narratives have to reconstruct the experience of slavery in retrospect, then any attempt to assign or imagine a complex subjectivity to slave characters in fiction is equally artificial.

Arenas confronts the perceived lack of interest on the part of the reading audience in the genre of antislavery or abolitionist literature early in their texts. He assures the reader that although *Cecilia Valdés* is considered one of the best examples of abolitionist literature it, and presumably his own revision, "en realidad es mucho más que eso" ["it is really much more than that"] (9). The parody of this genre works in three different levels in *La loma del ángel*: in the references to the Middle Passage, in the references to punishment and in the rhetorical strategies for dehumanizing the slaves. Arenas's novel handles the first of these levels by mentioning the Middle Passage not from the point of view of the slaves who went through it, but rather from the perspective of the speculators whose money made the journeys possible after the British had outlawed the slave trade. Cándido Gamboa, the father of both Cecilia Valdés and her lover, Leonardo, complains about having to bribe Spanish officials when the British military, enforcing the end of the slave trade, stops his boats full of contraband Africans. Gamboa has made his fortune from financing slaving expeditions as well as running a sugar plantation:

---

[9] Leonard Cassuto, *The Inhuman Race: The Racial Grotesque in American Literature and Culture* (New York: Columbia UP, 1997). 124.

> He sido albañil y carpintero, he vendido maderas y tejas, y sobre todo, he arriesgado mi fortuna, y a veces hasta el pellejo, trayendo sacos de carbón —esto es, negros del África— y vendiéndolos aquí a los señores de los ingenios, con lo que he contribuido al desarrollo de esta isla y gente malagradecida. Es cierto que mi matrimonio con Rosa también me ayudó mucho, ella tenía su fortuna. Pero yo la he triplicado con mi trabajo ... Yo tengo un ingenio, un cafetal, un barracón lleno de negros bozales (20).

A Spaniard, Gamboa sees himself above both the slaves in which he traffics as well as the Cubans amongst whom he lives. But, given his humble origins, it was his wife Rosa who had a fortune and himself who had to make a living as a bricklayer and carpenter, Gamboa considers his involvement in the slave trade not as idle speculation, but as part of his work.

Rather than resorting to the supernatural in his discussion of the punishment of slaves, the second narrative level, Reinaldo Arenas uses exaggeration and the absurd to voice his criticism. Among the many senseless acts of violence the Gamboa family perpetrates upon their black servants, the most flagrant disregard for life takes place each morning when Leonardo wakes up. The young man treats slaves as disposable commodities by killing at least one a day when they come to wake up Leonardo.

> En efecto, en varias ocasiones el señorito había dado muerte con lo primero que tenía de la mano a algunos de los esclavos por haberlo despertado, aunque la orden viniese, como siempre, de don Cándido.
>
> —No pienses que eso es una gracia —replicó precisamente don Cándido a doña Rosa, visiblemente contrariado—. De esa manera he perdido ya a varios de mis mejores criados. Y sabrán ustedes —dijo ahora dirigiéndose a don Pedro e Isabel— que los ingleses, esas bestias, cada día están más empecinados en que no desembarquemos ningún saco de carbón de África. (65-66)

This passage points to the contempt with which Europeans regarded the very people whom they forced to assist them in their most intimate details. Most slaves experienced their share of punishment and humiliation, though they were not murdered very often. At the same time, the quote also attests to the growing value of creole slaves, since the African slave trade had been banned. Ironically, Gamboa's word choice exemplifies the emptiness of the rhetoric of racial superiority which the European powers used to justify their use of slave labor. The Spaniard designates his fellow Europeans, the British, by means of an animal metaphor, comparing them to beasts, "bestias", but he reserves the mineral metaphor, coal bags or "saco[s] de carbón," for the slaves, thereby implying that he views Africans as natural resources, not as sentient beings.

The third way through which the narrator parodies the rhetoric of slaves' inhumanity is by denying the individuality of the slave characters. The narrator of *La loma del angel* briefly ponders upon the popularity of "Dolores" as a first name for slaves in general even as he himself chooses the same appellation for his character:

> Dolores, Dolores... ¿Por qué tantos negros, lo mismo hombres que mujeres, se llamaban Dolores? Quizás, seguramente, porque como esclavos no tenían otra manera de publicar su dolor; un dolor sin sexo y tan largo como sus propias vidas, un dolor que duraría tanto como su propio nombre. Dolores, dolores, al ponerle ese nombre a sus hijos, los padres ya les anticipaban, con una fatídica y certera premonición, el significado de toda la existencia, dolores, dolores ... y Dolores era también su nombre, nombre sin duda bien escogido, porque dolores había sido y era su historia. (83)

Though this passage seems to indicate a critique against the system of slavery, it is mostly a rumination on the nature of the sign and the signifier. The narrator's analysis of the slaves' choice of first names is really a commentary upon naming as "publishing" or making public both a message and an identity. Naming their children "Dolores," the narrator argues, was slaves' only means of publically commenting on the ill treatment they constantly received: "porque como esclavos no tenían otra manera de publicar su dolor." This act of naming might be read as a subversive way of resisting authority but it also implies that slaves regarded their children as texts to be deciphered by each other and perhaps by sympathetic whites. The narrator implies that slaves also regarded themselves as characters in an overdetermined drama of slavery. But by prefacing the chapter entitled "Dolores Santa Cruz" with this meditation on the popularity of the first name "Dolores," Arenas likens himself in the role of author to the slave parents who anticipate a long and arduous life ahead for their children as "creations."

By using parody and metafiction to emphasize the textual nature of our knowledge of the past, Arenas also criticizes revisionist attempts to speak for the oppressed. *La loma del ángel* tries to find new ways of discussing slavery without the constraints of either historiography or traditional ways of fictionalizing the past. As a novel, *La loma del ángel* presents the saga not of the individual slave who breaks free from his or her chains but rather of the narrator who struggles to reconcile the different readings of history.

Lo real maravilloso or Postmodern exaggeration?

La loma del ángel parodies *lo real maravilloso* and its tendency to celebrate the supernatural as an inherent feature of the local landscape. Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier first theorized about *lo real maravilloso* in the preface to one of his own historical novels about slavery, *El reino de este mundo*.[10] Carpentier's historical novel presented voodoo as a serious religious practice and featured lycanthropy as an example of the slaves' faith in "the marvelous in the real." Arenas's novel, on the contrary, is a product of a secular age: none of the characters in either text actually believe in the existence of either a deity or an afterlife. The supernatural elements of *La loma del ángel* do not so much blur the boundary between the real and the fantastic as they emphasize their own impossibility and status as literary constructs to criticize other writers' tendencies to celebrate the exotic nature of the Caribbean landscape. In their narrative, Arenas exaggerates ordinary events to such a degree that they acquire absurd proportions, in part to criticize the self-exoticism of *lo real maravilloso.* Hyperbole emphasizes the un-naturalness of events being described, such as the gluttonous plantation owners whose bodies become as big as spheres, roll out of the house, and harden into boulders in *La loma del ángel.* The reader has no expectation that these events could really take place, and therefore in reading about them is only reminded of the very fact that he or she is reading a work of fiction.

This tendency towards exaggeration might suggest a closer correspondence with the genre of magical realism, as practiced by Gabriel García Márquez and Salman Rushdie, a literary style not necessarily dependent on the landscape of specific Caribbean countries. Jean-Pierre Durix contends, however, that although "'Magic realists' are clearly sophisticated in the use they make of metafiction, intertextual references, an interweaving of the 'realistic' and 'fantastic modes,'" the novels they write "have a strong realistic basis" (146). Because *La loma del ángel* does not attempt realism at all it cannot be classified as magical realism. Arenas's and Chamoiseau's use of excess and hyperbole, then, insists on the texts' artificiality in order to force the reader not to suspend disbelief. Rather than suggesting that truth resides in any kind of text, these postmodern novels about the past demand that their readers be aware of how meaning is made through the convergence of the author's act of writing and the reader's own reading acts and interpretation.

---

[10] See Alejo Carpentier, *El reino de este mundo* (Santiago, Chile: Orbe, 1972).

The title of Arenas's novel refers at once to a geographic landmark (la loma/the hill) as well as to the supernatural "ángel." Instead of making the reader "hesitate between a natural and supernatural explanation of events described," as Tzvetzan Todorov argues the fantastic does, *La loma del ángel* presents absurd descriptions of excess.[11] The hill of the novel's title is not a natural outcrop of rock, as the reader might suppose, but rather a man-made phenomenon consisting of an ever growing number of corpses buried underneath the church building which lift it almost to the clouds. In another instance, after witnessing how two slaves who fell inside the bowels of a steam machine don Gamboa purchased to aid in sugar production were forcefully ejected, 2,500 other slaves willingly throw themselves into the fiery furnace in the mistaken belief that it would throw them back to Africa. The scale of the numbers involved in both of these examples are ludicrous, and their status as symbols is obvious: the target of criticism is the maltreatment of the slaves in the sugar plantations which resulted in high mortality rates. Exaggeration here functions in the same way didactic asides worked in either abolitionist novels or historical novels about the past: rather than discuss at length the Catholic Church's complicity in the slave trade and the plantation owners' view of their slaves as automatons, the narrator uses hyperbole to create humor about situations few would defend. Since slavery is no longer practiced in the Caribbean, Arenas has no urgent need to convince readers that it is a bad thing. In contrast, Villaverde's goal in writing *Cecilia Valdés* was to denounce slavery as evil and convince his fellow Cubans to outlaw it. This discrepancy shows that regardless of Arenas's desire to write "the novel I would have written if I were in his place," *La loma del ángel* and *Cecilia Valdés* are each the product of their respective times.

Both the dangers of the forest and the proliferation of corpses, slaves, etc., take place only within the parameters of the novel as a text. Exaggeration forces the reader to reconsider the ways in which books or stories have shaped his or her understanding of the world. Instead of looking to the Caribbean islands themselves as the source of narrative magic, Arenas constructs a literary history of Caribbean fiction about slavery and challenge the reader to examine the assumptions about the truth value of written texts in general before reading the canon these authors name. Through parody and intertextuality, Arenas suggests that literary depictions of the past

[11] Tzvetzan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard. Howard (1970; Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1975). 25.

reflect most accurately our current reading practices and attitudes about reality in general. Arenas' use of the theme of slavery demonstrates their awareness of the presence of the past in the present, and their 'historical sense' compels them to situate their own work, *La loma del ángel* in the context of previous literary depictions of life in bondage.

Vivian Nun-Halloran
Department of Comparative Literature
University of California, Los Angeles

JUEGOS RETÓRICOS DE LA IDENTIDAD PUERTORRIQUEÑA: LA "RENUNCIA" DE RODRÍGUEZ JULIÁ Y EL "VAIVÉN" DE RODRÍGUEZ VECCHINI COMO ESPACIOS DE EQUILIBRIO DISCURSIVO

José E. Santos

A la memoria de Hugo, el maestro.

El universo colonial que constituye la experiencia puertorriqueña parecería haber agotado sus canales de ulterior desarrollo y posible evolución. A la altura de finales del siglo XX se nos presenta como un reducto olvidado, un pequeño monstruo de la práctica social y política en el que se debaten todos los modelos discursivos existentes bajo la lupa precavida pero generosa de una metrópoli ingeniosa. La clave de este impasse es la fórmula política actual, el llamado Estado Libre Asociado, vigente desde 1952, y por el cual los puertorriqueños eligen su gobernador y demás funcionarios legislativos y ejecutivos, y que ha habilitado un clima de desarrollo democrático y de intercambio de ideas que calca un tanto el de los Estados Unidos, si bien queda subordinado a los designios del Congreso de este país. No es nuestra meta presentar la trayectoria de esta historia colonial. Nos basta recordar la hábil estrategia que constituyó dejar en manos de los puertorriqueños la administración de su territorio, lo que ha servido a la metrópoli como ejemplo de su benevolencia y providencial legado en su manejo de los asuntos internacionales.

Nos importa, para los efectos de esta comunicación, el papel que representan los discursos intelectuales a raíz de estas condiciones. Nos centraremos en dos de ellos: la obra literaria misma, y la crítica (literaria, social, etc.). Deseamos de esta forma fijarnos en la respuesta retórica que estos discursos presentan a la luz del problema colonial, y el modo en que difieren sus respectivas estrategias. Tenemos en cuenta las grandes diferencias entre ambos, centradas

en el concepto de "propósito central". El rigor estético se impone en el discurso literario mientras que el "análisis" viene a ser el móvil del lenguaje crítico. Esta distinción nos servirá, por el momento, como una base estructural sobre la que montaremos un diálogo entre las dos obras que hemos escogido, *La renuncia del héroe Baltasar,* de Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá, novela publicada en 1974, y el prólogo crítico "Back and Forward", de Hugo Rodríguez Vecchini, que encabeza la colección de ensayos críticos *The Commuter Nation*, de 1994, colección centrada en la migración como eje de la experiencia puertorriqueña del siglo XX. Deseamos declarar de antemano que el espacio de la colonia ya predetermina varios aspectos de todo discurso que se origina desde su fuente. Tanto el enfoque como las pretensiones y, en última instancia, la recepción de estos textos se ven filtrados por la red de relaciones impuesta por esta condición política. La proyección y la reacción de los núcleos intelectuales se inscribe en este juego de lazos diversos ejecutados con la misma cuerda. Si bien aparentaría no ser posible escapar de esta implícita subordinación, sí es interesante y tal vez imperativo destacar la trascendencia ética de las aspiraciones discursivas (o al menos de la ejecución textual) de cara a la noción de una "responsabilidad intelectual", noción que consideramos problemática y frágil dentro del entramado discursivo de cualquier régimen político, pero que se acentúa o se manifiesta de manera más dramática en el estado colonial.

El texto de Rodríguez Vecchini "Back and Forward" se divide en cinco partes en las que pasa de una presentación general a una presentación de la trayectoria histórica de Puerto Rico (parte en la que nos centraremos), a un análisis del manejo discursivo sobre la identidad desde finales del siglo XIX hasta la década de los ochentas del siglo XX, y finaliza con un aprecio de los logros de la comunidad puertorriqueña en Nueva York como base de su visión de una nación fluctuante. Constituye así una especie de prólogo totalizador. Como doctamente manifiesta el crítico, se trata de un texto escrito al final que se ubica en el principio, que va después de la palabra y antes de la misma. Esta ejecución discursiva, eco de la ejecución atributiva del Evangelio de Juan, se declara como eje de una propuesta de interpretación abierta, ponderada y equitativa:

> A foreword not only comes before and after the word, is father and son of this word, but in this case can also stand for and against it. The title of this foreword can therefore serve as an anticipation of the proposed overture to the subject matter which the articles in this volume have but begun to explore. Moreover, it points to the possibility of different and even contradictory interpretations: either to a negative or a positive interpretation or simultaneously to both.

> I include both titles to stress such a possibility of interpretation concerning the facts and events which constitute the historical field of the Puerto Rican "migrant nation," as it has been recently called. Thus the reader remains cautioned: this foreword is mainly concerned with the words used in constructing a historical reality and analyzing the facts of a historical field, without pretending to renounce, in turn, its own interpretation and story, which is supposed to serve as a background. (31-32)

Se hace indispensable el concepto de lo dual como base de la oferta. La dualidad, vista en elementos como "this foreword stands for and against", "negative" y "positive" y el modificador "simultaneously" intentan atrapar la lectura en la construcción de un presente discursivo diáfano, fiel a la voluntad de ejercitar la plurivalencia interpretativa. La no renuncia a su "propia interpretación" o a "su propia historia" y la pretensión de que éstas sirvan como fondo, manifiestan la sinceridad del expositor y la buena fe de su empresa, si bien revelan a la vez la desviación justificativa que todo acto prologal implica. A diferencia del prólogo típico o "autorial auténtico" como expresaría Genette (166), en el caso de "Back and Forward" se posibilita una lectura que llamamos "mercenaria", que imita el intento incorporativo y expositivo de la prologación típica, pero que al estar en manos de alguien que no es el "autor" de la obra (posibilidad remota e inmaterial en el caso de esta colección), posa el manto de su interpretación particular (como ha manifestado), o de su adscripción ideológica, o ambas. La metáfora de la filiación reversible, "father and son of this word", cobra un papel determinante que se extiende a la posibilitación de cualquier explicación textual, entendida ésta como análisis o como obra estética. La contradicción fundamenta toda escritura y toda lectura, y como más adelante veremos en el caso de Rodríguez Juliá, puede constituir el móvil de una ejecución textual específica y a la vez servir de modelo para la evolución de un proceso social y cultural.

La exposición inicial de Rodríguez Vecchini desarrolla un encadenamiento discursivo que favorece o destaca el papel de la ideología "autonomista" en la historia política de la Isla. Al caracterizar la trayectoria histórica del país, se refiere a la condición colonial de manera particular, incluyendo la palabra entre comillas —"decidedly mantained some sort of 'colonial' status" (32)—, lo que a nuestro entender adhiere un elemento de duda o de atenuación al concepto. De manera inversa, no notamos el mismo tratamiento en la subsiguiente referencia a la guerra hispano-americana de 1898, a la que se refiere directamente sin que medien paréntesis u otra marca como "invasión liberadora", en un momento en que empieza a hablar de la gesta "autonomista" del siglo XX, el ELA: "Fifty four years of renewed

autonomist struggle, since the liberating invasion of 1898, reached a provisionally 'permanent' climax on July 25, 1952..." (33). Su siguiente comentario, en el que se valdrá de la comparación con el Quijote y la polémica sobre el "vaciyelmo" como instrumento de análisis discursivo, se inicia con una definición atenuadora del estado colonial puertorriqueño:

> ...the formula remains as ambivalent and conciliatory as it is exclusive/inclusive. Puerto Rico is not an independent state nor is it a state of the Union:....This amounts, *de facto* and unconventionally *de jure*, to a national autonomy under a neocolonial form of homerule, i.e., colonialism by consent and thus only partly colonial. (34)

El trato de la fórmula "autonomista" contrasta grandemente con el dado a la independentista. La mención del plebiscito de 1967 apunta hacia este desequilibrio en el discurso de Rodríguez Vecchini. No se trata simplemente de que se celebre el triunfo "overwhelming" del Estado Libre Asociado en la contienda, sino de la minimización de la fórmula independentista por la cual en sus palabras "Indeed less than 1% voted for". No se hace la salvedad de que el Partido Independentista no participó en este proceso plebiscitario que implica para Rodríguez Vecchini "another important moment for the ELA" (36), momento capital al que Pedro Cabán se ha referido como un evento fallido y propiciante de pugnas e inestabilidad dentro del grupo autonomista, además de no lograr su cometido de modificar la fórmula del ELA (Meléndez y Meléndez, 25). Resume Rodríguez Vecchini la poca popularidad de la independencia como opción en seis puntos que se suman a su aceptación del impedimento tradicional que se vocifera desde la escuela primaria, el de que Puerto Rico no tiene recursos naturales suficientes para sostenerse que Garzaro reproduce entre otros prejuicios en *Puerto Rico colonia de Estados Unidos* (270). La ecuación "independencia=abundancia de recursos naturales" no es precisa en la práctica política real. Tres de los seis puntos expresados por Rodríguez Vecchini nos interesan. Son estos "the inclusion of political autonomy and cultural affirmation of national identity in the PPD's political platform", "the culturally differentiated nature [of the]... (estadidad jíbara) proposed by the PNP", y "the dissuading nationalist rhetoric, which seems irrelevant to contemporary social concerns" (38). Vistos en conjunto, los tres puntos constituyen el eje de una contradicción discursiva que curiosamente se manifiesta en la realidad puertorriqueña. Tanto el movimiento "autonomista" como el "anexionista" se valen del "irrelevant" y "dissuading nationalist rhetoric" que parece desestimar el crítico. El populismo y la reafirmación de los elementos constitutivos de la puertorriqueñidad se acoplan al juego discursivo de los partidos

políticos mayoritarios a la luz de la creciente dependencia económica que se traduce a su vez en dependencia sicológica.

Se desvía esta caracterización de la expresada por Albert Memmi, que da énfasis a la carencia del colonizado de los "atributos de la nacionalidad" (106). Esta posibilidad sí se da en Puerto Rico, por lo que la violencia inmediata (si bien existente) se sustituye por la violencia intelectual, el acoso de la indecisión por parte de quienes viven en un ambiente de "libertad de expresión". Rodríguez Vecchini, como tantos intelectuales puertorriqueños, vivió la catalepsia histórica y social de una comunidad que se refugia en el modelo de la familia, en el núcleo primario que en palabras de Memmi "salva al colonizado de la desesperación de una derrota total" (109). No extraña que el centro de su argumentación antiindependentista se ubica en este espacio, en la concepción de la gran familia puertorriqueña que se une en el aquí y el allá de las dos "Islas" de Puerto Rico, la insular y la continental:

> Scenes of farewell and family reunions among thousands of Puerto Ricans can be seen daily at the Luis Muñoz Marín and John F. Kennedy Airports, not to mention other major U.S. airports. A family farewell in one airport is often followed by a family reunion in another just a few hours later. And this constitutes today a structural characteristic of the Puerto Rican social reality. (39-40)

Parecería que se justifica la imposibilidad de la separación con una experiencia que en nada es privativa de los puertorriqueños. Se debe recurrir entonces al concepto de la "comodidad", el "freedom to migrate" del estado vigente de cosas, lo que ubicaría a los puertorriqueños en un binomio de enajenación y oportunismo que se enmarca dentro de una relación sicosocial de benevolencia e ingratitud desde, ante, y con el colonizador.

El texto de Rodríguez Juliá, *La renuncia del héroe Baltasar*, reclama un espacio expresivo de mayor trascendencia dentro del marco discursivo de la Isla que en sí mismo es uno de los "personajes" implícitos de la obra. Se publica a mediados de la década de los setenta, durante el mandato del Partido Popular de afiliación autonomista y en medio de la crisis económica de esta década, la recesión, período en el cual, en palabras de Pedro Cabán, se nutrió la fuerza del movimiento anexionista en Puerto Rico (Meléndez y Meléndez, 26). En *La renuncia*, Rodríguez Juliá hace una reconstrucción ficticia de la historia insular del siglo XVIII. A partir del "milagro" que propició la construcción de la capilla del Santo Cristo de la Salud en San Juan, un historiador, desde el momento presente, lee un ciclo de conferencias en el que se detallan los eventos más

importantes que circundan la vida de Baltasar Montañez, mulato hijo del líder de una revuelta de esclavos, y cuya popularidad desea utilizar el poder detrás del trono, el obispo Ibarra, para apaciguar los aires de rebelión de la población esclava mediante el casamiento de Montañez con la hija del Secretario de Gobierno, Josefina Prats. Después de celebrado el casamiento, Baltasar entrega a su esposa a la multitud esclava que celebra desenfrenadamente en las calles. Luego de una disputa sobre el hecho con el obispo, éste le entrega la Secretaría de gobierno a Baltasar para así crear la impresión de que hay un gobierno justo y equilibrado. Baltasar hace caso omiso de los deseos generales del obispo y vive su mandato a su modo, y se entrega al disfrute de los placeres eróticos, que se ha negado con su esposa. Esta etapa de la vida de Baltasar se documenta con una serie de retratos realizados por un pintor, Juan Espinosa. Los retratos, así como otros momentos de la vida de Baltasar, son comentados también por el poeta Alejandro Juliá Marín. Baltasar enloquece ante su obsesión por demostrar la iniquidad de todas las aspiraciones humanas. El obispo trata de hacer recapacitar a Baltasar pero fracasa en su intento. El texto presenta varios ángulos de lo que sería una contienda monumental: la humillación del Secretario de Gobierno al enterarse de los planes del obispo de casar a su hija, la humillación de Josefina en el festejo popular después de las nupcias, el deseo de venganza subyacente de Baltasar en contra del "malagradecido" pueblo negro y mulato que traicionó a su padre, la alterna vivencia erótica y sus consecuencias en la vida de Baltasar, la renuncia del mismo al privilegio de ser Secretario de la Gobernación, la subsiguiente pugna con el obispo, y la final respuesta ontológica de Baltasar ante la realidad circundante.

Nos inclinamos por el señalamiento de Francisco Cabanillas de que en la novela el poder es el centro ordenador y que la renuncia final de Baltasar al mismo lo erige en un ser "todopoderoso" (286). La trayectoria que sigue la ejecución del poder es fundamental para entender la respuesta ética que se desprende del texto. Entendemos que la clave se encuentra en la fragilidad de todos los núcleos de poder identificables, como el mando del general Prats (subordinado al obispo Larra), el mando del obispo (que requiere de la fabricación de intrigas y alianzas para equilibrar las condiciones vigentes), y el mando de Baltasar en la Secretaría de Gobierno (entre la inestabilidad general y su drama personal). El desarrollo de este entramado se da bajo la plena conciencia de Baltasar de que el poder y la voluntad pueden trivializarse al punto de que la identificación entre el "mandar" y el "ser" constituya otro juego más, otra excusa para llenar el tiempo en el que las identidades no se definen.

En un momento en el que el narrador-historiador habla de un texto que el propio Baltasar escribe para condenar el acto propiciado por sí mismo de humillar a Josefina Prats entre la muchedumbre esclava, el historiador nos da el siguiente juicio:

> Perverso el placer el que derivaba este hombre al jugar con fuego junto a un inmenso barril de pólvora. Jugando a una sangrienta confrontación entre blancos y negros, Baltasar intentaba vengar la muerte de su padre. He dicho jugando porque considero que para Baltasar el poder tenía un sentido lúdico, que consistía en incitar las pasiones y luego contemplar, con cínica sonrisa, como un Dios que está por encima de los preciados motivos humanos, la inutilidad de todo esfuerzo. (36-37)

Para Rubén González, la estratagema de Baltasar corresponde a una heroicidad degradada, personalista, "desconectada de la colectividad y con grandes dosis de narcisismo" (87). Esta caracterización se ubica en la visión de González de que en *La renuncia* se atenta contra el utopismo o su contribución positiva en el desarrollo histórico de los pueblos, lo que queda patente en su juicio cuasicondenatorio de que "Baltasar falsifica el sentido de su historia y se niega a la posibilidad de un futuro comunitario" (90). Entendemos que la trastocación ética en el comportamiento de Baltasar se mueve hacia un deseo genuino de exposición crítica, desnuda si se quiere, de la realidad individual y política. Recordemos el escenario circunstancial en el que se publica. Se trata del nacimiento de la pugna intensa entre autonomistas y anexionistas en la década de los setenta para tratar de justificar los primeros el crecimiento de la fórmula en crisis del Estado Libre Asociado y denunciar los segundos lo inapropiado del modelo dentro del paradigma de las relaciones entre los EE.UU. y Puerto Rico. El malestar del coloniaje permea la expresión y la negación ontológica viene a ser una reacción natural del ente histórico que no conoce la soberanía real y cuyos ensayos de mandato viven bajo el temor subyacente de la censura metropolitana, en concreto, la censura del Congreso estadounidense. La clave existencial de la rebelión "desviada" de Baltasar la propone el mismo Rodríguez Juliá en su ensayo "At the Middle of the Road":

> But what was I trying to accomplish with that work (*La renuncia*)? No more and no less than to go to the seed of our nationality, to that blurred eighteenth century where the birth of our shared living is hidden. I did not wish to resort to history or documents. I decided to invent my own eighteenth century that would be like a nightmare of Puerto Rican history. Nightmares also say something about reality. (122)

La "falsificación" de Baltasar no es más que una muestra del juego que constituye la reconstrucción del pasado. La contundencia

de la realidad presente se impone como el eje asociativo de cualquier precedencia, y en el caso de Puerto Rico, la eternidad colonial se asoma como la pesadilla existencial. En este sentido, la labor del intelectual se ve mediatizada por la angustia de la subordinación, por el conjunto de temores y el deseo de reivindicaciones, que dialogan entre sí más de lo que se oponen. De ahí la franqueza del gesto de Baltasar, tal vez posible sólo en el texto estético. Se plasma en uno de los apartes poéticos del poeta Alejandro Juliá Marín cuando comenta el momento de la renuncia:

> Buscaba un gesto que resumiera todo su afán: Ejercicios de laberintos sin respuesta. Dibujos que no alcanzaban la precisión del sueño. Cascadas de papel que fatigaban techos lejanos, de los cuales ya no llegaban claras noticias. Maqueta ya irremediablemente perdida para su mirada. Cuando su aliento apenas alcanzaba tanto simulacro, tomaba una larga pipa que avivaba el intento.
>
> La maldita naturaleza fue dispuesta para que gravitásemos en ella hasta el límite de la muerte. (*La renuncia*, 100-101)

La fascinación con el ensueño es eco del escapismo debido al peso de la realidad. La gravitación se vuelve el movimiento privilegiado de esta condición de inacción. La exposición discursiva se ve tronchada en su intento por denunciar o proponer. La construcción estética, en el caso de *La renuncia*, permite echar una mirada sobre la desnudez contextual. El discurso crítico llega a sucumbir en ocasiones ante las presiones de esta misma, y opta por la autocensura, la complacencia, o el travestismo retórico. He aquí la esencia del "vaivén" que propone Rodríguez Vecchini, la clave del "inter-insular migrant nation" que consideramos un impedimento a cualquier ulterior evolución. No puede romperse ese espacio familiar, reducto de la aclamada nacionalidad extendida.

Rodríguez Juliá incurre a su vez en el trayecto de esta avenida íntima, si bien despliega una perspectiva diferente. Confiesa que la paternidad constituye el eje de su narrativa, lo que hace de su arte un diálogo entre la ilusión y la desilusión, la utopía y la imperfección, y entre el deseo y la realidad entre otras cosas ("At the Middle of the Road", 122-123). Su visión supone la diferencia como rasgo definidor, como elemento promotor de esta necesidad de diálogo e intercambio. Entendemos que este reconocimiento es tan válido ahora como en la década de los setenta. La experiencia socioeconómica de Puerto Rico se enfrenta a un momento crítico en el que la formulación de una respuesta responsable debe partir de las necesidades de desarrollo del territorio, conforme a su capacidad productiva y los recursos humanos disponibles. La retórica de la nacionalidad dispersa impide crear el ambiente para este tipo de

respuesta. Es otro velo más de la retórica de la dependencia, y delata la condición actual de la crítica social y cultural que aspira todavía a las utopías familiares. Peor aún, la aceptación tácita del "colonialismo por consentimiento". Por su parte, la experiencia puertorriqueña en Nueva York y otras ciudades estadounidenses debe servir de ejemplo y no de lastre. Han luchado por establecerse y proponer su propio modelo de desarrollo dentro de su realidad contextual. Han ido creando su propia nación, si se quiere, en algunos sentidos diferente de los modelos que se dan en Puerto Rico. Valdría proponer esta actitud ante la realidad puertorriqueña insular. La independencia política, sea asequible o no bajo las condiciones presentes, no tiene que constituir un amasijo de visiones "pasadas de moda", ni un hervidero pasional de retórica decimonónica. El lenguaje de la separación no supone distancia sino madurez. La persistencia del discurso autonomista e, irónicamente, del anexionista de cultivar la semilla de una nacionalidad diseminada responde más al estancamiento, a la construcción eterna de un "jardín de los infortunios" textual que lamentablemente se evidencia en la praxis.

Otras opciones esperan por su merecido turno. Es posible la vida después de la renuncia.

José E. Santos
Rhodes College

Obras citadas

Cabanillas, Francisco. "La política de la ficción: *La renuncia del héroe Baltasar*".

Juan Villegas, ed. *Actas de la Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas. Tomo IV. Encuentros y desencuentros de culturas: siglos XIX y XX*. Irvine, CA: University of California Press, 1994.

Garzaro, R. *Puerto Rico colonia de Estados Unidos*. Madrid: Editorial Tecnos, 1980.

González, Rubén. *La historia puertorriqueña de Rodríguez Juliá*. Río Piedra, P.R.: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1997.

Meléndez, Edwin and Edgardo Meléndez, eds. *Colonial Dilemma. Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Puerto Rico*. Boston: South End Press, 1993.

Memmi, Albert. *Retrato del colonizado*. 1966. Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Flor, 1980.

Rodríguez Juliá, Edgardo. *La renuncia del héroe Baltasar*. 1974. Río Piedras, P.R.: Editorial Cultural, 1986.

_____. "At the Middle of the Road". Asela Rodríguez de Laguna, ed. *Images and Identities. The Puerto Rican in Two World Contexts*. New Brunswick, U.S.A. and Oxford, U.K.: Transaction Books, 1987.

Rodríguez Vecchini, Hugo. "Foreword: Back and Forward". Carlos Antonio Torre, Hugo Rodríguez Vecchini and William Burgos, eds. *The Commuter Nation. Perspectives on Puerto Rican Migration*. Río Piedras, P. R.: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1994.

THE ANTI-CARNIVALESQUE HAMLET

Dominick M. Grace

No reader of *Hamlet* can miss the fact that there is an inordinate amount of comedy in it, despite its focus on regicide, fratricide, suicide (maybe), and good, old-fashioned homicide. Five characters (Polonius, Gertrude, Laertes, Claudius, and Hamlet) die on stage, another three (Ophelia, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern) off stage during the action, one of whom has an onstage funeral, and three more deaths (of Yorick, Fortinbras Senior, and Hamlet Senior), two of them violent, prior to the play's opening are central to the ongoing action; indeed, one of the pre-play victims appears as a ghost to exhort Hamlet to "Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder" (I.v.25), while the ghost of another, longer-dead figure, the jester Yorick, hovers at the edge of our consciousness as Hamlet apostrophizes his skull. In addition to wishing not only to kill Claudius but also to damn his soul, an understandable enough desire under the circumstances, the hero of the play also coldly sends two college chums to their execution and murders the father of his beloved Ophelia, after heaping vicious verbal abuse (and in some productions physical abuse as well) on her, driving her to madness and probably to suicide. And yet, this grim action is liberally salted with comedy, most notably in the gravediggers' scene, perhaps, but at various places elsewhere, perhaps most disconcertingly in Hamlet's reactions to Polonius's death.[1]

This comedy is not too surprising, as the mixing of comedy and tragedy is common in Renaissance theater. As John Russell Brown notes,

> Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists *exploited* laughter.... Although miracle and morality plays presented issues of life and death, destiny

[1] Completion of this paper was made possible in part by a travel and research grant from Algoma University College. I wish also to express my thanks to Lisa Macklem for editorial assistance.

> and choice, good and evil—themes which in other ages have proved inimical to laughter—they had been given comic servants and midwives, coarse jokes, horseplay and grotesque combats; successive revisions augmented rather than pruned the low comedy. (103; emphasis added)

I place some emphasis on the word "exploited" to stress a complex point. The use of humour in serious drama is a conscious and deliberate strategy of the medieval and Renaissance English dramatist—but not simply to amuse the groundlings or to relieve the tension of the tragedy. The comic is of course exploited for its entertainment value by Shakespeare—part of the pleasure we take from the gravediggers' scene derives from its sheer delight in language play, and Hamlet's remarkable array of dirty puns appeals before all else to our salacious humour—but there is more to the exploitation, deriving from the medieval heritage of Renaissance drama. Comedy is used as a thematically central device in Renaissance drama and in the work of Shakespeare especially. The interpenetration of tragedy and comedy in the Renaissance is evident even from the title pages of many plays; as Susan Snyder notes, "Designations like ... 'tragical comedy' are not unusual" (17).

Nevertheless, *Hamlet* may seem rather more radical in its comic aesthetic than many other Renaissance plays, exploiting as ruthlessly as it does a clash of opposites, a collision between serious and tragic actions and wild, even grotesque comedy. Most of the comic devices mentioned by Brown occur in *Hamlet*, along with many others, including the use of pun, paradox, oxymoron, satire, parody, talking at cross purposes, mistaken identity, disguise, playacting, and so on—a complete catalogue would run through a significant portion of the total number of comic techniques and devices. The play thrusts us into a world in which inimical situations and value systems, and ultimately plots, are juxtaposed. As Michael D. Bristol reminds us, "The funeral for Hamlet's father is combined with a wedding feast, and this odd mingling of grief and of festive laughter is typical of the play" (350).

Such mingling participates in the idea of the carnivalesque, as articulated by Mikhail Bakhtin. Though Bakhtin noted that Shakespeare employed the carnivalesque, he provides little exploration of the carnivalesque in Shakespeare in his own work. Scholars have only recently begun to apply Bakhtin to Shakespeare in any extensive way; indeed, Ronald Knowles asserts that *Shakespeare and Carnival: After Bakhtin*, a 1998 essay collection he edited, is "the first [book] devoted to Shakespeare and Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas of the carnivalesque" (1). Michael Mangan's slightly earlier *A Preface to*

Shakespeare's Comedies: 1594-1603 (1996) also applies carnival to Shakespeare and offers a useful, brief summary of some of the main features of the carnivalesque:

> The laughter of carnival involves bathos, bringing things down to the materialistic and bodily levels. The imagery of carnival involves food and drink, and a revelling in bodily parts and functions: bowels, buttocks, genitalia, urinating, defecating and copulating. Carnival speech and language, too, escapes exuberantly from the confines of official decorum; it is abusive or irreverent, parodic and vulgar, and characterized by variety. (34-35)

Mangan applies the carnivalesque to the world of Shakespeare's comedies, but recently, commentators such as Phyllis Gorfain and Michael Bristol have applied carnivalesque theory to *Hamlet*; Gorfain sees the play as Shakespeare's most carnivalesque, and Bristol likens Hamlet and Claudius to "two murderous clowns attempting to achieve strategic advantage over the other" (350). Though such parallels between protagonist and antagonist are significant, however, there are crucial distinctions, and though the play does invoke the carnivalesque, how Hamlet responds to Claudius's carnival qualifies the attitude towards carnival presented in the play. The play *Hamlet* may be Shakespeare's most carnivalesque, as Gorfain argues, but its central character is anti-carnivalesque.

Claudius celebrates the carnivalesque; *he* collapses the distinction between feast and funeral, sex and death, marriage and murder, from his opening speech onward:

> Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death
> The memory be green, and that it us befitted
> To bear our hearts in grief, and our whole kingdom
> To be contracted in one brow of woe,
> Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature
> That we with wisest sorrow think on him
> Together with remembrance of ourselves.
> Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen,
> Th'imperial jointress of our warlike state,
> Have we, as 'twere with a defeated joy,
> With an auspicious, and a dropping eye,
> With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage,
> In equal scale weighing delight and dole,
> Taken to wife.... (I.ii.1-14)

Even a cursory consideration of this passage exposes Claudius's carnivalesque conflation of grief and revelry; the oxymoronic nature of Claudius's imagery, the collapse of inimical categories underscored rather than elided by the singsong effect created by the alliteration of "delight" and "dole" (the juxtaposition of which two terms itself encapsulates Claudius's elimination of difference between

inimical states of mind), even the subtly grotesque pictures created by imagining the whole estate having a single brow, or even an individual having one dropping eye, make a serious response to the speech difficult. But the speech is consistent with Claudius's character, his desire to drown consideration of his brother's death—on the part of his subjects and, presumably, on his own part as well, in carnivalesque wassail.

Under Claudius's rule, however, the grotesque and humorous juxtaposition of opposed principles has become the rule, not the exception, the norm, not the temporary and celebratory inversion of it. Claudius is not a Lord of Misrule briefly substituted for the real king; he is a genuine usurper, a satyr permanently replacing a Hyperion and indulging in an ongoing orgy of feasting and excess, to which Hamlet objects; wassail, Hamlet avers, "is a custom / More honor'd in the breach than the observance. / This heavy-headed revel east and west / Makes us traduc'd and tax'd of other nations" (I.iv.15-18). In the face of celebratory indulgences, whether the feasting to accompany a marriage or simple revelry for no particular reason, Hamlet represents a critical, almost ascetic, response.

Hamlet, the filter through whom we perceive the action, invites us not to share in the world of revelry, to enjoy, as does the king, the pleasures of the flesh and of the table, but instead to stand outside it in the face of death and condemn that world. He is, from his first appearance, the black-clad figure who insists on the reality of death in the face of revelry. Bristol notes Hamlet's anti-carnivalesque stance at this point in the play: "His initial rejection of all forms of carnivalesque derangement, whether traditional or not, is symbolized by his black suit and his mournful attitude" (356). His rejection is not simply a matter of symbolism or stance, however; Hamlet's self-definition in the scene confirms his resistance to the carnivalesque world Claudius has established. Hamlet denies carnivalesque game as a valid response to the world when his mother asks him why the commonness of death seems so particular to him:

> Seems, madam? nay, it is, I know not "seems."
> 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
> Nor customary suits of solemn black,
> Nor windy suspirations of forc'd breath,
> No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
> Nor the dejected havior of the visage,
> Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,
> That can denote me truly. These indeed seem,
> For they are actions that a man might play,
> But I have that within that passes show,
> These but the trappings and the suits of woe. (I.ii.76-86)

One cannot play at grief, Hamlet argues, collapsing the gap between seeming and being so easily. He demands congruency between seeming and being. This insistence recurs in his speeches throughout the play, perhaps most notably when he insists on the difference between his Hyperion father and his satyr uncle: "This was your husband. Look you now what follows: / Here is your husband, like a mildewed ear, / Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?" (III.iv.63-65). See what *is*, he insists; do not pretend. He never loses this insistent belief that playing is inherently problematic, as is evident in his performance of grief in Ophelia's grave, when he rejects the mere performance of grief as mere rant: "and thou'lt mouth, /I'll rant as well as thou" (V.i.283-84). To assume the role of griever proves nothing about what one really feels, Hamlet asserts; playing a part obscures, rather than reveals the truth.

One might even argue that his insistent belief that one must be what one seems is Hamlet's tragic flaw, as it leads him not to kill Claudius when he has his proof and his chance, because he believes his uncle to be praying and therefore earning forgiveness. Instead, and significantly, Hamlet prefers to slaughter Claudius

> When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
> Or in th' incestuous pleasure of his bed,
> At game a-swearing or about some act
> That has no relish of salvation in 't ... (III.ii.89-92)

That is, Hamlet will kill the king when he is what he *is*, a figure of excess; Hamlet wants to kill a carnivalesque king, not a pious one.

Nevertheless, Hamlet adopts play as his mode of bringing about vengeance, despite his antipathy to it. Ironically, Hamlet must put on a carnival mask in order to unthrone the Lord of Misrule. Bristol argues for Hamlet's gradual acceptance of carnival; I argue instead that Hamlet only plays at such acceptance in order to accomplish his end. He remains the outsider, using carnival as an ironic weapon against itself.

Harry Levin, among others, compares Hamlet to the "dissembler of Aristophanic comedy, the eiron" (82), whose function is to expose and undermine the alazon, the figure of inflated self-importance who must be brought down to earth—as Claudius is, literally, by the end of Hamlet. Levin's Aristotelean reading of Hamlet provides, I think, the appropriate lens through which to observe Hamlet's appropriation of carnival. Claudius embodies carnival; Hamlet employs carnivalesque language in his abusive, violent, parodic, and ironic discourses to keep before us the absurdity of the world as it becomes if the Claudian carnival is allowed to dominate. That is,

Hamlet's use of carnivalesque devices serves to advance an anti-carnivalesque perspective. He uses carnival against itself.

Claudius invites us to laugh with him, to combine mirth and funeral and accept with a laugh the inevitable and undifferentiated end of all life in death. We all die, so eat, drink, and be merry, argues Claudius; we're all the same ultimately, so what difference does it make? Hamlet rejects vehemently such a view. As Richard Fly notes, in contrast to Claudius's, "Hamlet's intellect is militantly disjunctive, always insisting on the dissimilarity of things" (261). Hamlet is not amused by the gap between the world he perceives and the world he desires, but he is corrosively amusing in his commentary on that gap, as he requires us to laugh, sometimes in extreme discomfort, at the implications of the Claudian world. If we break down the wall between mirth and funeral, why stop there, Hamlet asks.

Nowhere, perhaps, is Hamlet's use of carnivalesque technique to undermine Claudius's perspective so evident as it is IV.iii. In this scene, Hamlet first collapses class by noting that all die and that "a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar" (29-30). Furthermore, and more significantly, he collapses the difference between man and woman by calling Claudius mother. When Claudius retorts that he's Hamlet's "loving father" (48), Hamlet insists "My mother: father and mother is man and wife, man and wife is one flesh—so, my mother" (49-50). Hamlet's initial strategy in this scene, his equation of eating and death, may seem carnivalesque, but in this context, a discussion of Polonius's death at Hamlet's hands—which included Hamlet's verbal speculation that he had killed the king—what is primary is its implied threat against Claudius. Hamlet's equation of father and mother, man and wife, is a more subtle expression of Hamlet's anti-carnivalesque stance, really, in that this reduction of Claudius, to Claudius's face, is manifestly not an expression of a genuine belief in the doctrine espoused but an evident insult to the king. Hamlet has, after all, been overly insistent on the gap between Claudius and his father throughout the play; here, he uses verbal equivocation to deny Claudius that role and to diminish Claudius by using Christian doctrine to get a dig in at Claudius's motivation in marrying Gertrude: not only union of the flesh, but also the consolidation of political power, as Claudius's first speech makes clear. The humour of Hamlet's insult is evident, and the Claudian perspective is its butt. We laugh, but not in carnivalesque celebration of the flesh.

Hamlet employs carnivalesque devices to deny the carnivalesque perspective. Hamlet recognizes the vanity of human pretensions and

laughs at the fates of beggars and emperors, but his is not celebratory laughter. Even when he can laugh at death, he is quickly called back to a serious meditation of it, as in V.i, wherein Hamlet's badinage with the gravediggers turns serious when he discovers that he knew the original possessor of the skull he holds. He recognizes that the joke is deadly, and that even the joker dies, in his apostrophe to Yorick's skull: "Where be your gibes now, your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now to mock your own grinning—quite chop-fall'n. Now get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favor she must come; make her laugh at that" (V.i.177-82). One might laugh at a carnivalesque image of death, but to laugh at the real thing, Hamlet suggests, is far more difficult. He speaks of Yorick, the dead jester, but he might as well be speaking of Claudius, not only because, as Claudius himself has already acknowledged, everyone dies, but also because Claudius now is the jester figure who gambols, who insists on merriment, and who occupies his lady's chamber. Hamlet's graveyard humour is ironic in the extreme; he laughs, but he laughs at those who laugh at death, defying them to laugh when confronted with its reality.

Hamlet's humour requires us to recognize the disjunction between opposites, to see the absurdity in combining dole and delight and therefore to laugh at the folly of Claudius, who invites such a combination. Claudius cannot erase his crime by perpetuating the inversion of order it represents. The very attempt is ridiculous. When dole and delight are collapsed, the world does not proceed as it should; the story of Hamlet, which should be a comic one of love in the face of absurd and restrictive parental authority, in which Hamlet and Ophelia overcome Polonius—an absent comic outcome dragged back to our minds by Gertrude's graveside farewell, "I hoped thou shouldn't have been my Hamlet's wife" (V.ii.230)—becomes instead an ironic one of funeral rather than wedding,

> of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,
> Of deaths put on by cunning and forc'd cause,
> And in this upshot, purposes mistook
> Fall'n on th' inventors' heads....
> (V.ii.364-67)

Take out the references to slaughter and death here, and Horatio could be describing a comedy rather than a tragedy. The line between the two is a fine one, as thin and keen as a knife-blade, but it is a line nonetheless. It is a line that Hamlet always sees and forces us to see; it is a line that Claudius wants to obliterate. Hamlet invites us to laugh at the folly of such an attempt.

There is, then, much to laugh at in Hamlet. The play's own exploitation of humour itself invites the comedic responses to the play I discussed at the beginning of the paper. But the play itself exploits humour to underscore the status of Hamlet as the figure whose perspective must prevail. That perspective allows for a comedic response to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, but it demands as well a clear recognition that the time cannot be left out of joint, and that the jester cannot keep his crown. In his study of carnivalesque elements in *1* and *2 Henry IV*, François Laroque argues that "Carnival, like the king, never dies" (95). Hamlet, and *Hamlet*, demonstrate the opposite.

Dominick M. Grace
English Department
Algoma University College

Works Cited

Bristol, Michael D. "'Funeral-Bak'd Meats': Carnival and the Carnivalesque in *Hamlet*." Shakespeare 348-67.

Brown, John Russell. "Laughter in the Last Plays." *Later Shakespeare. Stratford-Upon-Avon Studies* 8. London: Edward Arnold, 1966. 103-26.

Fly, Richard. "Accommodating Death: The Ending of Hamlet." *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 24 (1984): 257-74.

Gorfain, Phyllis. "Toward a Theory of Play and the Carnivalesque in *Hamlet*." *Hamlet Studies* 13 (1991): 25-49.

Knowles, Ronald. "Introduction." *Shakespeare and Carnival: After Bakhtin*. Ed. Ronald Knowles. London: Macmillan, 1998. 1-12.

Laroque, François. "Shakespeare's 'Battle of carnival and Lent': The Falstaff Scenes Reconsidered (*1 & 2 Henry IV*)." *Shakespeare and Carnival: After Bakhtin*. Ed. Ronald Knowles. London: Macmillan, 1998. 83-96.

Levin, Harry. *The Question of Hamlet*. 1959. New York: Viking, 1961.

Mangan, Michael. *A Preface to Shakespeare's Comedies: 1594-1603*. London: Longman, 1996.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Ed. Susanne L. Wofford. Boston: Bedford, 1994.

Snyder, Susan. *The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies:* Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Othello *and* King Lear. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979.

LOPE DE VEGA'S TRAGEDY *EL MAYORDOMO DE LA DUQUESA DE AMALFI*

Ismael Rivera-Rodríguez

In his *Arte Nuevo de Hacer Comedias,* Lope de Vega made certain observations that came to represent his theory on the art of writing drama. Of these, one of the most puzzling is when he says:

> Y cuando he de escribir una comedia,
> Encierro los preceptos con seis llaves;
> Saco a Terencio y Plauto de mi estudio,
> Para que no me den voces; que suele
> Dar gritos la verdad en libros mudos;
> Y escribo por el arte que inventaron
> Los que el vulgar aplauso pretendieron;
> Porque como la paga el vulgo, es justo
> Hablarle en necio para darle gusto. (877)

This passage has led to many different conclusions and on most occasions Lope has received severe accusations from those who see in this statement evidence that all he sought with his plays was financial gain. Be that as it may, an unavoidable truth is that whenever Lope wrote, he had the audience clearly in mind. As Karl Vossler says,

> No había para él acontecimiento, leyenda ni asunto que no fuese apto para ser llevado a escena, ni había crónica ni novela que no fuesen dramatizables. Solo exige, como condición previa, que el asunto sea lo suficientemente extraordinario y curioso para atraer al público y que sea nacional en sentido ético, es decir, que no repugne al sentimiento español, ni le sea inaccesible y que, si es extraño, sea por lo menos hispanizable. (341)

Undoubtedly, Lope followed closely what he expressed in his *Arte Nuevo de hacer comedias* and what Vossler's conclusion implied, in *El mayordomo de la daquesa de Amalfi.* And although it may be objected that in the above mentioned passage he is referring to the "comedia," it may also be argued that, in Lope, the difference between "comedia" and "tragedia" was marked by a very thin line. This fact is easily seen in the title page where it reads, *Comedia*

famosa del mayordomo de la duquesa de Amalfi, and at the end of the play, in what seems to be a brief epilogue, the author puts in the mouth of Urbino the following words:

> Aquí dio fin la tragedia
> Senado del mayordomo
> Que como pasó en Italia
> Oy lo han visto vuestros ojos. (223-A)

Lope chose for his topic a real life story, adhering once more to another of his precepts: "por argumento la tragedia tiene / la historia" (877). Keeping in mind that romantic stories were among the favorites of the Spanish public, he developed Antonio and Camila's love into a tragedy in which many of the customs and beliefs of the Spanish people were reflected. Tactfully, he used the conventional devices available, deviating from the audience's accepted standards only enough to captivate its curiosity without arousing its disgust. Thus, he presents a love affair between two people of different social ranks, but emphasizing that Antonio, although a major-domo, is of noble birth. This social rank difference, small as it seems, spells trouble to the audience immediately. To soften the situation somewhat, Lope emphasizes that the lovers have no kind of relationship until a formal wedding ceremony is performed. As a lady of high estate, this was one factor that the Duchess had to watch carefully, as we clearly see she did, when Antonio tried to kiss her after the wooing scene:

> Antonio, yo te adoro, pero advierte
> Que ha de ser de otra suerte el adorarte,
> No has de tocarme en parte, de que sienta
> Mi honor alguna afrenta, con secreto
> Podrás si eres discreto ser mi dueño,
> Esta prenda te empeño que es mi honra,
> Por escusar deshonra y por la ofensa
> De Dios que ha de ser piensa amado Antonio
> En justo matrimonio mi deseo... (205-B)

The audience could condone her mistake of choosing an inferior man for her husband as an enamored woman's weakness, but would look on her allowing him to take liberties with her as the behavior of a strumpet. Besides, if she had allowed Antonio to act freely with her, her image would have fallen in the eyes of the audience and her tragic stature in the play would have been endangered. This is also why the wedding is performed by a priest and why the Cardinal is not presented on the stage. The exclusion of the former and the inclusion of the latter would have made many people uncomfortable to see such sacrilege committed against the Church and it would have meant a head-on collision of the author with the Inquisition. Lope

was usually careful to avoid topics that could trouble the religious feelings of his audience or to arouse the rage of the Holy Institution, although the fact that his play *La conversión de San Agustín* was banned from the stage, means that he was not always successful (Astrana Marín 212).

The audience also saw with good eyes the rage expressed by Julio de Aragón against the dishonor committed by his sister. Her social position made it imperative for her to submit to a marriage of convenience and to abide by her family's advice. Therefore, her decision to marry beneath her state and contrary to the authority of her brothers made it mandatory for them to take action against her.

> For if honor depends on the ability to impress one's will on others, it is clear that nothing could be so dishonoring as man's not being able to exert authority over those whom he is most obliged to control and should most easily control: the women of his family. This holds true whether the man is husband, father, son, or brother. (Larson 10)

Julio, then, is bound to bring his sister to justice, and as long as he remains within the bounds of reason, Lope and his audience accept him, not as a villain but as an offended avenger. However, as he traces his steps down the lane of the traditionally accepted avenger, he makes certain mistakes that incline the audience to view him as a villain.

The threat that the Duchess' marriage presented to the succession of the Duchy was not so great because her son (by her first husband) was the lawful heir, and she left him in possession of his estate when she decided to go off with Antonio. There were also other ways out of Julio's difficult situation, hinted at by the author, which could have satisfied his honor just as well. One of these solutions was banishment. With the Duchess, Antonio, and the children out of Italy, the blot on his honor would have been cleansed, since, as I said before, the Duchy was not in danger of falling under the power of an ignoble ruler. Furthermore, with her out of the country, the damage she inflicted on her court could be repaired by the new untarnished honor of the young Duke of Amalfi. Julio rejected this solution though, making his first vital mistake. Another mistake on his part was that he killed his sister and Antonio by poisoning them, a way that did not seem very proper in an "hidalgo" (supposed to be a man of honor and courage) who won more glory when he took arms against the transgressors of his honor. The way he killed the lovers had shameful marks of treachery about it. And one final error on Julio's part, and perhaps the worst, was that he did not keep his word. According to the code of honor, a nobleman's word was law; the man was as good as his word and, if his word was not trustworthy,

his honor was equally worthless. Julio had given his word to his nephew that he would allow the couple and their offspring to depart from Italy unharmed but he did not fulfill his promise. Since he was a foreigner, the audience could accept his treachery to a certain extent, but when Amalfi Hispanicizes him,

> Que miras tigre Furioso,
> Que miras león Alabano
> Que miras Español toro,
> Saca la espada cobarde
> Que desde la punta al pomo
> Tiñiré en tu sangre aquesta, (223)

it becomes unacceptable. Thus, it can be seen how skillfully the playwright has been working on the audience's fixed notions so as to turn, right before their eyes, what under normal circumstances would have been a hero, into a villain, and a transgressing couple into innocent victims. In the eyes of the audience, therefore, the young Duke of Amalfi's rage seems justified; the death of the lovers unnecessary and villainous, and Julio becomes the treacherous villain of the play.

However, Julio's villainy, although it augmented the audience's sympathy for the slaughtered couple, merely attenuated the Duchess' mistake. It was a well-known fact for the audience that the Duchess' first obligation was to her subjects. Her social status put certain claims on her that should have been her priority, but which she preferred to ignore. She overlooked the fact that "... para la nobleza resultaba inconcebible renunciar a acrecentar su poderío mediante uniones desventajosas, porque la estirpe era el valor fundamental, complementada con el dinero patrimonial" (Díez Borque 113). The Duchess' misfortune was expected because, although the public's sympathy was with her, social codes were against her. She had made a terribly wrong choice when faced with the decision between the accepted social standards and her personal happiness, and she chose the latter. Her choice was made with her heart—she chose the man she loved, who, unfortunately, was her own servant—instead of choosing with her head, in which case the reasonable choice would have been Otavio de Medicis. But she fell a victim of love "que es demonio" and lost her head, forgetting "that earthly life is basically vain—Will and Understanding had to contend with their mortal enemies, the World, the Flesh, and the Devil" (Larson 116). The Duchess refused to look on this world as a Vale of Tears, preferring to enjoy life here rather than in the hereafter. By doing so, she struck a revolutionary note, too overwhelming for anyone to fully forgive at the time; she represented a young woman rebelling against the tyr-

anny of parental authority, a situation, which presented a unique opportunity for the author.

Lope, like many of his contemporaries, thought that the public's view of life could be influenced favorably by their plays. Therefore, he dramatized the story of the Duchess' passionate love, showing that she was willing to renounce everything,

> El señor Antonio amigos
> Es mi marido, no quiero
> Título, estado ni hacienda
> Rentas, vasallos, ni Reynos, (217-A)

for the happiness that her marriage provided her. Her only plea is to be left alone with her husband and children. She believes that "El casarse, es un camino / largo hasta el fin de la vida" (202-B), in which only the person getting married should choose his or her companion, a belief that is also shared by Lope, who "championed a saner and if we may call it so, a freer position for women; he emphasized again and again the necessity of granting them greater liberty of choice in determining their own happiness in marriage or any other state" (Schevill 66). And so, the dramatization of the Duchess' odyssey becomes an opportunity for the audience to visualize a problem of contemporary dimensions and decide if the punishment for her transgression was really a socially acceptable act; more yet, whether or not it was a human act. However, under no circumstance is it to be understood that Lope was patronizing the marriages between the social classes. The difference between Antonio and the Duchess, as I have said before, is one of rank, her social position is higher than his, but still he is of noble birth. A bigger social difference between the lovers would have robbed the situation of all connection to reality.

The seventeenth-century Spanish audience strongly rejected dramatizations of unreal proportions, a fact that Lope knew, thus his strong adeptness to verisimilitude. This was not one of Lope's innovations, however, but a precept established by the pre-Lopean tragedians. In the words of Alonso López Pinciano, "el poeta debe dejar lo posible no verosímil para seguir lo verosímil, aunque sea imposible" (Hermenegildo 25). Luckily for Lope, the tragedy of the Duchess presented no problem that could challenge truth. And whenever something seemed to pose some difficulty to credibility, he supplied some justification or proof of its veracity. For example, there is Lope's insistence that the audience has seen a faithful representation of the tragedy as it happened in Italy. There is also the allusion to refrains usually connected to the most fixed beliefs of

the Spanish public, as is the case in Libia's expression:

> Conozco en la libertad,
> Con que te quieres perder,
> Que es gran mal en la mugger
> Enviudar en mocedad, (201-A)

which, at the same time, immediately identifies the Duchess' situation with future trouble.

Another device used by Lope to sustain the verisimilitude of his play was the parallel love situation of Doristo and Bartola to the Duchess and Antonio's. In the love relationship of these two shepherds the audience is confronted with a real life situation, impregnated by local color, wit, and humor that was intended as a counterpart of the love affair of the protagonists. Doristo, like the Duchess, represents a rebellious young man trying to break through the established ideological barriers concerning marriage. In his challenge of his grandfather's authority, lies the challenge of the new generation to the old. Words unseemly in the mouths of the Duchess or Antonio, are spoken by Doristo:

> Ya no es tiempo abuelo mío
> De andar en antigüedades
> Sabed que en estas edades
> Es muy diferente el brío. (206-B)

Since he is a peasant, his expression can be taken as concerning peasants only, although it can undoubtedly apply to the nobility as well, as indicated by the Duchess' actions. A social fact that Doristo throws at the audience carelessly, but that has great relevance in the play, is the need for women to marry, or as he puts it, their being destined to the altar from birth:

> Aun no tiene sentimiento
> En el pecho de su madre
> La niña, y dize a su padre
> Tayta, tayta, casamiento.
> Apenas en un quilotro
> La comienzan a envolver,
> Cuando dice que es muger
> Para casarse con otro. (206-B)

Doristo's expression is apparently intended to make fun of the female's obstinate insistence on marriage, but this was the only way in which a woman could obtain independence from paternal authority. It also tends to explain, in rustic tones, the Duchess' inclination to marry a second time.

Doristo, therefore, represents the young man unwilling to abide by the authority of his grandfather, whose age is intended to give, in

part, an idea of the antiquity of the rules he is trying to impose on his grandson. Doristo's position also meant that not only young women were subjected to the arbitrary commands of authoritarian relatives, but that young men were also crushed under them.

Doristo, however, is not able to overcome his grandfather's opposition to his desire to marry Bartola until he makes up the story that she is pregnant. This new contingency represents a completely new problem. Bartola's pregnancy, without being married, means that her honor is lost and as a consequence, her family's. Arsindo, Bartola's father, present during the argument between Doristo and his grandfather, Melanpo, demands satisfaction and this can only be obtained through matrimony or blood shedding. All three men understand the critical turn the situation has taken and the marriage is reluctantly accepted by the irate grandfather so that, despite his threats of marrying against his grandfather's opposition, Doristo finds a way to obtain Melampo's consent in the end.

The happy result of Bartola's feigned pregnancy presents a dramatic contrast to the fate of the protagonists, for whom the Duchess's pregnancy marks the first step towards their tragedy. It also points out that the peasants adopted the logical and peaceful solution to their problem. It is true that this marriage did not involve as many complications as the Duchess's, but the fact remains that they applied the only remedy possible to an act that could not be undone.

Lope also added a taste of national flavor to his play by making some of his characters discourse on the nature and force of friendship, another ingenious maneuver to sustain the verisimilitude of his play. True friendship meant that friends were to honor one another. Unfaithfulness to a true friend led to the staining of one's reputation, which was closely connected to one's honor. "La asimilación del honor a la reputación determina que el honor no dependa de su propietario, sino de la opinión de los demás, rigiendo y regulando las relaciones diversas en sus diversas áreas" (Díez Borque 298).

The first character to allude to the ties of friendship in the play is Urbino when he sees Libia giving Antonio a note sent by the Duchess:

> La grande amistad Antonio
> Que hemos tenido los dos,
> De que sospecho que vos
> Teneys cierto el testimonio,
> A pediros me obligó
> Todo lo que aveys oydo,
> Mas pues aveys respondido
> A lo del papel que no
> Acabóse la amistad,

Desobligado me aveys. (203-A)

The negative response to his petition implies that Antonio distrusts Urbino, who finds himself at liberty then, to turn against the former without fear of acting dishonorably since it was Antonio, who, by his action, broke the friendship. But the character that really stresses the obligation that friendship puts on a man's honor is Otavio. In the scene where Julio and the Duchess are arguing about the damage done to the reputation of the Aragonian house by her indiscretion, Otavio interferes, provoking the following exchange:

O. ... no pudiera
la Duquesa de Amalfi aver pensado,
cuanto más cometido tal baxesa.
D. Que tu vienes aquí? *O*. Pues quien pensavas?
D. De qué te toca a ti la sangre nuestra?
No eres Medicis tu *O*. Si, yo soy Medicis
Sangre en que ha habido Reyes, y Pontífices.
O. Por donde tienes los Aragones?
O. Por amistad, que es la más noble sangre,
Y el quartel de las armas de más honra. (220-A)

Otavio's remark clearly indicates that he equates the ties of friendship with the ties of blood. Both Otavio and Urbino are, therefore, emphasizing the value of a principle that was cherished by the Spanish people.

The examples presented above show how Lope strove to preserve his play within the bounds of verisimilitude. He was fully aware that the public expected a story that could be possible, as implied in his *Arte Nuevo de Hacer Comedias*: "Guárdense de imposibles porque es máxima / que solo ha de imitar lo verosímil" (879). One advantage that he had in *El Mayordomo de la Duquesa de Amalfi* was that he was dealing with a story from a foreign land and of foreign people, which allowed for certain liberties, but in the overall scheme he had to ground it on Spanish bases to serve the public's wide acceptance.

> The Spanish 'comedia' at the time that Lope was writing for the stage was a sensitive instrument, which, if it did not reflect in all cases the actualities of the social, political, and religious life of the Spanish people, at least recorded their fixed beliefs, their fantasies and their aspirations. (Villarejo 32)

The relationship between the representations on the stage to real life were expected to be so close that "the dramatists had to take into account at all times the cherished beliefs and prejudices of the multitude as they sought to secure its applause" (Villarejo 33).

The important question is whether this interest of Lope in secur-

ing his audience's applause diminished the quality of his work. To a certain extent, it apparently did; he was conscious of the flaws that his inclination to satisfy the public created. But he understood that the public's bad taste had been conditioned by the mediocrity of many of his predecessors:

> Mas porque, en fin, hallé que las comedias
> Estaban en España en aquel tiempo,
> No como sus primeros inventores
> Pensaron que en el mundo se escribieran,
> Mas como las trataron muchos bárbaros
> Que enseñaron el vulgo a sus rudezas;
> Y así se introdujeron de tal modo,
> Que quien con arte ahora las escribe
> Muere sin fama y galardón; que puede,
> Entre los que conocen de su lumbre,
> Más que razón y fuerza, la costumbre. (877)

Only by gradually exposing the public to a refinement of the works could it finally be brought to develop a taste for fine drama. He proposed to carry out his gradual education by briefly sketching what he considered the appropriate structural pattern to be followed by all playwrights:

> En el acto primero ponga el caso,
> En el segundo enlace los sucesos
> De suerte que, hasta el medio del tercero
> Apenas juzgue nadie en lo que pasa. (879)

El Mayordomo de la Duquesa de Amalfi is a faithful representation of the pattern. There is no deviation from it and the confusion originated by the title page, where the play is called a "comedia" and in the end a "tragedia," testifies to its close application. It is not until almost the end of the play that the action really affects a tragic mood. The diversity of probabilities that this technique produces is magnificent, as discussed in the following pages.

As Lope clearly expresses in his theory, in the first act of the play he makes the exposition of the case. As Antonio declares his love for the Duchess, partly shocking the audience with such daring, the appearance of Otavio with similar feelings provokes a false expectation of furious antagonism between the two; it is false because Otavio never really presents an obstacle to Antonio. In any case, their love for the same woman evokes the thought of a possible tragedy, a possibility that is strengthened when Antonio, after being assured of the Duchess's love, says:

> Bien sé que ha de costar
> La vida si a sus hermanos
> Llegan mis intentos vanos,

Mas donde podrá emplear
Un hombre tan bien la vida. (203-B - 204-A)

But the following scenes, in which the peasants shed some humor on the action and the passive tranquility of the second Act, suggest an atmosphere for a happy resolution. This creates confusion in the expectations of the audience. Even the third Act begins with a peaceful mood. At no time do any of the characters behave in such a way as to suggest a potential for violence until the appearance of Julio de Aragón. With him the darkness of evil is brought into the play, and, although he seems to be appeased for a while, there is always the sensation that his Machiavellian mind is brooding some evil project. And in fact he is planning a monstrosity: the murder of his sister and her family, thus committing a grotesque crime "in a play that otherwise neither in language nor in situation indulges the grotesque" (Loftis 29). This final incident, carried out so suddenly and unexpectedly, supports the idea expressed by many critics that Lope's "tragedia" differed from his "comedia" only in that the former ended sadly while the latter ended happily. Thus, one brief scene in the play frustrated all previously encouraged expectations of a "they lived happily ever after" ending. It was perhaps this ability of Lope to thwart the audience's expectations, and the scarcity of tragic elements that led critics like Edwin S. Morby to conclude that "his 'tragedia al estilo español' is too rarely a tragedy, though its merit may be enormous" (205).

Undoubtedly, *El Mayordomo de la Duquesa de Amalfi* is a tragedy. What makes it fluctuate on the borderline between tragedy and comedy is its modernity. Lope assimilated some of the techniques of his predecessors, eliminated others, and added a great many details of his own, creating, as a result, a new kind of tragedy very closely related to his new kind of comedy. Speaking of the pre-Lopean tragedians, Alfredo Hermenegildo comments:

> Estos autores escriben tragedias que persiguen una enseñanza moral, con amontonamientos de muertes y truculencias. Generalmente, buscaron la lección final y, para conseguirlo, no dudaron en multiplicar las peripecias sangrientas y refinadas crueldades que asustaron a la elegancia espiritual de Moratín. En general supeditan la acción trágica a la acción moral y convierten al héroe en personaje anormal. (160)

Lope certainly did retain the desire to provide a moral in his play, but not at the expense of the verisimilitude of his characters. And more important, he presented it with a certain degree of flexibility, so that it could be accommodated by each member of the audience according to the intensity of his/her moral standards. This ability of

Lope becomes evident in that some would condemn the Duchess's rebellion as an act of pure lust, while others would consider her a victim of the circumstances. Yet, in either case, by the time the Duchess and Antonio are killed, the audience has been presented so many proofs of the innocence and purity of their love that despite its knowledge (even the most reluctant ones) of the impropriety of their marriage, it is moved to pity and forgiveness.

If Lope retained the moral lesson, however, he eliminated or avoided in great part the presentation of carnages on the stage. In *El Mayordomo de la Duquesa de Amalfi*, the bloody scene and the sophisticated use of mangled bodies, to torture the tragic heroine beyond reason, are relegated to the very end of the last Act. His tragic characters throughout the play seem very human and, rather than a tendency to focus on their limitations, there is an emphasis on their consistency. Their integrity remains strong against the storm that threatens to destroy them. As Vossler says, "el teatro de Lope no muestra preferencia por los caracteres capaces de cambio y condicionados temporalmente, sino por los caracteres constantes y dotados de estabilidad, por los temperamentos crónicos del voluble y del obstinado" (339). Therefore, it can be said, without the least apprehension of doubt, that Lope has polished the over-elaborated tragedy that he inherited from his predecessors into a finer work.

The influence of Seneca, strongly responsible for the tragedy of horror of the last quarter of the sixteenth century, is also noted in the theater of Lope:

> Por ejemplo la venganza (Tiestes) aparece en España, pero modificada por un especial código de honor ... La importancia de la fortuna está en nuestro teatro con su más pura forma senequiana, principalmente en las obras del favorito caído. (Hermenegildo 162)

Julio's revenge is not awakened by the murder of any member of his family but because of an offense to his honor. He is the descendant of the Senecan tragic hero, deprived of his tragic aura and of all heroic qualities, and his relentless persecution of the protagonists serves to strengthen the Senecan stoicism in them. They show a stoical view of death, not caring if they die the minute after their happiness has been obtained: "Du. Por ti no hay muerte alguna. Ant. Por ti es vida / la muerte" (206-A). And there is the usual expectation of being favored by the Goddess Fortune: Du. Ay Antonio que adoro esos pies tuyos. / Ant. Detenga en mi los suyos la fortuna" (206-A), which is, as usual, a wasted plea. They are tricked by the treacherous goddess and irretrievably doomed. But deep down one feels that not all the blame can be ascribed to Fortune; the lovers have

their share.

With Lope's peculiar structural pattern of tragedy, and the diversity of suggestions that it produces, one feels that the lovers will be able to escape and live happily in some far away land. The meeting of the Duchess and Antonio at Ancona, after such a long time has gone by, makes possible the idea that they are about to cross the bridge from the land of suffering into the land of happiness and tranquility. It is also suggested that the lovers will be banished and that, in spite of the separation from the homeland, they will be able to turn some remote corner of the earth into a small paradise. There is, as well, the possibility, although very short-lived, that the couple will be allowed to remain in Amalfi under the protection of the young Duke.

And finally, throughout the play, the power of love is constantly emphasized, encouraging the illusion that in the final encounter, love will prove stronger than hate, as when the Duchess says:

> Tengo esperanza en el cielo
> Que moverá a mis hermanos
> La sangre que dellos tengo.
> La inocencia destos niños
> Y el valor, partes, e ingenio
> Del señor Antonio. (217-A - 217-B)

But the outcome is contrary to our expectations and hate proves stronger than love. The Duchess and Antonio are too full of trust and confidence in their enemies, and thus are not properly armed to counter the criminal forces moving against them. Their excess of virtue disqualifies them to do battle with the machinations of evil. Like their children, their main weakness is innocence, one of the facts that arouses the most pity in their fall. And so, it is by this diversity of probabilities that their tragedy, when it occurs, is more moving.

This leads us directly into the heart of Lope's tragedy. The Duchess's life as a young widow must have been a difficult one. Condemned to present an exemplary image to her subjects, she was denied the right to seek her own happiness, since her position demanded that whatever change she made in her court had to be one of convenience, whether or not it brought her pleasure. And then she met the man that, in her eyes, was perfection itself:

> Es porque su entendimiento
> Su persona, su valor,
> Pienso que engendran amor
> En el más helado intento.
> Que bien habla, que bien mira

Que bien escribe, y entiende
Qualquiera cosa que emprende,
Su condición no te admira?
No te espanta su buen modo?
Su verdad, su trato honesto,
Su vestir noble y compuesto,
Y su verdad sobre todo?
Que bien que pone los pies
A un caballo, que bien canta,
Que gracia. (201-A)

She falls madly in love with him. Her heart, blinded by Cupid, can only pursue the paths of love because, at this stage, for her "A todo vano temor / cierra el casarme las puertas" (201-A). The Duchess discovers that her love is matched and through a secret marriage (the dream of all lovers), she and Antonio are, in the eyes of God, free to love each other. Soon the fruits of their union are born as a testimony of their undiminishing passion. The children increase their faith in that the absolute power of their love could bring down all barriers and win all resentful hearts to their cause. The lovers' actions, behavior, and expressions denote optimism by far too great to be held under the adverse circumstances that govern their destinies. They have flown into a world of their own, remote from the crude restrictions of the Duchess's court.

Behind their escape from reality can be distinguished the aspiration of the playwright, of whom, Silverman observes:

> With his unflagging optimism, knew how to transmute the bitterness and disenchantments of reality into the pure gold of an exultant, exemplary, lyrical, and ethical sublimation of life in seventeenth-century Spain. In this way, he achieved an equilibrium for his tortured soul and a source of unmatched pleasure for his audience. (185-86)

The author's optimistic view of life and the world, with its potential for improvement, invaded the world of the play to the point that death surprised the lovers innocently dreaming of happiness beyond the sea. Antonio, even after his first fall under the effects of poison, suspects only that "Algo me ha de suceder" (222-B). He gives no indication whatsoever that the treachery of Julio has crossed his mind, and leaves the stage without a word of hatred or animosity. And almost the same happens with the Duchess. She comes to her brother expecting to find him reconciled to her beloved and instead finds out that her life is escaping her,

Y apercíbete a morir,
Que tienes el pecho lleno
De un abrazador veneno, (223-A)

and to be shown the cruelty committed with her loved ones. This last

act of savagery on the part of Julio, although it might seem slightly far-fetched, immediately brings to mind the tragic death of John the Baptist. The death of both men comes as a result of being loved by a woman of a high social rank—Antonio dies for accepting her love, John the Baptist for rejecting it. In both cases the deaths were ultimately unnecessary, and the exhibition of the heads on platters an attempt to satisfy the whims of two sadistic and proud avengers. The effect produced by the disclosure of the severed heads is one of waste and sorrow. This gruesome spectacle, therefore, reinforces the image of the innocent sacrificed in the eyes of the audience. One can only feel that their lives have been sacrificed needlessly by those who attempted to shake their virtue and integrity unsuccessfully.

What is somewhat surprising is that Julio did not extend his revenge to the loyal servants of the Duchess, and even far more amazing that he did not respond violently to the young Duke's challenge. The latter, justly infuriated, acts according to the code of honor, challenging his uncle to armed combat. Julio, however, avoids the fight. Yet, the reaction of both men, so different in the face of similar circumstances, presents the audience with an opportunity to contrast the two characters. The young Duke has proven to be merciful, a good son, a good brother, and an even better friend. He reacts more understandingly to his mother's actions, and his noble behavior leads him to accept Antonio as his father:

> Antonio, pues ya mi madre
> Como a padre te me dio,
> Bien puedo llamarte yo
> Una y muchas veces padre. (222-B)

In general, the young Duke is able to forgive his mother and accept his brothers as his equals. He is, therefore, the embodiment of the just, noble, and flexible ruler, always willing to listen to reason and even more so to forgive than to punish. In Julio, on the other hand, we are presented with the proud, ruthless, and inflexible nobleman who will not tolerate the mistakes of others. He proves to be an unscrupulous fratricide, an unmerciful uncle, a very poor friend, and an overall tyrant. In the young Duke is seen, despite his threats to live for revenge only, that stability has finally come to Amalfi. Furthermore, his abrupt breach of relations with his uncle tends to imply that justice will not be outraged, that under him, justice will be tempered with mercy, eliminating the skeptic view of justice originated by Julio's action. In a word, as A. Gasparetti says, the generosity of the young Duke makes Julio's perversity appear in its full monstrosity (401).

Generally speaking, we can say that Lope de Vega's tragedy,

El Mayordomo de la Duquesa de Amalfi, served the author as a vehicle to present certain principles of his society that were being questioned by the new generation of the age. Lope does not take an inflexible stand on the issues being discussed, but he does offer different alternatives and hints at certain conclusions without disrupting the essential bases of society. He makes his suggestions without insistence because "ni en su vida ni en su obra Lope fue nunca disidente; su vida se sentía identificada con la de su pueblo y su obra expresa esa identificación" (Alonso 3). So, he takes the theme of the honor play, which he had turned into a serious dramatic one, differing greatly from its initiator, Cueva, who had presented it from a "perspectiva crítica de marcado interés ridiculizador" (Hermenegildo 308), and dramatizes a family situation that to many of the spectators resembled actuality.

The audience's problem in deciding the rightfulness or wrongfulness of the protagonist's actions arises from the fact that the motivations of these characters (persecuted and persecutors) are, to a certain extent, rightfully justified. Be it an emotional or a social reason that propels them, their actions are perfectly understandable. The deviations from normality through excess, however, lead to tragedy. By overemphasizing Julio's attachment to the code of honor and his unflinching persecution of the transgressors of his honor, the author exposes the character's selfish and tyrannical authority. The Duchess's disadvantageous position (and indirectly all women's), is also brought into focus with a silent plea for better treatment, and with the hope that women be seen as human beings, not objects. Similarly, the problems of honor and authority among the peasants are presented as in need of certain changes and updating. Melampo's old world must adapt to Doristo's new one.

Thus, Lope, by keeping close attention to the tastes and preferences of his audience, was able to present to them alternative ways of dealing with their every day life situations. In this sense he came to be identified as part of the Spanish way of life of the era. And his "tragedia," with all its characteristics of "comedia," became a point of reference between the old tragedy of the late sixteenth century and the one written during the following by authors like Rojas Zorrilla, Calderón, and others.

Ismael Rivera-Rodríguez
Department of English
University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez

Works Cited

Alonso, Amado. "Lope de Vega y sus Fuentes." *Thesaurus*, 8 (1952): 1-24.

Astrana Marín, Luis. *Vida Azarosa de Lope de Vega.* 2nd ed. Barcelona: Editorial Juventud, S.A., 1941.

Díez Borque, José María. *Sociología de la Comedia Española del Siglo XVII.* Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 1976.

Gasparetti, Antonio. "Giovanni Battista Giraldi e Lope de Vega." *Bulletin Hispanique*, 32 (1930): 372-403.

Hermenegildo, Alfredo. *La Tragedia en el Renacimiento Español.* Revised edition of *Los Trágicos Españoles del Siglo XVI.* Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1977.

Larson, Donald R. *The Honor Plays of Lope de Vega.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977.

Loftis, John. *"The Duchess of Malfi* on the Spanish and English Stages." *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama*, 12 (1969): 25-31.

Morby, Edwin S. "Some Observations on Tragedia and Tragicomedia in Lope" *Hispanic Review*, 11 (1943): 185-209.

Schevill, Rudolph. *The Dramatic Art of Lope de Vega, Together with La Dama Boba.* Berkely: University of California Press, 1977.

Silverman, Joseph H. "Lope de Vega's Last Years and His Final Play, *The Greatest Virtue of a King." The Texas Quarterly*, 6, No. 1 (1963): 174-86.

Vega Carpio, Félix Lope de. *Comedia Famosa del Mayordomo de la Duquesa de Amalfi.* Barcelona: Sebastián Cormellas, 1618.

_____. El Arte de Hacer Comedias in *Obras Escogidas: Estudio Preliminar, Biografía, Notas y Apéndices de Federico Sainz de Robles.* Vol. II. Madrid: Aguilar, 1964-69.

Vossler, Karl. *Lope de Vega y su Tiempo.* 2nd ed. Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1940.

JESÚS DÍAZ: EL CINE COMO TEXTO Y PRETEXTO PARA LA LITERATURA

Ana María Rodríguez-Vivaldi

El cine es una forma de producción artística que pertenece al siglo XX, y es quizás tanto causa como efecto de los cambios de perspectiva que prevalecieron en ese siglo. Causa, porque las técnicas cinematográficas han dado paso a nuevas formas de ver y de decir, sobre todo a formas de expresión directa, sin mediadores que nos prejuicien a pensar como ellos o dirijan abiertamente nuestra lectura. Efecto, en el sentido de que el siglo XX se convirtió en uno de experimentación en las artes, donde los medios de comunicación masiva como el cine, la televisión y la radio se convirtieron en vehículos aceptables de la expresión artística, influyendo así en el triunfo de la fragmentación y el relativismo por sobre toda noción de absoluto. A su vez, y dada su dependencia en maquinaria, laboratorios, electricidad y métodos de comercialización modernos, es razonable afirmar que el cine es una de las primeras y grandes respuestas del arte al reto de la industrialización, una forma de aprovechamiento de las posibilidades tecnológicas en pro de lo estético que hoy en día está siendo emulada en la informática.

Cuando aparece, el cine no es más que una máquina que registra fotografías en movimiento, las "escenas de la vida" de los hermanos Lumiére, por ejemplo. Cuando los cineastas descubren que ese registro neutro de ciertas imágenes, objetos o figuras puede organizarse en una construcción que "cuenta" acontecimientos y que se desarrolla como espectáculo, el cine quedará ligado a los otros medios de expresión que hacen lo mismo, a saber, el cuento y la novela (por su calidad narrativa) y el teatro (por la dramaturgia escénica y los actores). Respecto al cuento y la novela, el cine reclamará desde el principio ese lenguaje narrativo mediante las imágenes y luego los sonidos. A pesar de las diferencias obvias entre la comunicación escrita y las imágenes audiovisuales cinemáticas, ya era obvio entonces que ambos se aproximaban al querer

contar una historia determinada, al tener un interés inherente y un gusto estético por la manera en que se cuenta una historia y por lo que se cuenta en sí.

También desde el principio, el cine utilizará la literatura como fuente para obtener temas y argumentos, dándose principalmente a través de las llamadas adaptaciones que se siguen efectuando hoy en día.[1] Al pasar el tiempo, con el desarrollo del medio y el acceso al mismo, muchos futuros escritores integrarán el cine a su formación cultural (desde Borges hasta Fuentes, Vargas Llosa, García Márquez, Puig, entre otros) asimilando elementos estilísticos que luego integrarán a sus obras. Se produce eventualmente una relación simbiótica en que la literatura incorpora técnicas y temáticas del cine en su producción, de igual forma que el cine lo había hecho desde sus principios.

El autor que nos ocupa también forma parte de ese proceso de aprendizaje cultural. Jesús Díaz nace en La Habana en 1941, en una época donde en Cuba se veían películas de todo el mundo. A pesar de que la producción local era escasa (de 1930 a 1958 sólo se produjeron 80 filmes) más de 1.5 millones de cubanos asistían al cine cada semana, de una población de 7 millones más o menos en la década del cincuenta. Recuerda Néstor Almendros, quién vivió esos años anteriores a la revolución, que en Cuba se mostraban diferentes tipos de filmes porque casi no había control gubernamental; se pasaban producciones norteamericanas, aun las producciones tipo B, que rara vez saltan a otros mercados, y también películas mexicanas, españolas, argentinas, francesas, e italianas. Casi 600 filmes eran importados cada año, y los censores eran sumamente tolerantes. Por ello, La Habana era un paraíso para los amantes del cine. (King, Magical Reels 145). Esas décadas del cuarenta y el cincuenta verán un impulso hacia la fundación de cinematecas y los comienzos de un desarrollo de la industria local que, una vez triunfe la revolución, llevará a que se aumente la producción local de largometrajes a más del doble en menos de treinta años (entre 1959 y 1987, Cuba produjo 164 películas). En la segunda mitad del siglo, y particularmente en la década de los sesenta, a raíz de las directrices ideológicas de la revolución, Cuba se enfrascará en el fomento de la industria cinematográfica local en miras a sustituir en el ideario colectivo esas películas de Hollywood que habían sido por tanto

[1] Dos ejemplos cubanos son *Cecilia* (Humberto Solas, 1982) basada en la novela de Cirilo Villaverde y *Concierto barroco* (coproducción cubano-mexicana, dirigida por Paul Leduc en 1989) basada en la novela de Alejo Carpentier.

tiempo el paradigma para el público cubano y de diseminar su mensaje político-social. Este fomento, liberado por el Instituto cubano del Arte y la Industria Cinametográficos o ICAIC y representado por el apoyo económico gubernamental de la tarea de filmar, le da la oportunidad a una serie de jóvenes cineastas, Jesús Díaz entre ellos, de desarrollarse en la escritura de guiones, y en la dirección, producción y distribución de muchos filmes y documentales que hoy en día son considerados clásicos dentro de la historia cinematográfica latinoamericana. Podemos citar a artistas como Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Julio García Espinosa, Humberto Solas, Octavio Gómez, Sergio Giral, y Pastor Vega como varios de los que desarrollarán un estilo experimental y muchas veces subversivo de las convenciones del cine hollywoodense (cine cubano). A pesar de los altos y bajos de la producción, surgen obras como *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (1968), *Lucía* (1968), *El otro Francisco* (1973), *La última cena* (1976), *Retrato de Teresa* 1978, *Cartas del parque* (1988) y *Fresa y chocolate*, entre muchas otras, que representan ante el mundo lo más granado de la cinematografía cubana.[2]

Jesús Díaz se inicia en la literatura en los años sesenta, obteniendo el Premio Casa de las Américas en 1966 con el libro de relatos *Los años duros*. Sin embargo, al igual que muchos otros intelectuales y artistas, perderá el respaldo del gobierno, particularmente a partir del caso Padilla en 1971, y buscará amparo en el ICAIC, que se había convertido en una especie de protector del pluralismo artístico y proveía un espacio a artistas que se veían relegados por su deseo de experimentación en otras instituciones. Desde allí proseguirá su labor escribiendo guiones, y dirigiendo dos filmes: Polvo *rojo y Lejanía.* Ya, sin embargo, va sintiendo una creciente insatisfacción con el rumbo que ha tomado la revolución en Cuba. Esto se hará patente en obras como *Las iniciales de la tierra* (1987), una novela crítica de la revolución, y *Las palabras perdidas* (1992). Ambas novelas fueron publicadas en España, escapándose un poco a la censura del gobierno cubano. Sin embargo, ese mismo año de 1992 publicará un ensayo en Zurich que luego será reproducido en muchos periódicos de Europa y América. En él ("Los anillos

[2] En los últimos años, la gestión cinematográfica del ICAIC ha sufrido dada la carestía económica que, entre 1990 y 1993, provocó una verdadera crisis de la cual todavía no se recuperan. Se entra entonces en un período de producción multinacional con capitales extranjeros, particularmente europeos, que modifican la producción cubana para acoplarla a gustos o temas de interés de las naciones auspiciadoras. Esto ha llevado a una merma en la calidad y, sobre todo, a un alejamiento de formas y temas que definieron el cine cubano clásico. (Acosta)

de la serpiente") Díaz hace una crítica profunda de lo que ve como el fracaso del gran proyecto utópico que tanto sentido le había dado a su existencia. El ensayo le valió una carta del Ministro de Cultura cubano condenándolo al exilio. Es en ese exilio donde publica, en 1996, *La piel y la máscara* (Siemens 116).

La novela gira en torno a la filmación de una película homónima que se efectúa en la Cuba de los noventa, la Cuba que está sufriendo la carestía económica y la problemática social que surge por ser una anomalía, por persistir en el comunismo en el vacío de la era poscomunista. Como texto de su novela, Díaz se inspira en la filmación de su propia película *Lejanía*, que escribió y dirigió en 1985.[3] Se dan ciertas coincidencias entre ambos textos, fílmico y narrativo, que le otorgan a la lectura de la novela un nivel metaliterario donde lo real se hace cómplice de la ficción y la completa, donde la existencia del film obliga a asimilar la ficción narrativa como una recreación de una realidad particular, vivida por el autor.[4] En *Lejanía*, como en la novela, se presenta un melodrama de corte doméstico donde la madre exilada retorna de Miami para reencontrarse con su hijo, quien la rechaza. Con ella regresa también una sobrina, que vuelve para recobrar sus raíces a través de la experiencia sensorial de La Habana que dejó atrás cuando niña. Ambos textos recrean el dolor del exilio y el sentimiento de enajenación experimentado, particularmente el de la joven que se encuentra oscilando entre dos culturas. Por ejemplo, una escena que se da en ambos textos presenta a la sobrina subida al techo de la casa declamando unos versos de la poeta cubana Lourdes Casal que resumen su conflicto interno (147). El exilio se transforma en una obsesión para cada personaje, asumiendo varias caras: exilio como deseo, como realidad, como necesidad, como amenaza, como abandono. Exilio, también, como expresión de escape de la propia vida y de los problemas que la hostigan. Eventualmente, el exilio se transfomma en símbolo del

---

[3] El filme *Lejanía* explora el género del melodrama político. Para más detalles, ver el artículo de S. Travis Silcox "'Represento el pasado': Political Melodrama and Jesús Díaz's *Lejanía*."

[4] En esta utilización de lo cinemático para lo literario, Jesús Díaz tiene predecesores importantes en las figuras de, por ejemplo, Vicente Huidobro, quien en 1928 publica una llamada novela fílmica *Mio Cid Campeador* dedicada al famoso actor Douglas Fairbanks; de Borges y Bioy Casares, con la publicación de dos cuentos-guiones *Los orilleros* y *El paraíso de los creyentes* en 1951; de Rulfo, con *El gallo de oro*: de García Márquez, quien reescribió un guión para una película titulada *Eréndira* como cuento, y en *Doce cuentos peregrinos* incluye la reescritura de varios más. No hay que olvidar tampoco a Manuel Puig, que en *El beso de la mujer araña* elabora narrativamente la reescritura e invención de varios filmes.

escape que estos seres añoran en lo más recóndito de sí mismos y que logran a través de la máscara que se ponen al actuar.

La estructura de la novela emula el ojo de la cámara al separar la narración en segmentos narrados por voces diferentes, y enfocando la perspectiva de cada segmento en los pensamientos y problemática del actor/personaje que está sirviendo como narrador. Así, se alterna entre las cinco personas y sus máscaras: el Oso/Fernando; Ofelia/Iris, Mayra/Elena, Mario/Oreste y Ana/Lydia. Cada binomio actúa como lo haría la cámara, permitiéndonos como público/lector adentrarnos en la problemática distinta y específica de cada uno. En ese sentido, cada fragmento nos da un "primer plano" del personaje y de su actor, avanzando la historia a la vez que se inserta sincrónicamente en la sique del individuo. Lo que los une a todos es ese deseo implícito de escapar: distintos escapes y distintas formas de escape, pero presentes en todos. A su vez, la temporalidad del texto narrativo es la de la película: la novela comienza cuando se inicia la filmación; llegando en ocasiones, aunque no siempre, a interrumpir la acción si la filmación cesa. De igual forma, la escena final de la novela es la de la película, y su final abierto remite a la esperanza del director de poder darle sentido a la obra una vez esté en el proceso de edición final. En términos literarios, ese proceso nos corresponde a nosotros como lectores: nosotros somos los que ponemos orden y damos sentido a los fragmentos discursivos que conforman la narración.

La novela también se hace eco de la problemática de producir un filme en la Cuba del descalabro económico citando como ejemplos la carestía de negativo que limita el número total de tomas, la escasez de negativo especializado para filmar de noche, o los problemas de conseguir utilería tal como dólares, ropa o comida que otorguen veracidad a lo que se pretende representar. A su vez, se evidencia cómo ese descalabro ha afectado los valores de la población en sí, haciéndose mención de las jineteras o prostitutas que se pasean por ciertas avenidas, del robo de carteras como el que simulan para el personaje Lydia, y la corrupción del mercado negro. Una de las escenas más tragicómicas gira en torno, precisamente, a un refrigerador lleno de comida en casa de un supuesto contrabandista, mafioso y santero llamado Diablo Cuncún. Tras mucho sacrificio y dinero, habían conseguido suficientes elementos para que el refrigerador representara verdaderamente la posición de poder del Diablo Cuncún en medio de la pobreza circundante. Sin embargo, no se pudo hacer una segunda toma de los alimentos porque: "en el refrigerador no quedaba prácticamente ninguna de las provisiones,

que habían sido compradas con un crédito que a Camilo el Mago le costó dios y ayuda conseguir" (105). En un receso de quince minutos, todo había sido robado.

Otra de las dificultades de filmar en Cuba a la que se hace constante alusión, principalmente en las intervenciones del Oso, es la censura. El clima de inestabilidad política y de persecución está presente en la figura de Ibrahim, un policía que se hace pasar por gran admirador del Oso pero que por atrás convence a uno de los actores para que espíe e informe sobre cualquier cambio que pueda surgir en el libreto ya aprobado. Si vemos el mal, también vemos cómo lo curan: el Oso está convencido de que "el centro donde deben converger todas las fuerzas de mi empeño es la noción de ambigüedad" (23) es decir, si no está claro, no puede ser censurado. La obra oscila entonces entre un claroscuro, donde la problemática familiar esconde mensajes y críticas que un pueblo cómplice puede recuperar fácilmente.

La presentación de las dificultades a todo nivel y de la añoranza de escape que suscitan, matizada por la visión del autor que pasó por lo mismo pero que escribe desde el espacio de la libertad, le otorga a la novela una validez y un patetismo extraordinarios. Dado que Díaz escribe la novela en el exilio, puede retomar la temática de su filme inicial con una mayor profundidad, a la vez que da rienda suelta a su frustración y angustia por lo que no se logró después de tanta lucha.

El alter ego de Díaz en la novela es un famoso director conocido como 'el Oso', quien se ha dado a la tarea de filmar la que será quizás su última película, dado el clima económico negativo y la propia precariedad de su salud. El apodo nos da la clave de la reputación del personaje: por un lado apunta al hecho de que una de sus producciones iniciales, *En una campana*, le valió el máximo galardón del festival de Berlín, el "Oso de Oro". Esa película, sin embargo, no obtuvo la diseminación deseada en su propio país dado que las autoridades cubanas la rechazaron, llegando incluso al extremo de "no publicar siquiera la noticia del premio, orquestar contra ella una brutal campaña de prensa y exhibirla apenas durante cuatro días en salas llenas de policías de civil que además tenían órdenes de romperle la crisma a quien aplaudiera" (55). De tal forma fue subordinada y, con ella, su director, que ya nadie recordaba que el apodo había tenido su origen en ese premio. Por otro lado, la imagen de oso alude también a su carácter apasionado y a su físico rotundo. Como los osos, tiene momentos de furia y momentos en que intenta "abrazar", por decirlo así, a sus actores, principalmente

a las actrices jóvenes como la que encarna el papel de la sobrina, Lydia, en la película. Es en esta encrucijada vital que el Oso decide recuperar la libertad artística que ha perdido con esta nueva película que describe como "una tragedia que no correspondió a las expectativas del gobierno ni a las de los mandantes del exilio" (55-56). Esta nueva aventura lo puede llevar al fracaso, al ostracismo, al exilio y hasta el suicidio: "se trataba entre otras cosas, del adiós a una revolución cuyos aciertos, ya remotos, yo había aplaudido con vehemencia, cuyas brutalidades, excesos y locuras había callado culpablemente y ante la cual no quería aparecer como juez sino como testigo, como alguien que habla desde el vasto y difícil territorio de lo irremediable" (23). Pero no renuncia a hacerlo a pesar de su miedo; "lo hacía porque me daba la real gana" (56) concluye, en un acto de afirmación personal de sus derechos como artista. "Ignoraba ... si las autoridades me permitirían terminar siquiera de filmado y también ... si me autorizarían a editar y exhibir la película. Pero no tengo otra alternativa que cumplir conmigo y aquí estoy, dispuesto a echarlo todo al fuego..." (23). Si el Oso es el alter ego de Díaz, la visión se complica al añadirse el personaje de Fernando que el Oso representa como actor en la película. Fernando refuerza la visión de victimización y de fracaso de lo que fue una trayectoria en ascenso: "Se había consagrado a la revolución en cuerpo y alma, al costo de romper con su familia cuando ésta se largó a Miami, y había llegado incluso a ser ministro de Comercio Exterior del gobierno. Ocupaba ese puesto cuando se atrevió a llevarle la contraria a Fidel Castro en una reunión y desde entonces su estrella empezó a declinar. En el presente de la película administraba una fábrica de vinos que sólo producía polvo" (51). Fernando, al contrario de lo que ha hecho Díaz o pretende hacer el Oso, no se opone abiertamente a pesar de pensar que la revolución ha muerto. En cierta forma, la revolución da sentido a su existencia y negarla sería negarse a sí mismo. De esta forma, Díaz presenta dos imágenes que responden distinto ante la circunstancia exterior, pero cuyas conclusiones respecto al sistema son enteramente similares.

El Oso manifiesta la rebeldía del artista que ha visto pisoteada su obra, el deseo de venganza hacia aquellos que "pudieron darse el lujo de aplastar *En una campana* sin pagar apenas por ello" (156). Lograr otro triunfo internacional con la nueva película "se convertiría en un escudo, en una cuchilla capaz de cortar y devolver a mis manos el hilo del que pendía [su] destino" (156). Así, escribe este guión con la intención de escapar del yugo y la injusticia de ver su arte sometido al vaivén de la opinión oficial, y poder así recuperar su integridad artística, lo que lo define como ser humano. Si el lema

inventado por él para su personaje era “yo comprendo”, el lema del Oso es “yo filmo”.

Enfocarse en la doble personalidad de actor y personaje y de las confluencias y divergencias entre ambos seres es uno de los grandes aciertos de la novela. El proceso de pasar de ser uno para convertirse en el otro, y la necesidad de asumir la problemática, las opiniones, los sufrimientos, los defectos, las virtudes, la experiencia, en fin, de ese ser que representan, hace que los actores de la película tengan que enfrentar sus propios espectros y poner en evidencia sus propios conflictos. Constantemente se hace alusión a ese proceso, en especial si se toma en cuenta ese lema que cada actor ha inventado para resumir la esencia de su personaje. En el caso del Oso mencionamos ya que era “yo comprendo” y esa comprensión se manifiesta no sólo porque su personaje es el tío comprensivo que trata de facilitar la reunión de la familia, sino porque él, como director, tiene un papel paternalista que lo lleva a ayudar a que cada actor dé lo mejor de sí y para ello necesita estar en cierta sintonía con ellos; y porque, como viejo conocedor del sistema, tiene una verdadera comprensión de los peligros a los que se enfrenta su producción, su espacio y las personas que lo integran: Ese es también el caso de Ofelia, la actriz que hace el papel de Iris, la madre exilada que regresa a ver a los hijos, Omar y Orestes, que ha dejado atrás hace 10 años. Su lema es “yo reclamo” y ese exigente reclamo se da a varios niveles motivados por los encuentros entre ambas mujeres: actriz y personaje. En el caso de la actriz, ésta había permitido que su ex-marido se llevara a su hijo del país y ella se había quedado en Cuba ante la promesa de una carrera en el cine y una relación con el Oso que culminaría en matrimonio. Ese sentimiento de culpa escondido durante años, aflora ahora al tener que lidiar y encarnar la figura de esa otra madre que también abandonó a sus hijos y que, ante la imposibilidad de recuperarlos porque uno, Omar, ha muerto ahogado al lanzarse al mar en un intento de llegar a ella, y el otro, Orestes, la rechaza, negándole aun el apelativo de mamá, se suicida. Ofelia parte de su propia culpa y de su propio deseo de recuperar a su hijo alguna vez para darle autenticidad al personaje; sin embargo, el personaje la seduce, la posee en cierta forma, y su necesidad de reclamar esa parte de su pasado crece obsesivamente hasta llevarla a iniciar una relación amorosa seudoincestuosa con el actor que hace de hijo en la película. En su afán morboso de convertirlo en el hijo perdido. Ofelia va emulando el olor, los gestos y hasta la vestimenta de la verdadera madre del actor, causando en éste un caso agudo de impotencia. Constantemente oscila entre ser ella y ser la otra, y al final tiene que hacer un esfuerzo consciente por

recordar que ella no es la otra: "yo la encarnaba y comprendía pero no compartía su actitud e incluso ante la muerte necesitaba preservar cierta distancia con respecto a ella" (199). Su actuación como Iris coincide con el punto en su existencia en que necesita lidiar con los fantasmas de su pasado para enfrentarse al futuro incierto que la espera. De 45 años, y con un marido enfermo, prevé que su momento está pasando, que cuando el Oso no esté todo cambiará para ella. Su reclamo entonces no está dirigido sólo al pasado, sino que asume otro nivel y se vuelve una desesperada lucha por vencer el tiempo y la edad, por demostrar que todavía vale, que todavía es joven, que todavía es la mejor, que ella puede seguir siendo quien es. No le importa destruir las barreras de la moral o jugar con los límites de la cordura, lidiando peligrosamente con sus obsesiones y fantasmas para apoderarse de lo que quiere.

Otro de los actores, Mario, el que hace el papel del hijo, Orestes, demuestra conflictos que surgen de la existencia en un ambiente excesivamente controlado, y comparte con el personaje que representa la necesidad de enfrentarse a situaciones para las que no está preparado: "Por primera vez me sentía más seguro en mi personaje que en mi persona. Orestes, por lo menos, debía atenerse a un guión; en cambio, yo estaba condenado a decidir qué hacer a cada paso" (174). El mecanismo de defensa de ambos estará representado por el lema que Mario elige para Orestes: "yo oculto" lo cual no sólo se refiere al deseo de Orestes de esconderle a su madre que su hermano Omar ha muerto, sino también a la realidad de Mario, quien debe ocultar que él es el informante o chivato que el alto Mando ha infiltrado en la película para revelar todos los detalles que puedan atentar contra el dogma nacional. A su vez, Mario juega un doble juego ocultándole a su superior que su colaboración no es más que un intento de convencer al Mando de que es ciudadano confiable para que lo dejen salir del país acompañando la película. Su intención es escaparse a la primera oportunidad y exilarse en España donde lo espera su padre. Estos enredos se complican aún más cuando resulta que Mario también es blanco de los espías del gobierno, quienes graban sus conversaciones amorosas con Ofelia, y de Leoncio, el chofer del Oso que le sirve de espía a éste. Al final la visión es pesadillesca y sumamente crítica de la realidad cubana: un infierno donde todos se espían entre sí, y donde la lealtad se ha perdido en pro de la conveniencia personal.

Mayra es la actriz que representa a Elena, esposa de Orestes en el filme. Mayra reconoce el gran abismo que la separa de Elena en términos de carácter e historia pero esa diferencia le sirve de estímulo

para tratar de mejorar su propia vida: “Pensar en mi alter ego me daba seguridad, me hubiera gustado muchísimo haber sido como ella...” (62). El lema que crea para Elena, “yo defiendo”, es el que le da impulso para intentar ejercer un mayor dominio de su espacio, lo cual como Mayra le es difícil por su carácter tímido y sumiso. Para Mayra, Elena es una gata que lucha por sobrevivir, por escapar de su pasado como prostituta para crear un hogar con Orestes. Ante la amenaza de la llegada de Iris y Lydia, Elena se defiende como puede, y su revelación del gran secreto de la obra —cómo murió Omar, el hermano de Orestes—, a Iris, será el catalítico que llevará a ésta al suicidio y, por consiguiente, le dará el triunfo a Elena. A Lydia la vence con armas distintas: tras descubrir que Lydia y Orestes han hecho el amor, Elena se sentirá destruida, pero su comportamiento ante el intento de suicidio de Iris, y su intento por salvarla donando su propia sangre, elevarán al personaje a su sitial como pareja de Orestes otra vez, porque es en ella que Orestes se apoyará en su pena. La actriz, Mayra, constantemente cuestiona el comportamiento de su personaje como una forma de recriminación a su propio comportamiento, buscando escapar de sí misma y de lo que ella acepta como limitaciones propias: “En la vida real siempre me había comportado como mariposa o paloma, probablemente por cobardía ... Pero siempre quise ser otra; por eso estudié actuación ... Y a esa otra, a Elena, le inventé la biografías que a veces quise para mí” (28-29). De todos los actores, Mayra es quizás la menos problemática y conflictuada, pero llega a un entendimiento claro de la mujer que está representando y experimenta lo desconocido a través de esa otra piel.

La última actriz es Ana, quien esconde un gran secreto: su homosexualismo. Su deseo de escapar se manifiesta en que, cuando su pareja Mary Jo le reclama que deje la película y la amenaza con dejarla en la calle, ella se niega, en un deseo inconsciente de salir de esa relación negativa y entablar otra. Eso es lo que pasa efectivamente: al Mary Jo echarla de la casa, Ana le pide a Mayra que le permita pasar unos días en su apartamento y, según el Oso opinará más tarde, eventualmente formarán una nueva pareja, mucho más acoplada dado el carácter dulce de Mayra que le permite a Ana asumir el mando en la relación. Su personaje, Lydia, funciona bajo el lema de “yo busco”. En la biografía que Ana le crea al personaje, ese lema revela, por una parte, el deseo del personaje de reencontrarse con las raíces que perdió al irse de Cuba en su niñez; de recobrar la relación con su primo que fue interrumpida por su exilio; y de recuperar su sexualidad perdida tras una violación cuando era más joven. El personaje, como Ana, se encuentra entre dos mundos.

En el caso de Ana, los mundos son los de la sexualidad: aunque lesbiana, es vista como objeto del deseo por el Oso, quien intenta aprovecharse de ella pero es rechazado. Su sexualidad, a su vez, se da en un espacio donde la divergencia es vista como crimen, como corrupción y debe, por lo tanto, ser escondida. Ana, como Lydia, busca recobrar lo que otras personas le han arrebatado: Ana: la tranquilidad y el derecho a tener su propia carrera y hacer sus decisiones, y Lydia la compañía de su primo y La Habana de su niñez. Eventualmente, ambas logran obtener lo que buscan. Ana eventualmente elige la separación, se libra de las escenas de celos de Mary Jo al anteponer su profesión a su relación; Lydia logra la relación sexual con su primo, que había quedado en estado potencial con su exilio, y aunque es una relación transitoria porque éste se queda con Elena, el acto mismo para Lydia se convierte en una liberación de los traumas de su pasado: su contacto sensual le devuelve lo que había perdido.

Cada actor va pasando por un proceso de reconocimiento de sus ansiedades y sus necesidades gracias a la catarsis producida por la transmigración del espíritu del ser que inventan, al suyo propio. Su enfrentamiento a la vida artificial que animan los hace considerar y enfrentar esos ámbitos oscuros de sus propios seres. En cierta forma, al analizar a sus personajes llegan a conocerse mejor a sí mismos, y a lidiar con sus propios dilemas. La novela emula el proceso real por el que pasa todo actor de ponerse una máscara para poder representar a un ser distinto. Pero la novela apunta más allá, a un plano humano. El acto de escritura pone en evidencia las actuaciones mismas que todos efectuamos día a día para lidiar con los dilemas sociales y personales que nos rodean. Recoge nuestras aspiraciones, nuestros deseos de ser lo que no somos, y nuestro reconocimiento ontológico. El acto de filmar y lo que éste conlleva en términos de la preparación de sus actores, se convierte así en pretexto para presentar una alegoría de esa comedia humana que todavía sigue vigente y que alcanzará su apoteosis en el plano final.

En esa escena los cuatro personajes restantes acuden al entierro de Iris, unidos al fin por la tragedia de la muerte. De repente, el plano se complica por la presencia de un desfile de ciegos cuyo tropel envuelve y separa a los personajes. Las palabras del Oso "La marejada que avanzaba tras el féretro nos había desboradado definitivamente dejándonos a la deriva" (225) se convierten en el último momento de comprensión de su personaje; él, como Fernando en el plano, deberá aceptar la situación y tratar de derivar de ella el posible significado que le sirva para "revelar el sentido oculto en las

imágenes de aquella pesadilla" (225). Con esa escena final, se cierra el filme y la novela en una gran metáfora del contexto cubano al que están supeditados. *La piel y la máscara*, novela y filme, clausura así su comunicación, dejando en su público lector la gran interrogante del futuro. Texto y pretexto, el cine y su cómplice novelesco delegan en nosotros la misión de buscarle sentido a aquellas máscaras que intentamos representar, y pone punto final a nuestro escape a través de las imágenes evocadas por la palabra.

Ana María Rodríguez-Vivaldi
Washington State University

Textos citados

Acosta, Dalia. "Film Institute in Crisis at 39." *Inter Press Service*, New York; April 7, 1998. "Cine cubano" http://www.cinecubano.cu/historia/h largo4.htm

Díaz, Jesús. *La piel y la máscara* Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 1996.

King, John. *Magical Reels: A History of Cinema in Latin America* London: Verso, 1990.

Siemens, William. L. "Review of *La piel y la máscara*." World Literature Today 1997 (71): 116.

Silcox, S. Travis. "Represento el pasado: Political Melodrama and Jesús Díaz's *Lejanía*." *Journal of Film and Video* 44(3-4): 120.

Textos consultados

Burton, Julianne. *Cinema and Social Change in Latin America: Conversations with Filmmakers* Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986.

Pick, Zuzana M. *The New Latin American Cinema: A Continental Project* Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993.

Rowe, William and Vivian Schelling. *Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America* London: Verso, 1993.

Williams, Raymond L. *The Postmodem Novel in Latin America: Politics, Culture and the Crisis of Truth* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996.

"I WOULD HAVE DROWNED TO SAVE YOU SINKING": EMILY DICKINSON, POETRY AND WOMEN IN COMMUNITY

Roxanne Harde

> I am not suited dear Emily with the second verse-It is remarkable as the chain lightening that blinds us hot nights in the Southern sky but it does not go with the ghostly shimmer of the first verse as well as the other one.
>
> Susan Gilbert Dickinson to Emily Dickinson

> We are the only poets, and everyone else is *prose.*
>
> Emily Dickinson to Susan Gilbert Dickinson

In the last three decades, feminist scholarship on Emily Dickinson has discussed the importance of relationships with other women to Dickinson's poetry and life. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar point out the support Helen Hunt Jackson gave her (563).[1] Wendy Martin, in her examination of Dickinson's friendship with her sister-in-law Susan Gilbert Dickinson, argues that Dickinson's women friends "sustained her as an artist. Although practically no attention has been given to these friendships, they were the lifeline that permitted

[1] Actually, Gilbert and Gubar refer to Jackson as Dickinson's *only* completely supportive reader. However, their concern lies in Dickinson's publication history, something that Jackson insisted Dickinson should be doing, as she writes "you are a great poet—and it is wrong to the day you live in that you will not sing aloud" (L444a). In the eight extant letters from their correspondence, the affection between these women is apparent. But I do not include Jackson in my discussion of Dickinson's community, because I find equally apparent in their letters that Jackson is determined to see Dickinson in print, something Dickinson makes clear that she does not want. For example, Dickinson writes Loo of a letter from Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, "requesting me to aid the world by my chirrup more," and notes that after she declined, Phelps "might have been offended, or perhaps is extricating humanity from some hopeless ditch" (L380). While she shows more affection to Jackson, Dickinson does not allow herself to be popularized by the popular poet, nor does Dickinson include Jackson in the wider circle of her poetic community.

her to descend into her emotional depths" (82). Martha Nell Smith also privileges the importance of Susan to Dickinson's work, and argues that "to recover what can be known about Dickinson's most sustained literary relationship begins to supply a long-standing missing link in the chain of her poetic being" (41). Similarly, Suzanne Juhasz argues that "the literary nature of her relationship with Sue has importance for Dickinson far beyond the help it provides her in practicing her craft" (179). Stephanie Tingley contends that Dickinson's correspondence with Elizabeth Holland is "her most extended exploration of her vocation as poet" (195). Rather than seeing these friendships as discrete, Martin calls them Dickinson's "lifeline" (82), and Tingley notes "the poet's need for a network of close, sympathetic female friends" (183). Nobody has commented, however, on these relationships as a community of women. I aim to address this gap, for I find that Dickinson not only forges and maintains these largely epistolary friendships, but she constructs a community as she connects them to each other through introductions and frequent references. Furthermore, poetry was intrinsic to this community as these women functioned for Dickinson as sources of inspiration and passion, as collaborators and audience. The letters and poems Dickinson sent to these women seem to me a forum where she finds and enriches her female muse, where she develops her most enduring tropes, and where she centres her love and mutuality in the art of poetic comfort and consolation.

I take as my points of reference discussions by Adrienne Rich and Mary E. Hunt on female friendship as providing insight into living in a world defined by men, while creating the world as women imagine it could be. Rich contends that for our work we need a community of women, "on which we can draw; whom we envision as our hearers, our co-creators, our challengers; who will urge us to take our work further, more seriously, than we had dared; on whose work we can build. Women *have* done these things for each other, sought each other in community" (*On Lies* 214). Hunt argues that women's friendships allow them agency: to name their experiences on their own terms, to make decisions on the basis of their experiences, to live in relationships, and to form communities of accountability on the basis of those choices (16-17). Dickinson claims this agency in her relationships with many women, but I intend to focus on those that reflected her poetry in community. Her poetry was affected most by Susan, then Elizabeth Holland, and her cousins Louise and Frances Norcross.[2] She was closer to no one than her sister Lavinia,

[2] Dickinson's community included more women than these; for instance she

but until Vinnie found the drawer full of poems after Dickinson's death, poetry was not part of their relationship. While Dickinson did maintain relationships with men, chief among them Samuel Bowles and Thomas Wentworth Higginson, that included her work, there was direction but there was no collaboration, and the flavour of their correspondence is of student and "preceptor."[3] These men saw Dickinson's work as a largely idiosyncratic art, something she did in her spare time. Dickinson and her poetic community realized and fostered a more intrinsic connection between Dickinson's poetry and who she was. Audre Lorde articulates this connection of love and friendship between women to poetry, which she sees as the illumination by which we understand our lives. For Lorde, as for Dickinson, "poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change" (*Sister* 37). In her own life writing, Lorde explains that "every woman I have ever loved has left her print upon me, where I have loved some invaluable piece of myself apart from me—so different that I had to stretch and grow to recognize her. And in that growing we came to separation, that place where work begins" (*Zami* 255). For Dickinson, the place where work begins comes from her love for Susan, Holland, and the Norcrosses; outside of this community, "everyone else *is prose"* (L56).[4]

---

sent several poems to Sarah Tuckerman, also of Amherst. However those relationships were less consciously poetic. Dickinson does not discuss poetry or her poetics in them, and the poems are appended somewhat like the gifts of baked good or flowers that she often sent along with the letters. Interestingly, one might conjecture that, given the frequency and familiarity with which she discusses them with her friends, Dickinson might have seen George Eliot, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and the Brontës as part of her poetic community.

[3] Dickinson's relationships with these men, and others, has been the subject of much critical attention. See, in particular Richard Sewall's and Cynthia Griffin Wolff's biographies of the poet. Of Dickinson's relationships with men, the one with her brother is the most important, and is a close approximate of that with Susan, although it lacks the literary dimension.

[4] Because I rely so heavily on the Johnson and Ward *Letters*, I have elected to use the Johnson *Poems* instead of the new Franklin variorum edition of the poems. Poems are cited by number from the Johnson variorum edition, ie Poem 365, (P365). Letters are from the Johnson and Ward three volume edition, and are also cited by number, ie Letter 35, (L35).

"That Bird of mine"

Dickinson learned early who was poetry and who was prose. Her girlhood letters, increasingly fraught with anxiety over conversion, are self-consciously poetic and emotionally effusive. As she made choices about her faith and her vocation, letters to girlhood friends gradually give way to her correspondence with Susan Gilbert.[5] Their acquaintance began when Susan moved to Amherst in 1850, and she and her sister Martha quickly became "sisters" of the Dickinson girls. Carol Lasser describes this idea of "fictive kinship" between women as crucial bonds that committed both parties to lifelong "demonstrative affection, emotional mutuality, and the fulfillment of obligations to support and nurture" one another (169).[6] Susan eventually joined the family circle with her 1856 marriage to Austin Dickinson.[7] Elizabeth Holland is Dickinson's truly "fictive kin." They met in the early 1850s, and Holland was close to both Dickinson girls. From the beginning, Dickinson was self-consciously poetic in her correspondence to both Susan and Holland, as she was in her relationship with the Norcross sisters, Frances and Louise. Dickinson's "Little Cousins" on her mother's side and a generation younger, Fanny and Loo were favorites of the Dickinson girls and they visited frequently and corresponded regularly. From Dickinson's references to each of them in letters to the others, it is clear that these women formed a circle of mutual respect, affection, and support.

But more than this mutuality, Dickinson connects these women through poetry; common to her correspondence with each of them are Dickinson's thematic use of birds as representative singers and

---

[5] I have elected to refer to Susan Huntington Gilbert Dickinson as Susan. To Dickinson, she was Susie, then Sue or Susan. For all of Susan's names, there is no combination that does not also refer to someone else, hence my use of Susan.

[6] Dickinson pays homage to these sisters in several poems, among them "One Sister have I in our house" (P14, L197), sent to Susan, which makes clear the control Dickinson wields in choosing Susan and poetry, and in using each to make the other, and the poet, immortal. In addition, she often opens the letters to Susan, Holland, and the Norcrosses with "Sister."

[7] From the time of Letter 173, and "I have a Bird in spring," Dickinson sent hundreds of poems to others, but the majority of them went to Susan. Johnson, while meticulous in detailing in *The Letters* which poems were sent to Higginson and other literary people, includes only those sent to Susan that were attached to prose. One must read the notes and the appendices in *The Poems* to understand just how large a percentage of Dickinson's work went first to Susan.

as inspirations.[8] As early as 1854, Dickinson refers to Susan as a bird, whom she seeks in vain (L154). Soon after, in response to Susan's criticism of her unrepentant spirit, and as the culmination of their long disagreement on spiritual matters, Dickinson makes clear that she has chosen her path and the "darker spirit" that is her call to poetry and away from conversion. She begins "Sue—you can go or stay—There is but one alternative—We differ often lately, and this must be the last" and makes clear that if Susan cannot accept Dickinson's unconverted state, she will give up the relationship: "Sue-I have lived by this. It is the lingering emblem of the Heaven I once dreamed, and though if this is taken, I shall remain alone, and though in that last day, the Jesus Christ you love, remark he does not know me-there is a darker spirit will not disown it's child" (L173). Dickinson closes the letter by first setting forth Susan as singer in highly poetic language that also criticizes religious codes, "Few have been given me, and if I love them so, that for *idolatry*, they are removed from me—I simply murmur *gone*, and the billow dies away into the boundless blue, and no one knows but me, that one went down today. We have walked very pleasantly—Perhaps this is the point at which our paths diverge—then pass on singing Sue, and up the distant hill I journey on." The letter ends with "I have a Bird in spring," a poem that holds poetry as its central subject. In the poem, the elusive and fickle bird becomes an extended metaphor for art. The speaker expresses the patience and faith required to sustain the relationship between self and art as she sees the bird leave but tells her "doubting heart" what is gone may yet be held close. The poem ends "Knowing that Bird of mine ... Bright melody for me / Return." Margaret Homans argues that in this letter, "while she keeps declaring her love and concern for 'Susie' over and over, Dickinson is finally selfishly concerned most about herself, her feelings, her desires" (172). However, Julia Kristeva describes the early love/transference relationship as the first idea of the self ("Tales" 332), and it follows that in forming their first bond of intimacy, and in articulating her own ideology, Dickinson both risks her emerging sense of self, and proves that she has the ability to stand alone as well as in close engagement with another, both requirements for community. Furthermore,

[8] Emily Dickinson's construct of the female muse in bird form has been an example for women poets that followed, including Dorothy Livesay and Louise Bogan, who in turn influenced Adrienne Rich's and Audre Lorde's treatment of the muse. Before she began to use the sea as the place of women's poetry—before Rich in "Diving into the Wreck"—Livesay made clearer her progressive vision of the muse as a sudden and dazzling bird in "Dream Sequence I & II" (*Self* 194-5).

Jane Gallop concludes that "any daughter, that is, any woman, has a self that is not completely individuated but rather is constitutively connected to another woman. The formation of groups of women draw upon the permeability of female self-boundaries" (*Around* 51). Difficulty arises, of course, in that even in the face of necessary community, women need to express individuality, to be more than a constitutive part. The relationship with Susan allowed the narcissism necessary for metamorphosis, and the poet holds Susan as her primary critic, confidant, and friend.[9] Dickinson continues to use birds as metaphors for her vocation and she explains there is no language without Susan: "the Bird would be a soundless thing without Expositor" (L333).[10]

As Tingley notes, however, Dickinson uses the avian tropes most frequently with Holland (192-94).[11] Of Dickinson's other friendships with women, the one she held with Holland comes the closest to that with Susan. However, the flavor of this relationship was much different. Their friendship lacked the fervency that Dickinson had with Susan; there was affection, but not passion. Tingley argues that, "in this correspondence Dickinson creates a self-confident, authoritative persona, a poet" (184); she is very fond of Elizabeth Holland, but not at all dependent upon her. The first poem she sent Holland is a reprise of "I have a Bird in spring," in a letter where she relates being made uncomfortable by the sermon of a visiting minister, and the solemnity of her father and sister, who seem quite sure that Emily and Austin are not among the elect: "He preached such an awful sermon though, that I didn't much think I should ever see you again

---

[9] After their marriage in 1856, Austin and Susan settled in the Evergreens, next door to the Dickinson homestead. Dickinson's correspondence to Susan hereafter consists of long letters when Susan is away, notes sent over the hedge, and many, many poems. The maturity and import of their relationship is made obvious by the ease with which Dickinson banters about her own reprobation, an ease that expects Susan's continued acceptance and support, even in the face of her own staunch Congregationalism: "I hav'nt any paper, dear, but faith continues firm-Presume if I met with my 'deserts,' I should receive nothing. Was informed to that effect today by a 'dear pastor'" (L194).

[10] Susan is expositor and more than forum, and their correspondence over "Safe in their Alabaster Chambers," partially quoted in my epigraph, is a brief but intense editorial meeting (L238, P216). This note is one of the few extant pieces of Susan's writing, and it sets forth both her own poetic eye, and her recognition of Dickinson's genius. Dickinson responded to it with yet another second verse, and a note: "your praise is good-to me-because I *know* it *knows*-and *suppose*-it *means*-.

[11] Tingley points out that while she figures both herself and Holland as plain little birds, an apt description for both women, Dickinson's metaphor for herself is the songbird in flight, and Elizabeth Holland is the nesting bird (193).

until the Judgment Day, and then you would not speak to me, according to his story. The subject of perdition seemed to please him, somehow" (L175). Then she writes that she misses her friend and the summer greatly and hopes they will be together soon. She concludes with the final stanza, in prose, of the poem, thus linking her spiritual crises to her song and to Holland. After this poem and its claim of the bird, Dickinson continues to make clear her vocation to Holland in the same metaphor. At one point, she teasingly queries "Perhaps you think I *have* no bird, and this is rhetoric" (L182). Some years later, after she had sent several poems and Holland had been tardy in responding, Dickinson claims Holland's affection with the emphatic "My business is to love," and then articulates her vocation in a bird fable: 'I found a bird, this morning, down-down-on a little bush at the foot of the garden, and wherefore sing, I said, since nobody *hears?* One sob in the throat, one flutter of bosom—'*My* business is to *sing*'" (L269). The poetic voice seems torn between assurance of the calling and the need to have that assurance reinforced by her friend, by someone who understands her and supports her work.

I posit that Dickinson built her community of women partly to enable herself to build a collaborative and supportive relationship with her muse. Alison Assiter argues that "knowledge of reality is gained from the perspective of a community of broadly like-minded people ... Knowledge construction and validation are not isolated, individual activities, and the notion of the individual implicit in such models—the isolated, autonomous, 'abstract' individual is anathema" (79). When Holland is away from Dickinson, the poet writes that "after you went, a low wind warbled through the house like a spacious bird, making it high but lonely" (L318). She implies the wonder of poetry, but that without the loved ones, there is absence instead of the necessary connectedness. The rest of the letter is frankly sensual and ends with "love for your embodiment of it." As the years pass and Dickinson becomes fully confident in her vocation, she assumes the bird persona without explanation or further need for validation, and she integrates it into elegies and poems of mourning. There are hundreds of those as Dickinson and the women in her community mourn their loved ones. When her dear friend Judge Otis Lord died in 1884, Dickinson sent Holland a poem from the depths of her mourning, in which "Quite empty, quite at rest, / The Robin locks her Nest, and tries her Wings," casts about "Crumbless and homeless, of but one request—/ The Birds she lost—" (L890).

By the time Dickinson begins her correspondence with her Norcross cousins, she is past explaining her song, and the bird metaphors seem mutually understood and confirmed in letters to the younger women, and they are abundant. For example, Dickinson prefaces a poem with some rather acerbic observances of her neighbors and herself, "I think the bluebirds do their work exactly like me. They dart around just so, with little dodging feet, and look so agitated" (L339). And, she seems to playfully comment on Loo's own poetry as she writes, "you know some cannot sing, but the orchard is full of birds, and we all can listen" (Ll99). However, she is centered in her poetry when she writes, in the midst of the Civil War, to her cousins of Robert Browning, and her own art: "I remembered that I, myself, in my smaller way, sang off charnel steps" (L298). When the girls' father dies and leaves them orphans, Dickinson uses birds and song to comfort them, prefacing her elegy with "Let Emily sing for you because she cannot pray" (L278). The poem begins "It is not dying hurts us so,— / 'Tis living hurts us more," and likens the bereaved to birds left behind, "till pitying snows / Persuade our feathers home." Dickinson's engagement with life and living, her sensuality, is also made apparent in her Norcross correspondence. As she becomes more centered in her poetic community, she expresses the eschatological and philosophical conclusions that she has drawn. Her claims are broader, both worldly and spiritual. Her muse, the bird, and her poetic element, the sea, take on multiplicities of meaning. For example, the bird, moves from being typically female or non-gendered to being male on occasion, as in the poem about a male "most triumphant bird," sent to Holland and the Norcrosses. She prefaces the poem, in which "His transitive estate ... Does finest glory fit," with descriptions of the sensual pleasures of life and expectations that an afterlife, because remote like "robins a long way off," will be as sweet. She cautions her friends to enjoy this life, because "each of us gives or takes heaven in corporeal person, for each of us has the skill of life" (L388).

I posit that just as Hunt finds that women's friendships illuminate questions of meaning and value (7), Dickinson centers her ultimate concerns in her relationships with women. As Hunt describes it, the power of love of woman for woman moves past narcissism; it is metamorphosis (52), and it is in Dickinson's sensual and lesbian discourse that she mediates her connectedness to women and to the world. As Beverly Harrison argues, for women, all knowledge, including our moral knowledge is profoundly worldly and body-mediated: "all power, including intellectual power, is rooted in feeling" (218). One of the early definitions of lesbian is "a mason's rule of

lead which could be bent to fit the curves of a molding; hence figuratively, a principle of judgement that is pliant and accommodating" (*OED*). Thus, when I speak of lesbian discourse, my understanding moves past biography and biology to a language that insists upon the poetic, in its ambiguity, pliability and multiplicity, to a love of woman for woman that, in whatever combination of the emotional and the sensual, generates and focuses each woman's power. It is in community that women place each other as mirror and muse, place their visions in each other's eyes in order to understand and control the meanings.[12]

Much has been made of Poem 1072, and the fact that it was sent to Samuel Bowles (L250). However, "Title divine-is mine!" was sent to Susan also and seems more germane to this relationship. In the poem, Dickinson centers her concerns with women in relationship in writing that is distinctly female. The speaker both declares and accepts the title of "poet," a solitary occupation without sign. The speaker then turns to that other immortality, conferred by God, a title that is merely accepted. But if God sends that, He also "gives us Women—," and like is held to like: "Garnet to Garnet— / Gold-to Gold—." Is this physical love, or may it be read as poetic inspiration? Carolyn Heilbrun argues that the woman poet "must be enabled to perceive her muse as of whatever sex, but not threatening her social being ... so that anything a woman does is female; nothing is alien to her if *she* does it" (*Reinventing* 167). Dickinson's muse is of her choice; God may confer immortality, but the poet claims her inspiration. The speaker then turns from the glory of women, and conflates funerals and weddings, thereby criticizing two patriarchal systems. The version to Susan has "Tri Victory," a line not sent to Bowles, which casts irony on "Born-Bridalled-Shrouded-". The final, sensual question/statement, "'My Husband' -Women say- / Stroking the Melody- / Is this the Way?", presupposes the radical transformation posited by Hélène Cixous in her examination of women's writing: "because the 'economy' of her drives is prodigious, she cannot fail, in seizing the occasion to speak, to transform directly and indirectly

[12] Smith deals with the gaps we encounter in reading Dickinson, among them the self imposed gaps readers make when they refuse to acknowledge Dickinson's sexuality and sensuality (33). Smith examines their surviving correspondence to further understand Susan's participation in Dickinson's literary project and the intensity of their relationship. Where Homans points out that Dickinson's relationship with Susan is not lesbian, and indeed that their sameness engenders stasis (121), Smith looks at their love for each other and literature, and argues "that, whether harmonious, conflicted, inspiring, or frustrating, Dickinson's intense involvement with Sue was no wasteland but proved to be her most fertile poetic plain" (140).

all systems of exchange based on masculine thrift. Her libido will produce far more radical effects of political and social change than some might like to think" (486). These final three lines seem a turning back to the title of poet, and by conflating poetry with the marital bond and introducing the erotic, the speaker asserts that a relationship founded on creativity and affection is the preferable form of union and community.

"At Center of the Sea"

As with the avian trope, Dickinson uses the sea as the flexible means of articulation. The first poem she sent Susan, under the heading "*Write*! *Comrade, write*!" (L105,P4), returns to the metaphor she uses in prior letters to reject conversion: boating and the sea. For Dickinson the wonder of the sea expresses her call away from conversion. Throughout her corpus, the sea, representing both world and other world, both poetry and loss of language, remains an object of desire and terror. While she begins in the letters by figuring the sea as poetry, in a manner derivative of Emerson, Dickinson's language becomes far more flexible and her sea gradually becomes laden with meaning. In this poem she turns the earlier metaphor on itself: the sea is wondrous, but silent; she is attracted to Susan and the shore. In the first verse, the speaker exhorts the Pilot to find a peaceful, possibly fertile, shore. In the second verse, the speaker takes the active and seductive role, and concludes "Thither I pilot *thee-* / Land Ho! Eternity! / Ashore at last!" The shore now holds the promise of generativity, love, and an eternity that may be theological, poetic, or both; from the beginning of her canon the tie between faith, love, and poetry is intrinsic, irrevocable, and begins in a community of women.

Dickinson draws on the sea in many ways within her poetic community. Kristeva argues that women must work together to emphasize the multiplicity of female expressions and preoccupations ("Women's" 193), and I find Dickinson's sea as representative of both the known corporeality of the female body and the wider eschatological unknown. I argue that, at least in women's poetics, my ideas about the transformative powers of women in community coalesce in a combination of lesbian discourse and body-mediated language. Rich began this discourse when she asked "whether women cannot begin, at last, to think through the body, to connect what has been so cruelly disorganized" (Of 284). Alicia Ostriker points out that essential knowledge comes from the body, one "subject that

all women have in common to tell the truth about is anatomy; not, perhaps, as destiny but as priority" (65), and Gallop argues that rather than trying to get beyond the body, as classic philosophy does, women "treat the body as a site of knowledge, a medium for thought" (*Thinking* 4). While under treatment for severe eye problems, Dickinson draws upon body-mediated knowledge and further develops the tropes of the sea. She writes Susan from the "Centre of the Sea-" (L294), and tells Fanny Norcross about the sea as the element where women live, where there is pain and where vision is reduced. Dickinson mines its depths for poetry but needs the community on the shore. She appends a poem that juxtaposes the place of hope against the "escapeless sea" (L390). When her mother dies, she tells the Norcrosses, "I cannot tell how Eternity seems. It sweeps around me like a sea" (L785).

However, she can and does tell. Dickinson's ability to wrench into language certain almost unspeakable mental and emotional states, to articulate moments of prophetic vision, and to register a profound sympathy as she tries to invoke a way of being encompasses the best of human possibility when she aids her community in mourning. And the sea provides her most profound means of articulating grief and sympathy. Her emotional state is made almost physically tangible as she expresses her sorrow and theirs. I suggest Dickinson's elegies are most understandable when read in terms of Rich's ideas about the powers of lesbian discourse and women in community:

> Even before I wholly knew I was a lesbian, it was the lesbian in me who pursued that elusive configuration. And I believe it is the lesbian in every woman who is compelled by female energy, who gravitates toward strong women, who seeks a literature that will express that energy and strength. It is the lesbian in us who drives us to feel imaginatively, render in language, grasp, the full connection between woman and woman. It is the lesbian in us who is creative. (*On* 200-01)

While Rich's terms seem absolute, under my reading of lesbian discourse every woman is a potential site for the permeable and powerful creativity found in loving other women.[13] Because she loves these women, Dickinson finds ways to express their grief and her own, and thereby helps to comfort them. After a series of consolatory letters

[13] Rich's "Diving into the Wreck" is set in the sea and also articulates the dichotomous aspects of that female element and of poetry (*Diving* 22-23). Livesay also sends her speaker under water in "Towards a Love Poem," which moves from immersion to the reaffirmation of women in community as the speaker declares "I too / am learning to fly / under water" (*Self* 273).

and elegies to Holland on the death of her husband, Dickinson sends a poem that posits Dr. Holland comfortably in heaven, "at whatsoever Fathom / His Native Land" (L732). She repeats this theme when she writes the Norcrosses of Lord's death and sends a poem that sees the loved one "summoned by the tides" (L891). For Dickinson, the sea remains the metaphor for the ultimate mystery, and when her nephew Gilbert dies, she writes Susan a requiem of ecstasy, one of the finest elegies in the language: "The Vision of Immortal Life has been fulfilled- / How simply at the last the Fathom comes! The Passenger and not the Sea, we find surprises us- / Gilbert rejoiced in Secrets" (L868). The mystery of the sea and the mystery of heaven are conflated and made Gilbert's secret. The letter closes with the assurance of the child's grace:

> Pass to thy Rendezvous of Light,
> Pangless except for us
> Who slowly ford the Mystery
> Which thou hast leaped across!

When Dickinson died in 1886, Susan wrote her obituary; it concludes by affirming the importance of Dickinson and her poetry to her community: "she walked this life with the gentleness and reverence of old saints, with the firm step of martyrs who sing while they suffer." Dickinson held these women together in community, expressed her community's beauty and strength, and comforted each of them in their turn. Without Susan's "depths of Domingo" (L855), without Holland's "heart fit for *home*" (P84), without the Norcross "little sisters" (L230), could Dickinson's poetry have reached its heights and depths? I suggest that because of the community she needed and gathered about her, Dickinson engendered the emotional life needed for her poetry; love is necessary for this art. When Dickinson writes to comfort Susan, who is in deep mourning, and who Dickinson loves above all others, she again tropes the sea, as the place of pain and the artist: "You must let me go first, Sue, because I live in the Sea always and know the Road. I would have drowned twice to save you sinking, dear, If I could only have covered your Eyes so you wouldn't have seen the Water" (L306). For women in community, an hour apart is the sea and this sharing of pain echoes through Letter 312, written as the women console each other after the deaths of Dickinson's friend, Susan Phelps, and Susan's niece. As always, Dickinson comforts her community and herself with poetry:

> We both are Women, and there is a Will of God—Could the Dying confide Death, there would be no Dead-Wedlock is shyer than Death. Thank you for Tenderness—

I find it is the only food that the Will takes, nor that from general fingers—I am glad you go-It does not remove you-I seek you first in Amherst, then turn my thoughts without a Whip-so well they follow you.

An Hour is a Sea
Between a few, and me-
With them would Harbor be-

Roxanne Harde
Queen's University, Canada

Works Cited

Assiter, Alison. *Enlightened Women: Modernist Feminism in a Postmodern Age.* London: Routledge: 1996.

Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa." *Women's Voices: Visions and Perspectives.* Ed. Pat C. Hoy *et al*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1990. 481-496.

Dickinson, Emily. *The Letters of Emily Dickinson.* Ed. Thomas H. Johnson and Theodora Ward. 3 vols. Cambridge: Belknap Harvard UP, 1958.

_____. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Ed. Thomas H. Johnson. 3 vols. Cambridge: Belknap Harvard UP, 1951.

_____. *Open Me Carefully: Emily Dickinson's Intimate Letters to Susan Huntington Dickinson*. Ed. Ellen Louise Hart and Martha Nell Smith. Ashfield: Paris, 1998.

Dickinson, Susan Huntington Gilbert. "Obituary." *Springfield Republican* 18 May 1886.

Gallop, Jane. *Around 1981: Academic Feminist Literary Theory.* New York: Routledge, 1992.

_____. *Thinking Through the Body*. New York: Columbia UP, 1988.

Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination.* New Have: Yale UP, 1979.

Harrison, Beverly Wildung. "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love." *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality.* Ed. Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ. New York: HarperCollins, 1989. 214-25.

Heilbrun, Carolyn G. *Reinventing Womanhood.* New York: Norton, 1979.

Homans, Margaret. "'Oh, Vision of Language!': Dickinson's Poems of Love and Death." *Feminist Critics Read Emily Dickinson.* Ed. Suzanne Juhasz. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1983. 114-133.

Hunt, Mary E. *Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship.* New York: Crossroad, 1991.

Juhasz, Suzanne. "Reading Emily Dickinson's Letters." *ESQ: Journal of the American Renaissance* 30 (1984): 170-92.

King, Ursula. *Women and Spirituality: Voices of Protest & Promise.* 2nd ed. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1993.

Kristeva, Julia. *In the Beginning Was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith.* New York: Columbia UP, 1987.

_____. "Tales of Love." *The Portable Kristeva.* Ed. Kelly Oliver. New York: Columbia UP, 1997. 137-180. 308-49.

_____. "Women's time." *The Kristeva Reader.* Ed. Toril Moi. New York: Columbia UP, 1986. 187-213.

Lasser, Carol. "'Let Us Be Sisters Forever': The Sororal Model of Nineteenth Century Female Friendship." *Signs* 14 (1988): 148-81.

Livesay, Dorothy. *Archive for Our Times.* Ed. Dean J. Irvine. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp. The Self-Completing Tree: Selected Poems. Victoria: Porcépic, 1986.

Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches.* New York: Crossing, 1984.

_____. *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*. New York: Crossing, 1987.

Martin, Wendy. *An American Triptych: Anne Bradstreet, Emily Dickinson, Adrienne Rich.* Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1984.

Ostriker, Alicia. "The Nerves of a Midwife: Contemporary American Women's Poetry." *Claims for Poetry*. Ed. Donald Hall. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1982. 315-16.

Rich, Adrienne. *Diving Into the Wreck: Poems 1971-1972.* New York: Norton, 1973.

_____. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: Norton, 1976.

_____. *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978*. New York: Norton, 1979.

Sewall, Richard B. *The Life of Emily Dickinson.* 2 vol. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974.

Smith, Martha Nell. *Rowing in Eden: Rereading Emily Dickinson.* Austin: U of Texas P, 1992.

Tingley, Stephanie A. "'*My* Business is to *Sing*": Emily Dickinson's Letters to Elizabeth Holland." *Dickinson and Audience.* Ed. Martin Orzeck and Robert Weisbuch. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1996. 181-99.

Wolff, Cynthia Griffin. *Emily Dickinson.* Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1988.

"THE VISIT", DE MERLE COLLINS, Y "THE BED SITTING ROOM", DE MAUREEN ISMAY: DOS APROXIMACIONES AL TEMA DEL DESPLAZAMIENTO EN LA LITERATURA POST-COLONIAL

Teresa Moralejo-Gárate

1. Introducción

"The Visit", de Merle Collins, y "The Bed Sitting Room", de Maureen Ismay, tratan el tema del desplazamiento y la búsqueda de una nueva identidad que éste conlleva que sufre el sujeto colonial, en ambos casos una mujer, en la metrópoli.

El desplazamiento literal, definido en el diccionario *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* como "to remove from the usual or proper place; *specifically* to expel or force to flee from home or homeland" de las dos protagonistas tiene orígenes diferentes, ya que mientras que para Miriam en "The Visit" la estancia en la metrópoli es, como enfatiza el propio título del relato, sólo una visita, en "The Bed Sitting Room" la metrópoli es el lugar de residencia permanente de Mary.

El objetivo de este estudio es exponer cómo se articula en las citadas historias este tema fundamental en la literatura Post-Colonial, principalmente a través de la problemática de género, raza, y la relación madre-hija, metrópoli-colonia, *home-self;* así como la cuestión lingüística, y analizar si las protagonistas son capaces de solucionar su conflicto, su "crisis of identity" ... [mediante] "the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place" (Ashcroft *et al* 1989: 9).

Debido a la interrelación entre los diferentes motivos que aparecen en las historias, en ocasiones resulta difícil delimitar el contenido de cada una de las secciones en las que se divide este estudio.

2. Género y raza

Su condición de construcción cultural hace que la discriminación por género esté determinada por la presión social de una organización patriarcal que intenta constreñir a la mujer en unos roles determinados, por norma limitados a un espacio doméstico y familiar. La tensión se produce por la negativa de la mujer a aceptar el papel en que la sociedad intenta encasillarla.

En el primer párrafo de ambas historias se hace evidente que sus protagonistas son mujeres, y es precisamente el género una de las causas que contribuyen a su desplazamiento. Una voz narrativa omnisciente en tercera persona presenta a las protagonistas mediante breves pero reveladoras pinceladas. Resulta muy significativo que ambas mujeres aparezcan sentadas en un lugar interior de la casa y en silencio, enfatizando la falta de comunicación con el mundo que las rodea. Así, en "The Visit", "the woman set leaning slightly forward ... clamping shut her lips" (TV: 136)[1], y se la describe como con un "look of sullen disinterest" (TV: 136), y, de manera similar, con respecto a la protagonista de "The Bed Sitting Room", "in the silence of the room the woman set, looking across the lawn at empty windows, horizon below the sky" (BSR: 40).[2]

En cuanto a la voz narrativa, es importante señalar que en la historia de Collins aparece una multiplicidad de perspectivas, por la coexistencia de una voz narrativa omnisciente en tercera persona, el estilo directo, el estilo indirecto libre y el monólogo interior. Esta multiplicidad de voces narrativas permite articular la variedad de voces del microcosmos de la familia protagonista, y, al mismo tiempo, da cabida a la multiplicidad de subtemas que convergen en el tema principal. Lo que es más, esta multiplicidad de perspectivas "facilitates the representation of a world of fluid boundaries" (O'Callaghan, 1993: 6), como lo es el de "The Visit". Por lo tanto, la idea de ambivalencia que permea los diversos asuntos tratados en la historia, en especial el tema principal del desplazamiento, también está relacionada con esta multiplicidad.

---

[1] La paginación de las citas tomadas de "The Visit", TV para abreviar, de Merle Collins, corresponden a la obra *Rain Darling*, de la misma autora, publicada en 1990 en Londres en The Women's Press.

[2] La paginación de las citas de 'The Bed Sitting Room', BSR para abreviar, de Maureen Ismay, corresponden a la colección editada por Ronda Cobham y Merle Collins, *Watchers and Seekers: Creative Writing by Black Women in Britain*, publicada en 1987 en Londres por The Women's Press.

En contraste, en “The Bed Sitting Room” predomina la voz omnisciente en tercera persona, que frecuentemente utiliza a la protagonista como focalizadora, aunque hay pasajes en los que se focaliza a través de personajes secundarios, miembros de la comunidad hostil. En ocasiones se da paso al estilo directo y se reproducen diálogos. La presencia de la voz narrativa se hace más necesaria debido a la mayor alienación de la protagonista de esta historia. Es la voz narrativa la que da forma y articula los pensamientos de la mente fragmentada de Mary.

Volviendo a la cuestión del género en ambas historias, Miriam no se adapta a su rol de madre y abuela, y mantiene una relación distante con su familia. Es significativo que al comienzo de la historia Miriam sea presentada como “the woman” (TV: 136), como desligada de su papel de madre, a lo que se une que ella se refiera a su hija como “your sister” (TV: 140), y no “my daughter”, en una reafirmación de su condición de mujer, rechazando que su identidad se base en la maternidad. Este esfuerzo por redefinir su identidad y encontrar su *place* le hará dejar atrás a sus hijos y a su nieto, que aparecen asociados al sentimiento de dislocación de Miriam desde su llegada a la isla, “she had felt strange with her children and grandson from the beginning” (TV: 143).

En cuanto a Mary, una mujer más joven que Miriam, se niega a aceptar el rol de esposa que la sociedad reserva para ella:

> She remembered long ego - at sixteen, leaving home - her mother had screamed after her, ‘Where is the man - let me see him! She had been bewildered, retreated quickly, puzzled by her mother’s words - the only reason a girl should leave home was to set up house, with a man. (BSR: 41)

Los adjetivos empleados para describir la reacción de Mary reflejan su sentimiento de dislocación ante esta imposición social que conoce por boca de su madre. Se insiste en el hecho de que “she was lacking in something essential to a pretty girl and was defective, she did not have that one vital accessory which would have acted like a crossed ‘t’ or a final dot” (BSR: 42), como el origen del desplazamiento de la protagonista. Es la falta de un hombre a su lado una de las causas principales de que no encuentre un sitio para vivir, de que tenga que sufrir la desconfianza de la gente, de que no encuentre su *place* en una sociedad que es hostil con ella:

> She knew she would not find a place to live because, on opening the door, they would smile, allow her to see the room but ask, ‘Where...?’ They would also say, ‘We have other people coming -two girls sharing...’ (BSR: 42)

En yuxtaposición a la negativa de Mary de orientar su vida al matrimonio, en el relato aparece una visión totalmente negativa de esta institución a la que Mary se opone, y que además no parece proporcionar una vida menos alienante:

> He stood territorially, his wife behind him, her head covered. ... His wife behind him, her voice thin and slight. She was ignored. ... Eventually he walked away, his wife following behind. (BSR: 43-44)

Se establece un claro contraste entre la actitud de la esposa, "his wife following behind", con la de Mary, "the woman continued to walk the streets, until finally one day, she had found the place" (BSR: 44), poniendo de manifiesto la diferencia entre una mujer que acepta las constricciones que la sociedad le impone y otra que se resiste a ello en su intento de encontrar su propia identidad. La hostilidad que encuentra en el mundo que la rodea hace que en ocasiones Mary se replantee su rechazo a las imposiciones sociales, "she thought of catching man, ending it all, to retire to the kitchen to cook his dinner" (BSR: 43), pero abandona esta opción al considerar lo que conllevará, "she also thought of her humiliation ... of asking for the rent, a new dress, a pair of knickers..." (BSR: 43). Esta visión del matrimonio como institución, en yuxtaposición a insinuaciones de la comunidad hostil "they would think, on seeing her alone. ... 'Is she on the game? Is she a...?" (BSR: 42) dirigidas a Mary, parecen proponer una lectura del matrimonio en términos de relación de prostitución, una conexión que se hace más evidente cuando Mary piensa que ella "could find a convenient chauffeur to drive her from place to place to disarm landladies and reassure ... that the rent would be paid. He would only ask a small price for his solicitations—a simple matter of sex—and after all it was only giving and receiving"(BSR: 43).

Al igual que el género, los prejuicios raciales contribuyen de manera notoria al sentimiento de dislocación de las protagonistas, con el resultado de que el desplazamiento se hace más dramático cuando el sujeto colonial además de ser una mujer es de raza negra:

> It is a recognition that because of their history, Black women themselves have to redefine the contours of what identity, location, writing, theory and time mean, and thus redefine themselves against Empire constructs. (Boyce Davies, 1994: 96)

En ambas historias se usa el color como signo de identificación. En "The Visit" aparece no el color de la piel, sino el de los ojos, "heavy lidded black eyes" (TV 136), y éstas son los ojos los que proporcionan acceso a gran parte del relato. El color de la piel de la protagonista de "The Bed Sitting Room" también se hace explícito

(BSR: 47). Ambas mujeres sufren los prejuicios raciales de la sociedad patriarcal eurocéntrica, representados mediante el mismo motivo en las dos historias, a saber, la infantilización. Miriam y Mary son tratadas como si fueran niñas pequeñas en una sociedad patriarcal en la que se considera a la mujer negra poseedora de una capacidad intelectual de nivel infantil.

En el caso de Miriam, inmediatamente después de su llegada a la aduana se enfrenta a los prejuicios de los habitantes de la metrópoli, supuestamente sus conciudadanos. El trato que recibe supone una infantilización, lo que le hace recordar sus años en el colegio, con lo que se introduce una crítica al sistema educativo, otro pilar en la transmisión de la ideología del opresor, que contribuye al desplazamiento. Aún más, el guardia de la aduana se resiste a creer que su hija trabaje como "teacher in this country" (TV 142), mostrando sus prejuicios. Cuando por fin ve a su familia, la reacción de Miriam deja patente el comienzo de su sentimiento de dislocación. La referencia a "little Maria back home" redunda en esta idea de infantilización comentada anteriormente:

> She was near to tears. Something that hadn't happened for a long time. Her shoulders were hunched and she was feeling as small as Cousin Milton's little Maria back home. (TV: 143)

La protagonista de la historia de Ismay también es víctima de los prejuicios racistas de sus conciudadanos repetidamente. La conversación con el primer matrimonio con el que vive sugiere que la protagonista recibe un trato que también apunta a esta idea de infantilización ya citada, "'there is no one,' the girl had replied, not quite sure..." (BSR: 42). Sin embargo, no se especifica la raza de este matrimonio, y el que Mary tenga en este momento 16 años podría explicar el hecho de que sea presentada como "the girl" y no "the woman", como en la mayoría de las ocasiones. Por otra parte, en el personaje del casero se encarnan los prejuicios de la mujer negra estereotipada como sensualidad y sexualidad. Irónicamente, este casero "had been to India, fed the poor, walked the streets of Bombay and pressed money into the hands of beggars," pero sólo porque "expected returns" (BSR: 45). En el caso de Mary, el racismo que sufre es mucho más sangrante, como queda plasmado en el siguiente fragmento:

> After all she was a black, and it was the habit of the old woman to routinely remove, as one removing weeds, the blacks: 'Filthy things, eating food and making the noise they call music.' (BSR: 47)

El comentario de O'Callaghan (1993: 41) resulta relevante en relación con la problemática de ambas protagonistas:

> The colonizad, taught to value him or herself according to the standards of the empire, necessarily experienced impotence, powerlessness and insecurity: and severe alienation as well as the condition of self-division, is a recurren theme in West Indian literature as a whole.

Efectivamente, entre los motivos que causan la crisis de identidad de Miriam y Mary resulta fundamental la no aceptación de la diferencia de estas mujeres por parte de los habitantes de la metrópoli, que lleva consigo el deterioro, o incluso la destrucción en el caso de Mary, de la identidad del sujeto colonial, a causa de la "cultural denigration, the conscious and unconscious oppresion of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model" (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1989: 9). Parece apropiado, por lo tanto, analizar ahora la tensión metrópoli-colonia, que aparece introducida por la relación madre-hija. La estrecha interrelación temática es evidente, y en cierto modo dificulta el aislar individualmente las causas que convergen en el sentimiento de desplazamiento de las dos mujeres. Además, íntimamente ligado al conflicto metrópoli-colonia se sitúa el concepto de *home*, que, a su vez lleva a la idea de self; como se verá a continuación.

3. Relación madre-hija, metropoli-colonia, *home-self*

La relación madre-hija, presente en las dos historias, está relacionada con la presión social de una organización patriarcal que intenta constreñir a la mujer en roles limitados a un espacio doméstico y familiar ya mencionados. Esta relación, de la cual la ambivalencia es cualidad inherente, está desarrollada con más profundidad en "The Visit". La falta de entendimiento entre madre e hija también resulta enajenante, como se manifiesta muy expresivamente con la repetición de un gesto corporal reflejo de este estado anímico fragmentado, a saber, "shrugged" (TV: 136), o lo que es lo mismo, "the droop in the shoulders" (TV: 136), o "hunched" (TV: 143). Este gesto transmite, además de indiferencia e incertidumbre, una separación física y/o emocional, como es el caso en el relato. Esta idea de desplazamiento, que se plantea desde el comienzo de la historia, se refuerza con la insistencia en que la hija no pasa el marco de la puerta, y, así, la separación física es un reflejo de la separación que existe entre ambas a un nivel más personal o espiritual. Se emplean las habitaciones en un sentido simbólico de *self*; un uso que aparece ampliado en "The Bed Sitting Room", como más adelante se verá. La maternidad no aparece idealizada, más bien al contrario, ya que a pesar del esfuerzo de esta mujer por sacar a sus hijos adelante,

éstos no van a mostrar su agradecimiento, en especial la hija.

Mientras que en "The Visit" es madre y abuela, en "The Bed Sitting Room", la protagonista es hija y nieta. El comportamiento de la madre de Mary contrasta con el de Miriam como madre. Miriam aparece como una madre esforzada y trabajadora, "they didn't grow up anyhow, even if self was poor" (TV: 138), que ha puesto algo de su parte en la labor de deconstrucción de la sociedad patriarcal, ya que ha enseñado a su hijo varón a hacer tareas estereotípicamente femeninas: "Martin accustom cooking and looking after himself" (TV: 138). En cambio, en "The Bed Sitting Room" es precisamente la madre de Mary, que no está de acuerdo con el movimiento de su hija hacia la independencia, la que le recuerda el papel de esposa que debe desempeñar en la sociedad, que ya ha sido mencionado al hacer referencia al matrimonio. En cuanto a la abuela de Mary, aunque sólo aparece de manera indirecta, se presenta de manera positiva, como lo muestra el hecho de que el nombre de la protagonista del relato sea revelado por ella. El que el nombre sólo se mencione una vez parece conllevar un mensaje más universal, ya que se sugiere que la problemática que afecta a Mary es la misma que afecta a todas las "nice girl" (BSR: 41) que están en su situación.

Los resultados de la resistencia de esas mujeres a las imposiciones de la sociedad patriarcal eurocéntrica serán muy distintos, en gran medida porque, al contrario que Miriam, parece que Mary sabe dónde no está su identidad, su *place*, pero no sabe dónde está.

"The Bed Sitting Room" se centra en la situación en la metrópoli, sin atender explícitamente a la colonia, mientras que en "The Visit", la relación madre-hija constituye un reflejo del binomio metrópoli-colonia, estrechamente ligado a la idea de *home*, concepto difuso y problemático, de nuevo muy relacionado con la idea de desplazamiento, como se ha adelantado.

La metrópoli resulta ser un lugar de desplazamiento y alienación para las protagonistas de los dos relatos. En el caso de Miriam, el viaje implica tener que volver a buscar su identidad, a redefinirla, tiene que renegociar la relación entre *place y self*: El que insista en que posee su propia casa en el Caribe se une también a la idea de que tiene allí su identidad, de que ese es su *place*, a pesar de todo. Desde el extranjero, Miriam ve el Caribe con nostalgia, como algo positivo "I want to go home, yes! I want to go home where me is woman in me own house" (TV: 137). Se apunta, pues, en la historia de Collins, a la visión idealizada de la metrópoli desde la colonia,

que luego se viene abajo al conocer la realidad. Lo que uno se encuentra en Inglaterra no se corresponde con la visión idealizada que uno tenía, como queda claro, "she never would have thought that England was like this" (TV: 138). De vuelta en el Caribe, el diálogo con Cousin Milton, "How you mean you don't like England, dey? So England is place not to like then?" (TV: 145) parece transmitir la concepción idealizada sobre la metrópoli que Miriam probablemente tendría antes de conocer la realidad. Por otra parte, aunque ella siente este desplazamiento en la metrópoli, aparece la situación de sus hijos, que parecen estar contentos allí. Por lo tanto, se rompe el binomio centro-margen, metrópoli-colonia, como reflejo de lo positivo-negativo, respectivamente, ya que en este caso lo que perjudica a unos favorece a otros.

Para Mary, la metrópoli, su lugar permanente de residencia, también es un lugar de desplazamiento y alienación. El que Miriam tenga su propia casa, símbolo de su *self*, como ella misma apunta en varias ocasiones, señala la diferencia fundamental con Mary que imposibilita la resolución de los conflictos de esta última de una manera similar a los de Miriam.

La casa y sus habitaciones resultan ser, como ya se ha adelantado, lugares de identificación y metáforas del *self*; como explica Boyce Davies (1994: 101 102) respecto a este mismo relato:

> A mood of greyness and images of peeling wallpaper, isolation and imprisonment. The young black woman in this story never leaves, seems to have no home to go. The landscape outside similarly does not embrace her as she negotiates between inside and outside.
>
> Rooms in this context become metonymic references for reduced spade and the references to homes are therefore often within the context of alienation and outsideness.

Mary siempre ha vivido en habitaciones alquiladas, cuya realidad no corresponde en absoluto a la descripción de "nice room in a respectable establishment" (BSR: 41), una palabra, *establishment*, con conexiones obvias con el poder eurocéntrico patriarcal que causa el aislamiento de la protagonista.

> The hard wallpaper, the narrow room in which the outstretched hand touched the wall was slightly repellen, but tolerable in comparison to others she had seen. (BSR: 41)

Las numerosas alusiones a la *bed sitting room* de Mary hacen casi inevitable la conexión con relato de Charlotte Perkins Gilman "The Yellow Wallpaper", con el que comparte el tema de la locura, de la alienación de la protagonista. Sin embargo, esta alienación tiene orígenes completamente diferentes, ya que en "The Yellow

Wallpaper" la víctima de esta alienación, causada por una depresión post-parto y las imposiciones patriarcales de su esposo, es una mujer de clase social alta.

Aunque no corresponde aquí analizar los paralelismos e interrelaciones entre ambas historias, el comentario de Showalter (1987: 141) acerca de la habitación con "the yellow wallpaper" hace evidentes las semejanzas con la habitación de Mary:

> It also has all marks of a cell for the solitary confinement of a raving lunatic: the windows are barred, there are rings in the wall, the wallpaper is torn, the floor is scratched, the plaster is dug out, the bed is nailed down, and the bedposts have been gawned.

Más aún, Showalter (1987: 142) defiende que el papel de la pared "in the story becomes the correlative of her mental disintegration", algo similar a lo que ocurrirá al final de "The Bed Sitting Room".

Volviendo a la historia de Ismay, mediante las numerosas referencias que se hacen a las habitaciones en las que vive la protagonista, se pone de manifiesto que carece de casa propia, no tiene raíces en esa sociedad y se ve obligada a cambiar constantemente de un sitio a otro. El que nunca haya tenido su propia casa sugiere que nunca ha podido tener su propio *self*; una identidad definida, sino que la suya ha estado en continua redefinición. El desarraigo ha caracterizado su existencia, y, a pesar de que se da cuenta de que éste no es su *place*, no conoce otro que le sirva de referencia para saber lo que busca. Abundan las imágenes de aislamiento y aprisionamiento, de manera más notable hacia el final del relato, que representan la gradual alienación de Mary.

Además de a los espacios interiores de la casa, en ambas historias se hace referencia a espacios exteriores. En "The Visit" la recuperación de la identidad de la protagonista pasa por su regreso al Caribe, y así, en el relato aparecen espacios exteriores de la isla de Granada, haciéndose evidente la afinidad de la personalidad caribeña con el mundo natural, como en la descripción de Miriam de vuelta a la isla, "under the tamarind tree on the hill just near to her house" (TV: 145). Se establece por tanto un contraste con el comienzo del relato, en el que Miriam aparecía sentada en una esquina en el sillón más incómodo de la casa. Los espacios naturales abiertos del Caribe son completamente diferentes a la vida en Inglaterra, que Miriam resumía como "only coop up, coop up inside a house all the time" (TV: 139). En la colonia Miriam ve cumplido su deseo, "give me place where I could sit down outside and see people, do what I want" (TV: 146), alejado del modelo de vida europeo:

> Let me go where I happy. I don't like this place. It cold, cold; you can't move; if it little bit bright, which is hardly, and I want to take a walk outside, I have to say where I going, as if me is some little child; I have to ring doorbell to annoy people for them to let me in again. How people could live like that? In a house, in a house all day long? (TV: 140)

El regreso de Miriam a Granada, al contrario de lo que suele suceder en la literatura caribeña, no aparece problematizado, ya que el viaje había sido solo una visita, no un período de tiempo más dilatado, y por lo tanto Miriam no responde al estereotipo de personaje *been to.* Al contrario, parece que el viaje a la metrópoli le ha servido a Miriam para encontrar su *home*, y, así, "the rewriting of home becomes a critical link in the articulation of identity (Boyce Davies, 1994: 115), y se confirma la opinión de Boyce Davies (1994: 113) de que:

> Home can only have meaning once one experiences a level of displacement from it. Still home is contradictory, contested space, a locus for misrecognition and alienation. Boyce Davies (1994: 113)

El sentimiento ambivalente hacia la colonia común a casi toda la población criolla aparece encarnado en la figura de Miriam, ya que aunque insista en querer volver a la isla, la imagen de Miriam "under the tamarind tree on the hill just near to her house" (TV: 145), sugiere una lectura negativa al tener en cuenta que "in Jamaican culture, 'tamarind season' is also a more generalised reference to hard times" (Donnel *et al*. 1996: 432).

También en "The Bed Sitting Room" los espacios exteriores concuerdan con los interiores en no sólo no ofrecer solución a la alienación de la protagonista, sino también en contribuir a hacerla todavía más acuciante. Desde el comienzo de "The Bed Sitting Room" se describe esta naturaleza hostil del jardín de la casa en la que Mary vive supone un marcado contraste con la imagen de Miriam en el Caribe. Además, el episodio de la rana resulta trágico y cruel:

> Last spring, she thought, the frog had jumped - across the wall and had waited just long enough to be cut up by the mower, left in pieces, strewn, done without reflection. ...
>
> Nothing lived there except grass cut precisely short, anxiously looked at for a sign of growth. Occasionally at night cats walked, backwards and forwards, eventually leaving trails. The fence was quickly mended and the occasional cat that ventured forward, hit by sterile pear.
>
> Nothing that was not contrived by human mind lived happily in the garden. Even then, uneasily.
>
> Tulips for springtime, planted in a row, begonias for summer and crocuses in autumn.

> Nothing was left to chance, and the colours of the flowers, which bloomed as a matter of course glowed precisely. (BSR: 40)

El mundo natural en "The Bed Sitting Room", cuya acción se reduce a la metrópoli, aparece manipulado, constreñido por la mano del hombre, que no permite que nada se escape a su control. Destaca la insistencia en la palabra *nothing.* El término *uneasily*, usado en más ocasiones en esta misma página, "the young and old lived together uneasily" (BSR: 40), representa la incomodidad tanto física como mental que caracterizan a Mary de forma muy expresiva. Al igual que en "The Visit", la casa constituye un símbolo social, de *status*.

> It was an old house,—painted once a year on the outside—, and neighbours could not say it was not respectable. Meticulous and sparse, the front covered with large concrete slabs, imitation crazy-paving leading to the door. (BSR: 40)

En relación con el mundo natural, el clima de la metrópoli, del que Miriam se queja, "always cold, always cold" (TV: 137), es otra causa del descontento, lo que de nuevo apunta a la afinidad entre la gente del Caribe con el mundo natural. En contraste con el clima del Caribe, en la metrópoli Miriam se encuentra una tierra fría, literal y metafóricamente hablando, que contribuye al desplazamiento mental que acompaña al desplazamiento físico. También en "The Bed Sitting Room" el frío ambiental parece ser reflejo del frío interior, de la falta de calor humano que contribuye a la alienación de la protagonista. Así, el frío inglés se identifica con el aislamiento psicológico de la protagonista: "she sat and shivered in the damp and cold in the middle of summer (BSR: 48). En este sentido, aparece el "winter wind" del final del relato.

Por lo tanto, en estrecha relación con la dislocación causada por la raza y el género de las dos protagonistas en su vida en la metrópoli, la relación madre-hija aporta una nueva dimensión al sentimiento de desplazamiento de las protagonistas. Aún más, el binomio madre-hija da cabida a la relación metrópoli-colonia y *home-self*; con lo que se agranda todavía más la representación del sentimiento de dislocación.

4. Cuestión lingüística

La última causa directa que contribuye a la alienación tanto de Miriam como de Mary que será analizada es la cuestión lingüística, para lo que no hay que olvidar que la lengua es parte de la definición de un individuo.

En la historia de Collins los tres personajes adultos son hablantes de criollo, como lo prueban el uso de verbos sin flexión, ni de tercera persona singular, "is as if she think England is hers" (TV: 137), ni de pasado, "I remember how I nurse that child" (TV: 142), o la elisión del auxiliar *to be*, "you not watching that, non!" (TV: 140). Sin embargo, la tercera generación habla inglés estándar, lo que apunta a una mayor integración en la vida de la metrópolis. El vínculo entre lengua y desplazamiento se hace patente mediante el *code switching*, ya que en el aeropuerto Miriam usa el verbo *to be* para dirigirse a la autoridad inglesa, "she's a teacher sir", (TV: 142), mientras que de vuelta en el Caribe usa otra variedad más alejada de la lengua estándar dentro del continuo criollo, "you all right yes, Cousin Milton" (TV: 146), su propia lengua, que en la metrópoli había sido *rendered unpriviledged*, como en la anterior cita de Ashcroft *et al.* (1989: 10).

En la historia de Ismay las tres generaciones, abuela, madre e hija se sitúan en distintos puntos del continuo criollo. Así, la abuela habla una variedad más alejada de la lengua estándar: "Mary - yu have fe wuk; yu ha fe support yuself" (BSR: 43), mientras que la madre utiliza una variedad más próxima a la estándar: "get yuself a likkle car and a television set" (BSR: 43). Por último, Mary habla inglés estándar. Estas diferencias lingüísticas con el resto de su familia hacen todavía más patética la situación de Mary, ya que, a la alienación que sufre en esa sociedad se une la pérdida de vínculos con su familia.

Queda claro entonces que la cuestión lingüística contribuya directamente a la alienación de las protagonistas en las dos historias, ya que el concepto de desplazamiento lleva unido también el dislocamiento lingüístico, que afecta a "those whose language seems inadequate to describe a new place, ... those whose language is systematically destroyed by enslavement, and ... those whose language has been rendered unpriviledged by the imposition of the language of a colonizing power. Some admixture of one or other of these models can describe the situation of all post-colonial societies" (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1989: 10).

5. Solución del conflicto

Tras haber repasado los principales motivos que contribuyen a la alienación de las protagonistas, corresponde analizar cómo se solucionan estos conflictos. Ya se han adelantado a lo largo de la precedente exposición ciertas características que hacen que esta solución sea muy diferente en ambas historias, a pesar del origen

común de muchos de los problemas que se plantean.

Miriam no es capaz de soportar más la situación, y decide adelantar el regreso a casa, rompiendo con su forma de actuar con el estereotipo de mujer sumisa y doméstica. Se opone a la idea de que la identidad de la mujer está basada en su capacidad creadora, de dadora de vida, y se desmarca de los estereotipos que tratan de constreñirla en un marco familiar. Su silencio inicial se transforma en protesta y reivindicación:

> Papa take care of allyou children as allyou want, you hear. Is your responsibility. I just want to go where I living. (TV: 141)

En el caso de Mary, no se presenta alternativa a su situación. Es importante la atención que se presta en ambos relatos tanto a la percepción visual de las protagonistas, como a la manera en que éstas son percibidas, sobre todo en el caso de Mary. En "The Bed Sitting Room", estas miradas están cargadas de hostilidad, y así, la miran "with scorn", (BSR: 42) "with speculation and winks" (BSR: 42), y se dirigen a ella "eyeing her with suspicion..." (BSR: 43). En cierto sentido, la persistencia de estas miradas hostiles acaba por hacer mella en Mary, y finalmente parece interiorizar la identidad que es construida a través de la mirada de los integrantes de la sociedad patriarcal eurocéntrica que la ve como La Otra, "she felt withered away among the scheming, withered people" (BSR: 46), lo que ya se había anticipado cuando al mirarse en el "white mirror and saw herself staring back like a photograph, slightly unreal, and wondered why she was tinged with green, her face copper brown instead of smooth and dark" (BSR: 44). Es significativo que sea un espejo blanco, una metáfora del tener que mirarse en esa sociedad blanca que no la acepta.

A pesar de que "the woman came one spring day not intending to stay" (BSR: 41), el cúmulo de agresiones que sufre acaban por derrotarla, y parece que se resigna a su fracaso, "her dreams had ended. She would grow old in the house, living there forever" (BSR: 44). El torrente de experiencias negativas alienantes tienen un efecto devastador en Mary:

> She walked the city until one day she hid her life, herself, her work, her identity under the bed—never to be resurrected.
>
> To recoil into disillusion and depression. (BSR: 44)

Este gesto de Mary, *recoiling*, ilustra su estado emocional que entronca con la forma en que Miriam exteriorizaba su sentimiento de dislocación, *hunching, shrugging* o *drooping.* Las perspectivas que tiene para su futuro son totalmente desesperanzadoras:

> Perhaps she would end her days lingering on street corners, wrapped in newspapers, bruised and battered, frost cold, abused, thrown out like refuse under arches to die. Nobody's grandmother or children taken away at birth to be brought up by strangers, forever mourned, forever unknown. (BSR: 46)

Parece que al final acaba por ser engullida por el mundo hostil que la rechaza y que ella rechaza:

> Perhaps a woman old and sterile among gossips, days passing in trivia, extemporating on trivia, to conceal the yawning gap that says there is nothing there. Nothing had been left because there was nothing there before. Where life had allowed to drift by, day after day. An old woman wrapped in blankets, crouched on feeble fire saying, 'At least I have worked, contributed to the killing, I am entitled to sit still.' An old woman who nobody goes to see, for in truth she had given her fingers, now arthritic, and had lost her brain in wars and in the service of a man. Now instead she pries on unwitting tenants young women—defending her territory, the men in her house. (BSR: 46)

A diferencia de Miriam, a Mary le falta un modelo que le sirva como referencia o de un lugar en el que alguna vez no se haya sentido desplazada. Carece de la experiencia en la colonia que constituyen la vía de escape de Miriam, ya su vida ha sido siempre la de una ciudadana de segunda clase en la metrópolis, sin salida a su problemática existencia:

> She had lived in tiny rooms, it seemed, forever, and there was no chance of escape. She would shrivel, old among the old, imprisoned. Mind trapped in decaying body, exterminated.
>
> ...
>
> Her mind began to drip away, and like a prison she began only to see the walls around her pressing. The young black woman, for now she had been harried into awareness of self against the pale and rotting flesh, was caged; aware of the machinations of people like animals living in sterile jungles. (BSR: 47)

La idea de aprisionamiento se hace más evidente en la siguiente cita, en la que el color amarillo, presente desde el comienzo del relato, y ahora vinculado a este estado de enajenación mental, *yellow psydelic patterns*, tiñe todo lo que rodea a Miriam.

> She felt like running away from prison bars, the yellow walls which assumed proportions of torture—yellow flakes falling on her head on opening the door, yellow psydelic patterns reaching out to suck her in, at morning time. It seemed as in only in sleep could she escape the room. (BSR: 46)

Hacia el final de la historia se sugiere que la habitación tiene una función ambivalente, ya que, además de simbolizar aprisionamiento, aislamiento y desarraigo, en cierto sentido la protege del mundo

hostil exterior, y así, "She began to go outside only in the evening so that spying eyes from curtains would not watch her movements" (BSR: 48). Igualmente dominado por el amarillo, el mundo natural tampoco ofrece una salida, sino que constituye otro foco de hostilidad:

> Even escaping to the park, to breathe fresh air, she would come across an old man among waterbirds, and fleeing would see a yellow car, an old man watching.
>
> The landscape became an old man dank and silent, watching, poking out his tongue.
>
> ...
>
> The woman walked through the streets at evening time, wind-blown and lonely, aware of isolation. Desolation delineated by falling autumn leaves, yellow and red. Grey slated sky like roofs hanging from above.
>
> Dogs' messes lay drying. Wind blew leaves, eddying carefree along the road. She saw branches which reminded her of bars and which stood in her way, to be pried apart. (BSR: 48)

Dejarse atrapar por y convertirse en un agente más de la hostilidad que la oprime a ella en el presente aparecen como las únicas perspectivas para el futuro. Como resultado del proceso de desplazamiento, alienación y experiencias negativas con todo el mundo que la rodea, Mary se ha vuelto "cynical" (BSR: 49), ha perdido su confianza en la naturaleza humana. La única salida es el suicidio:

> She paused for one moment looking down - into the vacuum below.
>
> The fines in her hands ran like madness, broken like the years.
>
> I was time to go. By now grown cynical she wondered if this charade would not play itself again and again and again! Without a mister. (BSR: 49)

Mientras que Miriam, en quien la colonización mental no se ha producido y es capaz de recuperar una relación de identidad efectiva entre *self* y *place*, Mary no tiene una referencia a la que recurrir, y no puede desarrollar una identidad nueva, y esto resulta en que "her mind became an empty space, left for illusion to gather. There was nothing left but old and dying people" (BSR: 48).

La estructura de "The Visit" es abierta, reflejo de la concepción positiva que transmite, y en "The Bed Sitting Room" el tono negativo se corresponde con la estructura cerrada de la historia, ya que, en cierto modo, la imagen de la rana destrozada del comienzo anticipa la imagen de suicidio del final de la historia. Al igual que la rana es destrozada al entrar en ese jardín en el que "nothing that was not contrived by human mind lived happily" (BSR: 40), la resistencia de

Mary a vivir "contrived by human mind" en un mundo en el que no ha encontrado su *place*, su identidad acaba con ella. En "The Bed Sitting Room" al final sólo quedan "silence and the winter winds" (BSR: 49).

En definitiva, frente a la visión negativa que emana la historia de Ismay, el mensaje de "The Visit" es mucho más positivo, aunque no exento de ambivalencia. Es optimista en cuanto que se presentan aspectos buenos tanto en el centro como en la colonia. Sin embargo, se pierde el *female bonding*, no hay *sympathy* o solidaridad entre las mujeres. Aquí se sitúa la multiplicidad aludida al comienzo, mediante el rechazo de las oposiciones binarias en las que se inscribía al sujeto colonial, y se reconocen la heterogeneidad y pluralidad, ya que del relato se desprende que no hace falta escoger entre polarizaciones extremas. Uno puede encontrar su *place*, su identidad en la colonia mientras que otro puede encontrarlo en la metrópoli, ya que aunque Miriam no encuentra su *place* en Inglaterra, no ocurre lo mismo con sus hijos, para los que la estancia en la metrópoli no se ha convertido en una experiencia alienante. En el caso de Mary, sin embargo, la liberación de la situación de desplazamiento es más problemática, no se hace referencia a que le quede ningún vínculo con la colonia, y un cambio geográfico no es suficiente, porque la causa de su desplazamiento no es una simple visita. Ella no encuentra su *place* en el país del que se supone que es una ciudadana más, e, incapaz de seguir con esa "charade" (BSR: 49), en un estado de enajenación mental, se suicida. Por lo tanto, mientras que la voz narrativa en tercera persona resulta más acorde con la completa alienación final de la protagonista de la historia de Ismay, la multiplicidad de perspectivas en "The Visit" concuerda con la ambivalencia del mensaje que transmite. En definitiva, el mensaje de "The Visit" podría resumirse en que "All place have their people" (TV: 144), frente al mensaje cargado de tintes negativos de "The Bed Sitting Room": "Worlds-unreconcilable" (BSR: 43).

Teresa Moralejo Gárate
Departamento de Filología Inglesa
Universidad de Murcia, España

Referencias

Ashcroft, B., G. Griffiths & H. Tiffin *The Empire Writes Back. Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures.* London & New York: Routledge, 1989.

Ashcroft, B., G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin, eds. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader.* London and New York: Routledge, 1995.

Boyce Davies, C. *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject.* London and New York: Routledge, 1994.

Cobham, R. and M. Collins, eds. *Watchers and Seekers: Creative Writing by Black Women in Britain.* London: The Women's Press, 1987.

Collins, M. *Rain Darling.* London: The Women's Press, 1990).

Donnel, A. and S. Lawson Welsh, eds. *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature.* London and New York: Routledge, 1996.

Gilman, C.P. *The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Stories.* London and New York: Penguin, 1995.

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, l0th edition. Deluxe Electronic Edition.

O'Callaghan, E. *Woman Version: Theoretical Approaches to West Indian Fiction by Women.* London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993.

Showalter, E. *The Female Malady. Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980.* London: Virago Press, 1987.

"CAR OF MY SLEEPLESS NIGHTS": MOBILITY AND METAPHOR IN RAYMOND CARVER'S POETRY

Robert Miltner

For twentieth century American writers, the car serves as a vehicle which is used both as a means of mobility and as a basis for metaphor. In an historical and technological sense, the car initially provided writers with access to otherwise inaccessible territory, especially as it did by providing new material for the Modernist writers of the first half of the century. In 1900, there were some eight thousand cars in America; by 1920, there were 10 million, more in the state of Kansas alone than in all of France; by 1980, the number of cars surpassed the number of households (Bryson 165-68, 343); the result, as language historian Bill Bryson observes, is that "no innovation in history has more swiftly captured the affections of humanity or more radically transformed the way the world looks, behaves, and operates" than the car (163).

Yet, even as the car was becoming ubiquitous, writers were realizing that the car could also become a way to express one's extended sense of self, and thus would serve as an effective metaphor for understanding the relationship of humans to the larger world. K.T. Berger, in *Where the Road and the Sky Collide: America Through the Eyes of Its Drivers*, sees the relationship of humans and their cars not only as a symbiotic relationship, but also as a synthetic relationship, using the idea of "the new centaur" to denote this complex interrelationship: "Cars have become a second skin. When we climb into our cars and cinch ourselves into the seat belts it's as though we're literally putting on our cars, as we would a suit of clothes" (17). The car, perhaps the twentieth century's dominant technological image prior to that of the computer, is a projection of self, either as mobility or metaphor, as American poet and short story writer Raymond Carver understood. In his poems, he rides the car as if it is the mechanical replacement for the horse on an epic, or comic

journey, using it as a means for escape from the routine of dull jobs, for transport to the woman of his dreams, for transformation of his personal circumstances, or for generating an inventory of ills that chants an incantation for change.

The car appears as a form of mobility in one of Carver's earliest poems from the 1960s, "Drinking While Driving." Bored, restless, aimless, Carver describes how he and his brother did "not have any particular place in mind to go,/ we are just driving," two Americans letting mobility be a means to any adventure, hoping that "Any minute now, something will happen." Carver demonstrates the concept of using the car to *go cruising*, to drive randomly looking for something to develop, for something to *find* beyond the events of their uneventful daily lives by looking outside of themselves, the car providing this kind of mobility and access. The car is a physical extension of our nation's insistence upon freedom, individualism, and independence, for, as David Halberstam notes, the car fits the nature of Americans who are "restless, independent, less rooted than other people" (15). The experience is thrilling, exciting, for Carver recalls feeling "happy/ riding in a car with my brother/ and drinking from a pint of Old Crow." It seems therefore evident that the two brothers are unaware that underlying this pseudo-quest, there may be nothing there, really:

> If I closed my eyes for a minute
> I would be lost, yet
> I could gladly lie down and sleep forever
> beside this road.

The idea of loss is further reinforced by the speaker's apology-of-sorts for having read only one book recently, *The Retreat from Moscow*, a title that both indicates failed campaigns and foreshadows the dangerous aimlessness of the two brothers who drink directly from the bottle they pass between them. As a teenager in Yakima, Washington, Carver liked to spend his time "rid[ing] around in cars with other guys" (McCaffery 114), during his "bozo" days of stealing hubcaps for kicks (Gallagher 9). Thus, for Carver, the car is a vehicle to open up new experiences that transcend the mundane, to expand the limitations of place, and to take the poet to new experiences which might otherwise not come to the poet. According to Carver:

> When I wrote [the poem] I was working an eight-to-five job in a more or less decent white collar position. But, as always with a full-time job, there was not enough time to go around. ... once or twice during that period I had ridden around at night with my brother in his car, both of us feeling aimless and hemmed in... ("On 'Drinking While Driving'" 105)

Here is the thrill of opening oneself up to the possibility of the new, the random experience that cruising brings, extending that sense of the ultimate adventure expressed by Dean Moriarty in Jack Kerouac's 1955 classic novel of the post-war generation's random traveling, *On the Road*:

> "Now, Sal, we're leaving everything behind us and entering a new and unknown phase of things. All the years and troubles and kicks—and now *this*! so we can safely think of nothing else and just go ahead with our faces stuck out like this, you see, and *understand* the world as, really and genuinely speaking, other Americans haven't done before us..." (226)

Randomly seeking the new world of what's around the next bend, over the next hill, behind the wheel of a car may be the last frontier left in America, as Kerouac's Moriarty suggests, yet there is, however, also a concurrent danger evident in the two brothers passing the bottle of alcohol back and forth in "Drinking While Driving," for the two brothers are *DUI*, or driving under the influence of alcohol with the potential for destruction as the vehicle, designed for transportation, transforms into a lethal weapon capable of *vehicular homicide.* Of course, the car can also be simply the means, the mobility, to homicide as well, as in Carver's short story "Tell the Women We're Going" in which Bill Jamison and Jerry Roberts, restless in their marriages and jobs, take a drive—while drinking—because, as Jerry tells Bill, "Guys got to get out," though their chance discovery of two young women just out for a bicycle ride ultimately leads to the girls' murder.

In "Waiting," Carver again uses the car as a means of mobility, this time as the literal vehicle which will take him to see the woman he loves. The poem acts as the kind of interior monologue one recites to oneself while driving, recalling verbal directions. The speaker begins by driving "Left off the highway and/ down the hill," continuing in a series of left turns, with the speaker advising himself to

> Keep going. Just before
> the road ends, there'll be
> another road. Take it
> and no other. Otherwise,
> you life will be ruined
> forever.

The urgency of avoiding potential ruin fuels the momentum of the poem, setting up the reader's expectations of the destination of this drive, the "house/ where trees are laden with/ fruit. Where phlox,

forsythia,/ and marigold grow." The romantic setting, enhanced by the image of fullness and ripeness with the trees bearing fruit, and the inventory of flowers which indicates a range of time—forsythia for spring, the varieties of phlox which bloom from spring into late summer, the fall colors of the marigolds—prepare both the reader and the speaker for arrival at the destination:

> the house where the woman
> stands in the doorway
> wearing sun in her hair. The one
> who's been waiting
> all this time.
> The woman who loves you.
> The one who can say,
> "What's kept you?"

The "waiting" operates on three levels here: first, in the mind of the writer who can't wait to get home to the woman he loves; second, in the mind of the woman who has been waiting for her lover; and third in the mind of the reader who "rides" in the car with the narrator, wondering where this "ride" is going and where it will arrive.

The reader can see Carver shifting from the car used merely as mobility to the car also used directly as metaphor in "Hope." Though the poem's narrator drives away from his wife and her boyfriend, his marriage ending, he drives away in the apparently run-down car, but as soon as the reader learns that the wife expects the narrator to "wreck the car," it becomes clear that the car which "was in [his] name" has become a metaphor for his life, suggesting that what she actually expects him to do is to wreck his life, one which "needed work anyway." Aimless, he left, and

> Then sped toward
> the state line. I *was* hell-bent.
> She was right to think so.

This is the speaker driving for the sheer feel of freedom he feels from escaping the moment. A similar scene occurs at the end of "Elephant," one of Carver's last short stories, as the nameless narrator, burdened by working himself into debt to support his mother, children, brother, ex-wife, finds his freedom by riding off into the mountains, a passenger in his coworker's car:

"*Go*," I said. "What are you waiting for, George?" And that's when we really flew. Wind howled outside the windows. He had it floored, and we were going flat out. We streaked down that road in his big, unpaid-for car. (364)

In “Hope,” however, the narrator’s car/life did not wreck, the reader learns, but instead he

> kept going. Went
> a long way without stopping.
> Left the dogs, my friends, behind.

When the narrator returns “months, or years, later,” and is described as “driving a different car” *literally*, the reader sees that the narrator is also *figuratively* living a new life, one in which he is “Sober. Dressed in a clean shirt,/ pants, and boots.” The use of car imagery to describe a marital state is also used by Carver in the short story “Are These Actual Miles?” Leo and Toni, racing ahead of bankruptcy court, have to sell Toni’s convertible, much in the same way in which they must sell their pride to the courts in order to clear out their debts. After Toni returns home from selling the car, Leo looks at Toni while she is asleep, seeing her body as a road map and seeing their marriage through the metaphor of their car:

> [Leo] runs his fingers over her hips and feels the stretch marks there. They are like roads, and he traces them in her flesh. He runs his fingers back and forth, first one, then the another. They run everywhere in her flesh, dozens, perhaps hundreds of them. He remembers waking up in the morning after they bought the car, seeing it, there in the drive, in the sun, gleaming.

The body is therefore a highway, and their marriage, which was once romantically fresh and new, “gleaming,” is now sold off, gone, done for. As in the short stories “Are These Actual Miles” and “Elephant,” in the poem “Hope,” Raymond Carver brings the car into the poem, operating it both as mobility and as metaphor.

An obvious metaphor, in fact a collage, or rather barrage, of metaphors, is Carver’s humorous poem, “The Car.” On the surface, the poem looks like a list or inventory of all the broken-down cars one could own, a kind of personal used car lot.

> The car with a cracked windshield.
> The car that threw a rod.
> The car without brakes.
> The car with a faulty U-joint.
> The car with a hole in its radiator.

Some of the items on the poem’s list are familiar to most drivers, the “corroded battery cables,” the “front end out of alignment,” the “broken fan belt,” or the “hole in the muffler.” Other items are more extreme, such as the “steering problem,” the “blown head-gasket,” the “transmission trouble,” or the “twice-rebuilt engine.” A few items suggest narratives-in-the-making: “The car I picked peaches for,”

"The car I traded for a bicycle," "The car the child threw up in," or "The car my daughter wrecked." Yet some items border on the surreal: "The car I struck with a hammer," "The car that hit the dog and kept going," or "The car that left the restaurant without paying." Individually, each problem with the car is stressful, difficult, troubling, yet collectively, through the use of the car as an anaphora, the sheer mass becomes overstatement, comic, absurd. Part of the humor derives from personifying the car, making it responsible for things which the driver ought to be responsible. After all, it was the driver who left the restaurant, hit the dog and kept going, not the car, unless, of course, the car is considered metaphorically as an extension of the driver.

This "list" poem operates as an incantation, a chant, an attempt to cast some magical spell on the car, the object which the late French critic Roland Barthes has called "a purely magical object" (12). When our lives seem out of control, when the fates make us their sport, we pray for deliverance, as does the speaker in this case, incanting the automobile gods to take pity upon his wreck of a car. According to Jungian psychologist James Hillman, the car embodies our "dominant fantasy of self-determination" and is thus a part of our larger fantasy of individualization, of ego control, of control of our individual fate:

> I, the modern secular ego, is the self-moved mover, which is precisely what *automobile* means. As long as I am driving, the wheel in my hands; no matter the facts of death on the road, my fantasy assures me I have death in my control. (15)

Obviously, the speaker in this poem has absolutely no control over his life, since the car, an extension of his ego, is multitudinously broken down. In this case, without mobility, there can be no metaphor, without motion, there can be no control; the speaker therefore implores the gods—imagined almost as the Mr. Goodwrench of the universe—to *jumpstart* or *overhaul* his life, get it back on life's highway, as it were. This is precisely how, as modern mobile Americans, we see ourselves: we are our cars. Carver's poem "The Car" is therefore a kind of indirect address to himself, a poem which, on the one hand, is a send-up of a litany of self pitying woes, yet, on the other hand, it is just as equally an incantation for change, for control, for the empowerment of individual freedom. After all, if his car will not run, he cannot cruise. Just as in "Hope," the car functions as a metaphor for the life of the speaker in the poem. In "The Car," however, the speaker's life is an endless tale of hard luck, bad karma, of feeling literally *stuck,* with no means, no vehicle for escape. During

the years in which Carver struggled with establishing his career as a writer, he "never had a car that worked" (Gallagher 10), thus the image of the constantly-breaking-down, start-and-stop car works as an effective metaphor for a literary career with similar start-and-stop motions. Of course, when Carver did finally "arrive" on the literary scene, grants and lucrative contracts allowed him the means to purchase his first new car: a Mercedes he paid for in cash (Gallagher 11).

Mass production and affordability of the car provided Americans with a vehicle for public access, for mobility, and, for American poets, it offered a specific metaphor for expressing individualism and independence. As T.K. Berger observes, "We have merely inherited this world and so must turn to something as mundane, and perhaps superficial, as the car to fashion poetry and meaning in our lives" (32). Raymond Carver discovered poetry in the car and expressed it in his writing, using his poems as vehicles to vicariously carry readers along with him on the ride as he heads off down the road to where the sun shines, the road gleams, and poems are in the making.

Robert Miltner
Department of English
Kent State University Stark Campus

Works Cited

Barthes, Roland. Quoted in Berger. 12

Berger, T.K. *Where the Road and the Sky Collide: America Through the Eyes of Its Drivers.* New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993.

Bryson, Bill. *Made in America: An Informal History of the English Language in the United States.* New York: William Morrow and Company, 1995.

Carver, Raymond. "Drinking While Driving." *All of Us: The Collected Poems.* New York: Knopf, 1998. 3.

_____. "Elephant." *Where I'm Calling From: New and Selected Stories.* New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1988. 351-64.

_____. "Hope." *All of Us: The Collected Poems.* New York: Knopf, 1998. 159-60.

_____. “On ‘Drinking While Driving’.” *No Heroics, Please: Uncollected Writings.* New York: Vintage, 1991. 105-6.

_____. “Tell the Women We’re Going.” *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love.* New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 1989. 57-66.

_____. “The Carl” *All of Us: The Collected Poems.* New York: Knopf, 1998. 151-2.

_____. “Waiting.” *All of Us: The Collected Poems.* New York: Knopf, 1998. 205.

Gallagher, Tess. “Carver Country.” *Carver Country: The World of Raymond Carver.* Bob Adelman. New York: Scribner’s, 1990.

Halberstam, David. Quoted in Berger. 15

Hillman, James. Quoted in Berger. 15.

Kerouac, Jack. *On the Road.* New York: Signet, 1957.

McCaffery, Larry and Sinda Gregory. “An Interview with Raymond Carver.” Summer 1984. *Mississippi Review* 40/41 (1985): 62-82. Rpt. In *Alive and Writing: Interviews with American Authors of the 1980s.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987. Rpt. in *Conversations with Raymond Carver.* Marshall Bruce Gentry and William L. Stull, eds. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990. 98-116.

DISMANTLING MASTER THOUGHT: DISCOURSE AND RACE IN FREDERICK DOUGLASS' *NARRATIVE*

Samantha Manchester Earley

Frederick Douglass reports that, when he was a slave, he was frequently asked if he had a kind master, a query he always answered in the affirmative. In giving such answers, Douglass claims that he was not telling a lie, "for I always measured the kindness of my master by the standards of kindness set up among slaveholders around us" (*Narrative* 266). With this admission, Douglass appears, on the surface, to have absorbed the standards of the oppressor: that is, measuring kindness according to white slaveholding standards of kindness advances Douglass as a colonized "other" who parrots the master's discourse.

A closer reading of this passage, however, points to a more discerning, subversive Douglass, a Douglass who takes a master discourse and uses it to his own advantage, changing the meaning in the process. Douglass here asserts that "kindness," as well as many other terms, "slave" included, are defined by a system of "standard[s]" set up by the dominant culture, "the slaveholders around us," and that he apprehended these defining systems. His assertion that "kindness" is defined by a certain set of criteria, the slaveholders' criteria, advances the ideologically constructed nature of such definitions and opens up a space for alternative definitions and defining systems.

Hence, when Douglass claims that, although he may not have agreed with the definitions put forth in those "standard[s]" he could use them to his own advantage, he tactfully posits alternative definitions constructed by appropriating these discursive tools; that is, in borrowing the masters' definition of "kindness," Douglass almost imperceptibly changes the definition of the word. "Kindness," in an ironic troping, comes to mean its opposite. Douglass here subverts the master discourse, the master defining system, in order to advance

his point on the cruelty of slavery and to advance himself as a human subject able to manipulate complex discourses.

It is in these terms that I propose to read Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass An American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845; henceforth *Narrative*). Through his development of the character of the slave, his text subtly indicts the dominant culture's definition of "slave" or "African American" as "animal" and, by the same gesture, posits "human" as alternative. In this regard, I analyze various discourse strategies that he uses to dismantle the power structures that cripple the slave community. I will demonstrate how Douglass' narrator draws upon existing racial ideology and the discourses that define "slave," and, in the process of critiquing them, produces a new discourse that bespeaks the inevitability of difference as well as the humanity of slaves. Douglass and his narrator thus indicate that slaves must be treated as humans.

During the early 1800s, the master defining discourse was constructed around the principle that slaves and blacks are somehow "animal" and "nonhuman." The popularity of such a dehumanizing view allowed the majority of American people, slave holders and non-slave holders alike, to define themselves as "not black" or "white." Racial discourse thus was an apparatus of power, a strategy for the reinforcement of an "ethno-centric" attitude. As Homi Bhabha says, the objective of racial discourse is

> to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction. ("Signs" 154)

The construction of the dominant American racial discourse is thus a complex articulation of religious rationales and economic stratagems used to construe Africans and African Americans as "a population of degenerate types" in need of slavery—a "system of administration and instruction." This dominant racial discourse finally produces a system of representation that translates into subjugation and racial discord and distrust. Frederick Douglass the slave and Frederick Douglass the fugitive slave narrator ingeniously subvert these discourses that equate "slave" with "animal," and, in their exposure and denunciation of this and other dehumanizing appellations, Douglass' two notions of "slave" establish the humanity of "slaves" and, by extension, African Americans.

A more particular representation of the use of religious discourse as a method to justify slavery is Captain Auld's religious experience at a Methodist camp meeting. Douglass' comment on this particular

event points directly to the nefarious ideological purposes that religion might be made to serve:

> I indulged a faint hope that his [Auld's] conversion would lead him to emancipate his slaves, and that, if he did not do this, it would, at any rate, make him more kind and humane. I was disappointed in both these respects. It neither made him to be humane to his slaves, nor to emancipate them. If it had any effect on his character, it made him more cruel and hateful in all his ways. (287)

Auld's "conversion" to Christianity evidently introduced him to an entirely new system of justification for his treatment of his slaves. After his conversion, then, he could beat his slaves with impunity, for Auld would have learned in church that they, having been cursed by God, were made to be punished. Auld's torture of the "lame young woman" (288-289) further exemplifies how "my master found religious sanction for his cruelty" (288). It is, however, important to note here that Douglass' does not dispute the veracity of the Bible. Rather, his concern is to question its uses to sanctify the torture of human beings and to keep a race of people in subjugation. Hence, in the *Narrative*, Douglass' slave character negotiates instances of racism within American culture, while another character, the fugitive slave narrator, makes comments about that culture, a process that Betty J. Ring terms "semantic intervention" (121); these comments criticize dominant discourses that define "slave" as "animal." Moreover, they prefigure the next stereotype of the African by showing that the "slave" must be defined with all the complexities that make up a "human being."

Douglass, the slave character, then, navigates through the morass of the stereotypes that determine the meaning of slavery. For instance, when Douglass goes to live with the Aulds in Baltimore, he becomes aware that his behavior toward white people is a learned behavior and that the white man's power to enslave the black man is based on the mastery of the word, on language. Indeed, language does not merely introduce a communication instrument, but also involves a broad orientation to knowledge and interpretation, indicating that slavery for Douglass has as much to do with knowledge as with physical bondage.

Douglass states that, when he moves to Baltimore, his early instruction is "all out of place" (274). He also apprehends that

> the crouching servility, usually so acceptable a quality in a slave, did not answer when manifested toward [Mrs. Auld]. Her favor was not gained by it; she seemed to be disturbed by it. (274)

At the Auld's, and with Mrs. Auld in particular, Douglass learns to

recognize and question the cultural constructs that dictate his behavior (and to a certain extent his thoughts) toward white people, white culture, and his own life and definitions of himself. Douglass realizes, in other words, that language is "the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of truth, 'order', and 'reality' become established" (Ashcroft 7). As Betty J. Ring explains, Douglass understands that the

> power-relations between master and slave are constructed epistemologically: deciphering the processes by which the true origins of slavery are obscured, Douglass becomes "master" of the "subject," thus transforming his own subjected status. (121)

Accordingly, once Douglass masters the master's discourse—that is, when he comprehends how he is first enslaved and then constructed as the nonhuman "other"—he no longer moves with "crouching servility," as he realizes that this particular posture is not a "natural" position for a black person when in contact with a white person, but merely a behavior that the whites have required the blacks adopt (274).[1]

It takes Douglass little time to extrapolate this lesson in physical demeanor into other facets of race relations, as evidenced in the ostensible "right" of whites to punish blacks or to keep blacks from literacy. More importantly, Douglass can then question the patterns of his and other slaves' lives, and he can act to change his circumstances. For instance, Douglass learns to read by beginning his own economic exchange, an exchange that will provide him with the knowledge to free himself from being a cipher in the economic exchanges of others. He befriends the white boys of the neighborhood, and, when he is dispatched on an errand, he, significantly enough, carries his book with him:

---

[1] According to William L. Andrews, many slave narrators deem as turning points in their stories their realization that the dominant culture constructs them to be inferior "others" and that the slave system was a means of

> marginalizing the Afro-American into the condition of not knowing who he was essentially or what her rightful status ought to be, so as to shape him or her into the most adaptable instruments for white manipulation. (*To Tell* 176)

Douglass apprehends that racial inferiority is no more than a social construct, not an inherent racial characteristic when Mrs. Auld's "favor [is] not gained" by his "crouching servility" (274). This realization is crucial in his refashioning himself from "a slave" to "a man."

> I also used to carry bread with me, enough of which was always in the house, and to which I was always welcome; for I was much better off in this regard than many of the poor white children in our neighborhood. This bread I used to bestow upon the hungry little urchins, who, in return, would give me that more valuable bread of knowledge. (278)

In this instance, Douglass acknowledges that, in some economic respects, he was "better off" than the free white boys of the neighborhood; he lived in a house where there was enough bread, and he was free to take as much as he liked. He can then exchange that bread for reading lessons.

His use of that "privileged economic position," being "better off," contrasts with his declaration to those same boys: "You will be free as soon as you are twenty-one, *but I am a slave for life*! Have I not as good a right to be free as you have?" (278). This juxtaposition of Douglass' potential for economic manipulation with Douglass as an economic cipher indicates the dichotomy between his ability to use a liberating discourse—exchanging bread for knowledge, for example—and his being defined as property, as an object of exchange, within the discourse system. Moreover, he implicitly articulates the dominant conception of slave as child. In these juxtapositions, Douglass evolves a hybrid discourse wherein two conflicting postures co-exist side by side. He is thrown into a paradoxical situation, one that is typical of the colonial scene: on the one hand, he is thrilled to discover that he is "much better off," and, on the other hand, he is made to acknowledge the value of the very culture, "that more valuable bread of knowledge," that keeps him in the lower rung of humanity, materially and spiritually.

Douglass' owner, Mr. Auld, comprehends that the slaveholders' religious and economic discourse systems keep the whites in power and the blacks enslaved. He also realizes that if Douglass learns to read, he will be able to redefine himself as "man" rather than "chattel" and that this redefinition "would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master" (274). Auld senses that Douglass is a man capable of self-definition, yet he wants to see Douglass only as an economic tool; learning, of course, will make that tool of no more use. Accordingly, Auld rightly imagines that a "chattel" will work for his owner because, being property himself, he cannot think of acquiring property. On the other hand, a "man" will want to work and produce for himself and his family, as Douglass later works in the shipyard to support himself and his wife (325).

At one crucial point, Douglass overhears Mr. Auld forbidding Mrs. Auld to teach Douglass to read. Auld's words

> sank deep into [Douglass'] heart, stirred up sentiments within that lay slumbering, and called into existence an entirely new train of thought. It was a new and special revelation, explaining dark and mysterious things, with which [his] youthful understanding had struggled, but struggled in vain. (275)

Upon overhearing Auld, Douglass has words to explain his "mysterious" youthful feelings; he comes to the realization that "the white man's power to enslave the black man" (275) originates in the white man's ability to read and write, that is, to control the discourse that defines "slaves" as economic tools of value and to propagate this discourse as the "natural" way of life.[2]

Paradoxically, Auld's opposition to Douglass' learning to read further encourages Douglass to pursue his studies. Douglass, the slave narrator, describes the character's forbearance to learn to read as follows:

> What he most dreaded, that I most desired. What he most loved, that I most hated. That which to him was a great evil, to be carefully shunned, was to me a great good, to be diligently sought; and the argument which he so warmly urged, against my learning to read, only served to inspire me with a desire and determination to learn. In learning to read, I owe almost as much to the bitter opposition of my master as I do to the kindly aid of my mistress. I acknowledge the benefit of both. (275)

While Douglass' careful crossing of "dreaded" and "desired," "loved" and "hated," "evil—shunned" and "good—sought," point to the diametrically opposed positions of master and slave, debunking thereby the contented slave myth, they more importantly indicate Douglass' ability to control the structure of his words and ideas. In his crossing of "bitter opposition of my master" and "kindly aid of my

---

[2] Houston A. Baker, Jr., emphasizes that the dominant culture, as epitomized for Douglass in Mr. Auld, attempts to control perceptions of what is "natural" or "real" through linguistic markers arising out of "semantic competition involved in culture contact" ("Autobiographical" 247). In order to keep slaves and African Americans as a means of production, then, the American slaveholding culture evolved a circular system by which slaves were enslavable because they were slaves. In other words, as Douglass apprehends after overhearing Mr. Auld's words, the dominant culture asserts that slaves are illiterate, and it is therefore forbidden to teach slaves to read. Moreover, with this logic, slaves are less than human and therefore enslavable because they are unable to read. As a slave, then, Douglass is specifically constructed within a disabling master discourse which conceives of slaves—African Americans, in this case—as a degenerate population in order to justify its conquest and rule.

mistress," Douglass acknowledges the cruelties and kindnesses that contributed to his development as a man, the paradoxes that controlled his life as a slave, as well as his impetus for mastering the discourses that helped make him free. Through those discourses, then, he posits himself as Auld's economic tool, and he declares his use of economic tools to educate himself. More significantly, he uses a number of sophisticated rhetorical strategies to posit a counterdiscourse debunking the popular notion of "slave" as "animal."

Furthermore, his strikingly simple statement "I acknowledge the benefit of both" places Douglass, the slave narrator, in control of his lived experiences and the self that emerges from those experiences. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Auld creates the man who emerges from "bitter opposition" and "kindly aid." Instead, Douglass fashions himself as a man in the process of learning to read, calling attention to Douglass, the author, crafting Douglass, the character, and Douglass, the slave narrator. Embedded in Douglass' above-cited statement is, moreover, a tacit resistance to the kinds of pressures put upon him by a master discourse that seeks to annul his self as constituted in the present. The first-person pronoun with which he begins his affirmative statement is further evidence that he can now raise his voice, that he is capable of more than just relating the bare facts of his bondage. In these respects, he becomes a subject manipulating discourses, no longer discourses' mere object.[3]

Significantly, the scene in which Douglass the slave character manipulates economic discourse by exchanging bread for knowledge is followed by Douglass the slave narrator describing the importance of mastery of language. In the dialogues and speeches found in *The Columbian Orator*, the first book Douglass owns, he finds the words, phrases, and sentences that allow him to articulate his views on slavery. His reading of this book provides him with the ammunition to battle the dominant culture with its own weapons: he

---

[3] The synchresis Douglass uses to describe his desire to learn to read, and by extension to be free, closely parallels what Lucinda H. MacKethan takes to be one of the central paradoxes of slavery:

> One had to know one's letters in order to be free, but in America, one had to be free in order to learn one's letters. In this double bind the fugitive slave found the greatest challenge to his achievement of full human status. (56)

Frederick Douglass the slave narrator systematically builds this paradox, this "double bind," into the structure of his narrative. Theoretically, such a "double bind" provides a framework within which identity is constituted by difference.

acquires the words for "a bold denunciation of slavery and a powerful vindication of human rights" (278). Of course, these tools are later put to use in his career as an orator on the abolitionist lecture circuit and as an author and editor. John Louis Lucaites argues that when Douglass orates he

> puts himself in the position of speaking *to* his audience as a dialogical other, rather than speaking for them as a duly constituted member of their community. (57)

In the same manner, Douglass positions himself as a dialogical other to his reading audience when he describes his slave character's initiation into white discourses.

For instance, Auld had warned his wife not to teach Douglass to learn to read, for, "if you give a n—— an inch, he will take an ell" (274). Douglass the slave narrator, reflecting back on his "stealing" the time to learn to read, positions himself as wiser and more experienced than the character grappling with the alphabet. He signifies ironically on Mr. Auld's words when he proclaims that "Mistress, in teaching me the alphabet, had given me the *inch*, and no precaution could prevent me from taking the *ell*" (277). Douglass here takes the words Auld uses and gives them an entirely new meaning, which marks his separation from the site of his owner's control and privilege. He, in other words, appropriates his owner's language by fully adapting it to his own interests. In this context, his appropriation is

> the process by which the language is taken and made to "bear the burden" of one's own cultural experience, or as Raja Rao puts it, to "convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own." (Ashcroft 38-39)

This is precisely why Mr. Auld assumes that giving any type of encouragement to Douglass (or any slave) would "spoil" him, would make him greedy for more freedom: Mastery of a language, and of the discursive systems that inform what speakers of that language can conceive, places an object of discourse into a subject position.

Douglass' words do indicate that Auld was right. Once Douglass learns the alphabet, he wants to learn to read, for in reading and writing he sees his pathway to freedom:

> I looked forward to a time at which it would be safe for me to escape. I was too young to think of doing so immediately; besides, I wished *to learn how to write*, as I might have occasion *to write* my own pass. I consoled myself with the hope that I should one day find a good chance. Meanwhile, I would *learn to write*. (280: emphasis mine)

Douglass' somehow obsessive concern with learning how to write

betokens an urge to achieve a degree of self-determination, self-education, and self-esteem, all of which are highly admired by the American audience.[4]

Houston Baker maintains that this tension appears in the multiple meanings Auld's negative appellation is forced to assume. While Auld uses the term, "n——," as "subhuman agency of labor," Baker argues that "agent capable of education" is the marker that emerges from Douglass' manipulations of the master's language ("Autobiographical" 247). Douglass does not identify himself totally with the members of the dominant culture even though he uses their discourses to inscribe himself into that world, for Auld's pejorative term is implied in Douglass' use of Auld's words. Thus, Douglass assumes a position inside the master's discourse, both as a subject manipulating that discourse and as an object of that discourse. In this respect, Douglass offers a new rendering of "slave" to those of the dominant culture, a rendering beyond "an agent capable of education." "Slave," as Douglass has constructed himself, emerges as one who has an ability to perceive the discursive systems by which he can be ideologically labelled and who can manipulate those discourses to posit and provoke new, alternative definitions.

Baker notes the irony in Douglass' description of Mr. Auld, "who wants a silently laboring brute" but who is ultimately rendered in Douglass' *Narrative* as an object fashioned by Douglass and "visible to himself and a learned reading public only through the discourse of the articulate black spokesman" (Baker "Autobiographical" 247). Douglass' portrayal of Auld (and Covey and the other whites in the *Narrative*) is as Baker indicates, an ironic troping on dominant discursive systems that posit him as "not of the human family" (Walker 20) and thus unable to apprehend or manipulate those systems. I suggest that Douglass, in his role as a narrator and as an author inscribing that narrator, is also manufacturing "slave" as a "dialogical other" who identifies the complexities, ironies, and contradictions of the dominant ideology, a position in keeping with his role as the interpreter of his own text.

---

[4] In this regard, Rafia Zafar rightly compares Frederick Douglass to Benjamin Franklin, the quintessential American self-made man. Zafar maintains that both Douglass and Franklin are cultural heroes, having written similar autobiographies that emphasize "the rise from obscurity to renown, the bondage to a kinsman, the education of a young man, and the attitudes towards self vis-a-vis the community" (99). Like Franklin, Douglass, in his self-conscious act of writing his life, stresses the all-American story of "rags to riches." At the same time, however, Douglass' *Narrative* subtly indicts the white culture that denies blacks the economic and political freedoms that would allow more of them to achieve economic prosperity.

Douglass' most significant identification of ideological irony, and the most noted rhetorical device used in his *Narrative*, is the chiasmus: "You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man" (294). Douglass constructs this chiasmus to foreground the notion of "man" by placing the word at the beginning and at the end (the alpha and the omega, the whole) of the rhetorical device. His use of the technique, moreover, harkens back to the Puritan tradition of using this crossing to mimic Christ's cross and to call the power of God into the words. Douglass thus brings the power of an American literary and political heritage into his text, subtly enhancing his own credibility and lending weight to his words.

In thus manipulating these rhetorical techniques, Douglass links his life, his journey, and his created self with the Puritan authors of conversion narratives.[5] These authors, according to Sacvan Bercovitch, subscribed to the Reformed notion that

> every man was his own church, so too, now that the Bible was made universally available and declared to be sole authority, every man became his own exegete. (28)

However, each individual could claim this authority only if he "had transformed himself in His image ... [if] interpreter and text confirmed one another in their mutual *imitatio*" (Bercovitch 28). Douglass, by manipulating literary techniques canonized in America by the Puritans and tropes of self popular in America since the Puritans, exploits the authority vested in them in order to reinforce his narrative, his voice, and his construction of his slave narrator. He then becomes "his own exegete," interpreting his life and manufacturing himself in the tradition of a Puritan "saint," and, by the same token, demystifying a whole constellation of ideological functions in his owner's discourse.

Therefore, Douglass emphasizes his and other slaves' humanity, declaring himself to be essentially a "man" before he was made a slave, and, by necessary extension, to have the same inalienable rights as any other human being. His use of the verb "made" markedly foregrounds the fact that his is not a natural condition, but the product of the dominant ideology. He, in other words, was ideologically constructed as a slave. In terms of reader response, such a

---

[5] David Van Leer offers a detailed analysis of the strategies of Puritan conversion narratives found in Douglass' *Narrative* in his "Reading Slavery: The Anxiety of Ethnicity in Douglass' *Narrative*" (see especially 120-121).

stylistic device as chiasmus causes the reader, as Betty J. Ring argues,

> to anticipate the process of slave-unmaking and yet simultaneously *enacts* it. In so doing, it also functions as a synecdoche for the text as a whole which itself evidences the unmaking it claims only to show or represent. (120)

In this sense, Douglass' use of chiasmus becomes a speech act that fashions him as a "man" or a "human being" in a society where, as Garrison maintains, mastery of discourse is the defining feature of a being's position on "the scale of humanity" (248). Because Douglass can fashion a chiasmus, indeed, because he can master discourses and write a narrative of his life, he is, in fact, a "man" or a "human." What finally emerges from Douglass' use of chiasmus and similarly sophisticated rhetorical tropes is the urge to establish a distinctive African American identity that alters epistemic notions of African Americans.

Once Douglass has come to these realizations, of course, he can no longer be "a slave," for a slave is, by dominant definition, "not a man." Douglass, in fact, articulates that in order to be a "contented slave," the type of slave that the Southerners vowed their slaves were, "it is necessary to make a thoughtless one ... to darken his moral and mental vision, and ... to annihilate the power of reason" (315). Moreover, he claims that his owner Thomas Auld, the owner he finally escaped from, continued to advise him "to complete thoughtlessness of the future ... to depend solely on him for happiness" (317). Thus, Douglass links the loss of thinking ability, the loss of the desire to think, and the inability to manipulate systems of thought—"the power of reason"—as the deciding factors in making a man a slave.

Douglass, however, refused to give up his "intellectual nature, in order to contentment in slavery" (317). His struggle against Auld and the nearly overwhelming ideological system of oppression that buttressed Auld's position indicates that Douglass' construction of himself as a subject in his *Narrative* is a subversion of the dominant stereotype that held that slaves had no agency. Furthermore, Douglass' slave self may also be considered what Michel Pecheux deems a "disidentification," that is, the outcome of combining political and discursive practices that both identify with and counter-identify with the dominant ideologies. Douglass' fashioning of his slave character and his slave narrator is a "disidentification," then, because the self created is a manipulation of the given social notion of what constitutes a "subject." Douglass' narrator, in other words,

does not merely embody the destruction of the hegemonic concept of "slave" or "African American" but alters that concept (Pecheux 158-9).[6]

From a different perspective, several critics assume that Douglass' use of dominant discourses in his *Narrative* results in his inability to thoroughly articulate the reality of the slave population at large. For example, Houston Baker maintains that

> the voice of the unwritten self, once it is subjected to the linguistic codes, literary conventions, and audience expectations of a literate population, is perhaps never again the authentic voice of black American slavery. It is, rather, the voice of a self transformed by an autobiographical act into a sharer in the general public discourse about slavery. ("Autobiographical" 253)

Douglass himself indicates, as I have examined previously, that he was changed the moment he realized that the use of discourses constituted the white man's power to enslave the black man. More significantly, "the voice of the ... self" who had previously been a slave but who could manipulate and reconstruct the master's literary and discursive tools, a self who analeptically narrates incidents of his own silence, of his inarticulate self, was an "authentic voice of black American slavery" in that he articulated the discursively constructed reality faced both by slaves and by black Americans.

David Van Leer also argues that the paradoxes in Frederick Douglass' *Narrative* and the ironies in contemporary culture that Douglass indirectly indicates to his readers, sabotage his position, which is that slavery should be abolished. Van Leer states that "Douglass' model of individual triumph over adversity tends to undermine the plea for social reform at the heart of all antebellum slave narratives" (128). While Van Leer indicates that Douglass' story, and Douglass' articulateness, may implicate those slaves who do not or cannot escape (because those slaves left in slavery might be perceived as not intelligent or determined enough to escape their bondage), he overlooks Douglass portrayal of himself and his story as a discursive interaction with the dominant culture. While Van Leer rightly assumes that Douglass' *Narrative* is a "plea for social reform," he fails to confront the multiple meanings "social reform" takes in Douglass' text. In other words, Van Leer ignores the fact that access to cultural, spiritual, and economic improvement (the Franklinesque

---

[6] Pecheux maintains that a dynamic exists between the subject and discourse, what he terms a "third modality." This third modality "constitutes a *working of the subject-form* and not just its *abolition*" (159).

"rags to riches" via self-improvement) was not available to slaves except under unusual circumstances. Douglass, and Olaudah Equiano before him, seek equal access and are successful.[7]

Douglass' slave narrator and the text itself are a complex of interactions with the dominant culture that presume not merely to inform the public that slavery is evil, but to position the slave self as a manipulator of the discourses that dictate the reality of slave life. Douglass' construction of himself (in all forms) in his *Narrative* is, then, a discriminating critique of the hegemony that labels sentient beings as "animals" and forces them into subservience on grounds of a supposed racial inferiority. More importantly, it is a dialogue that debunks epistemic notions of "slave" even as it posits new definitions.

In antebellum America, a majority of African Americans, both free blacks and slaves, lived lives proscribed by institutions of power that drew justification from ideological assumptions as to the nature of Africans and their descendants. Douglass' construction of his slave narrator as a being that assumes multiple subject positions in many situations demystifies racial stereotypes in such a way as to expose charges of "inferiority" and "cultural poverty" as mere social constructs. Recognizing that the parameters that confined African Americans were discursively constructed, Douglass strove to legitimize a unique "slave" or "African American" self that both confronted the dominant culture's notion that slaves were either "animals" or "children" and that placed that culture in dialogue with him, with its notions of "slave," and with the discursive strategies by which slaveholders imposed and maintained their "superiority."

Samantha Manchester Earley
School of Arts and Letters
Indiana University Southeast

Works Cited

Andrews, William L. *To Tell a Free Story. The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography 1760-1865.* Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1986.

---

[7] See Olaudah Equiano. *The Interesting Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa the African. Written by Himself. Classic Slave Narratives.* Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: NAL, 1987: 1-186. Equiano also manipulates economics and economic discourses in order to free himself and to construct the self of his slave narrator as a human able to apprehend and combat the contemporary racial discourses of the dominant culture.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post Colonial Literature.* New York: Routledge, 1989.

Baker, Houston A., Jr. "Autobiographical Acts and the Voice of the Southern Slave." *The Slave's Narrative.* Eds. Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985: 242-261.

Bercovitch, Sacvan. *The Puritan Origins of the American Self.* New Haven: Yale UP, 1975.

Bhabha Homi K. "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817." *Critical Inquiry.* 12 (Autumn 1985): 144-165.

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave Written by Himself. Classic Slave Narratives.* Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: Mentor NAL, 1987: 241-331.

Equiano, Olaudah. *The Interesting Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself Classic Slave Narratives.* Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: Mentor NAL, 1987: 1-186.

Lucaites, John Louis. "The Irony of 'Equality' in Black Discourse: The Case of Frederick Douglass's 'What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?'" *Rhetoric and Political Culture in Nineteenth-Century America.* Ed. Thomas W. Benson. East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 1997: 47-89.

MacKethan, Lucinda H. "From Fugitive Slave to Man of Letters: The Conversion of Frederick Douglass." *Journal of Narrative Technique.* 16.1 (Winter 1986): 55-71.

Pecheux, Michel. *Language, Semantics, and Ideology.* Trans. Harbaus Nagpal. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982.

Ring, Betty J. "'Painting By Numbers': Figuring Frederick Douglass." *The Discourse of Slavery: Aphra Behn to Toni Morrison.* Eds. Carl Plasa and Betty J. Ring. London: Routledge, 1994: 118-143.

Van Leer, David. "Reading Slavery: The Anxiety of Ethnicity in Douglass' *Narrative*." *Frederick Douglass. New Literary and Historical Essays*. Ed. Eric J. Sundquist. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990: 118-140.

Walker, David. *Walker's Appeal in Four Articles.* (1829) New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969.

Zafar, Rafia. "Franklinian Douglass: The Afro-American as Representative Man." *Frederick Douglass. New Literary and Historical Essays.* Ed. Eric J. Sundquist. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990: 99-117.

BODIES IN THE AGE OF MECHANICAL REPRODUCTION: COMPETING DISCOURSES OF REALITY AND REPRESENTATION IN BIOY CASARES'S *THE INVENTION OF MOREL*

Wendy Ryden

> "One hears warnings like the following: If everything is discourse, what happens to the body?" (28)
>
> Judith Butler

> "One might nevertheless wonder whether open acceptance of the camera and its operations does not recreate a lost attitude towards a culture which has been replaced by the mechanical arts" (vii).
>
> Pierre Bourdieu

> "DeBroglie states: 'A phenomenon is modified by the mere fact of being observed.'"[1]

> "No one is ever anything but the copy of a copy, real or mental...." (102).
>
> Roland Barthes

"Don't you see that there is a parallelism between the destinies of men and images?" (63). This is the question asked by the character Morel, the inventor who, in a quest to achieve immortality, substitutes holographic images for people in Bioy Casares's *The Invention of Morel*. Morel's question about the "destinies of men and images" is one that reveals a fascination with, and an anxiety about, the power of filmic representation as a textual device that constructs consciousness and reality. This fascination and anxiety are played out in Bioy's story, in which an unnamed narrator who seeks refuge on an island happens upon the images created by Morel. Through Morel's invention these images and their surroundings are projected

[1] Quoted in Bourdieu 130.

in interrupted but repeating loops of the actions filmed during the one week that Morel and his friends inhabited the island. Unaware of their status as images, the narrator voyeuristically falls in love with one of the projections. Upon discovering the secret, however, the narrator eventually finds that his love is unaffected by his knowing the "truth" about his beloved, Faustine: that she is merely an image and a kind of automaton condemned to repeat the same sequences eternally. The "truth" now is that he loves her anyway, and so his love blurs, or rather erases, the boundary between reality and representation he has hitherto held. Furthermore, the idea of repetition as constitutive of reality becomes less repugnant to him. He tells us that

> A rotating eternity may seem atrocious to an observer, but it is quite acceptable to those who dwell there. Free from bad news and disease, they live forever as if each thing were happening for the first time; they have no memory of anything that happened before. And the interruptions caused by the rhythm of the tides keep the repetition from becoming implacable. ... Now that I have grown accustomed to seeing a life that is repeated, I find my own irreparably haphazard. (75)

Only a few years prior to the 1940 publication of The *Invention of Morel*, Walter Benjamin took up similar questions regarding "the destinies of men and images." Culminating his ideas in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin, in the polemic of his essay, plumbs the same fascination and anxiety that Bioy explores fictionally in *Morel*. At the heart of the inquiry for Benjamin and, I think also for Bioy, is the erosion, through the technology of film, of the concept of authenticity from the domain of aesthetics, an erosion that Benjamin sees as contributing to the loss of what he called the art work's "aura," a loss that derives in part from the threat that reproduction poses to authenticity and thus to the authority that the concept of "original" contains.[2] Both texts can be located in the discourse of cinema and photography and its ontological concern with authenticity, for while Benjamin's and Bioy's attitude

[2] Benjamin pondered the effect of reproduction on the concept of uniqueness: "The technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence" (223). His idea of aura is bound up with uniqueness (authenticity), which is in turn bound up with authority: "Confronted with its manual reproduction ..., the original (work of art) preserved all its authority; not so vis à vis technical reproduction.... What is really jeopardized (through mechanical reproduction) ... is the authority of the object" (222-223). Unlike mass produced prints of paintings, forgeries (manual as opposed to mechanical reproduction) of paintings do not diminish the authority of the originals (rather in a sense they enhance it).

toward the loss of authenticity is ambivalent, both writers nonetheless see a profound change not only in art but also human consciousness that is wrought by the loss. That I use the word "loss" is no accident, since it seems to me that Bioy and especially, of course, Benjamin view the erasure of authenticity with a certain nostalgia, as a kind of fall from innocence, and as such their rhetoric can be located in that of literary modernism. But their understanding of the aesthetic move from *production* to *reproduction* verges on the postmodern. As Douglas Crimp says with regard to the disruption of aesthetics of postmodern art,

> through reproductive technology postmodernist art dispenses with the aura. The fiction of the creating subject gives way to the frank confiscation, quotation, excerptation, accumulation and repetition of already existing images. Notions of originality, authenticity and presence ... are undermined. (53)

Benjamin's contention is well-known: mass reproducibility is consistent with a "mass consciousness" that in turn is consonant with the "aesthetics" of fascism. But he seems also to glimpse, or at least point to, another potential when he speaks of "the liquidation of the traditional value of the cultural heritage" (223) that accompanies the loss of the aura in the medium of film.[3] It is the attitude towards this "liquidation" that seems to be at issue in *The Invention of Morel*.

For Bioy's invention of Morel's invention is a hyperbolic, hypothetical extension of the problem posed to art and the creation of art by the existence of film. To Benjamin film suggested a perplexing hybridity in "its tendency to promote the mutual penetration of art and science." He goes on to say that "of a screened behavioral item ... it is difficult to say which is more fascinating, its artistic value or its value for science. To demonstrate the identity of the artistic and scientific uses of photography which heretofore usually were separated will be one of the revolutionary functions of film" (238). In Bioy's story technology and art compete as they do for us in filmic representation. Morel, it seems, is a scientist, but one who is involved in aesthetic arranging, for he has made an aesthetic (as well

[3] Similarly in his essay "The Storyteller ...," Benjamin glimpses a positive potential in the "end of storytelling." He states: "the act of storytelling is reaching its end because the epic side of truth, wisdom, is dying out. This, however, is a process that has been going on for a long time. And nothing would be more fatuous than to want to see in it merely a 'symptom of decay,' let alone a "modern" symptom. It is, rather, only a concomitant symptom of the secular productive forces of history, a concomitant that has quite gradually removed narrative from the realm of living speech and at the same time is making it possible to see a new beauty in what is vanishing" (87).

as moral) choice in deciding how and when to film his subjects without their knowledge of his actions. The narrator, who recounts Morel's after-the-fact revelation to his group about his invention and project, divides the speech into two parts and passes judgment on Morel's oratory skills in the following way:

> Up to this point it was a repugnant and badly organized speech. Morel is a scientist, and he becomes more precise when he overlooks his personal feelings and concentrates on his own special field; then his style is still unpleasant, filled with technical words and vain attempts to achieve a certain oratorical force, but at least it is clearer. (60)

At a later point he interrupts his retelling to interject this commentary: "Morel's style is unpleasant, with a liberal sprinkling of technical terms, and ... it attempts, vainly, to achieve a certain grandiloquence. Its banality is obvious" (63). The narrator's criticism of Morel's ability to discuss his invention is in keeping with what Bourdieu notes about so-called "virtuoso" photographers when they speak about their work. They, he says, "most often juxtapose a vague aesthetic discourse with precise technical language." But unlike the narrator who dismisses Morel as affecting grandiloquence, Bourdieu interprets the competing discourses that appear in the language of the virtuosos as occurring "less in order to conform to the distinction of the noble and the trivial than because they are unable to provide a precise description of their activity" (132).

The conflict between science and art and literature runs through the narrative of *Morel*, with the narrator, as an advocate of Malthus and his doctrines, showing a predilection for the scientific while constantly "regressing" to the "art" of narrative (his diary) and visual depiction (his flower portrait).[4] But in the discourse of film, the question of art and science is linked to the question of (re)production and the creative act. As Bourdieu further notes, there is a perceived "ambiguity of the photographic act, situated half-way between being a creative act and a manufacturing operation" (139). Where on this continuum do Morel and his machine belong? As he himself states "To make living reproductions, I need living transmitters. I do not create life" [my emphasis] (63), suggesting that he is a technician, or recorder of reality. As Lisa Block de Behar observes, Morel's invention

[4] Suzanne Jill Levine discusses the dichotomy between science and literature in *Morel*, asserting that the intrusion of the library upon the scientific adventure "reveals the text's progressive awareness (from Wells to Bioy) of its own textuality" (20). She further states that books and the library "'interfere' with the scientific content" (18), and that the narrator essentially disapproves of all literary works (22).

doesn't invent; rather it conserves (75), but she later asserts that Bioy seems to show that films *create* history as much as they reproduce it (90). Critics have noted that Morel's week-long recording session echoes the seven-day creation schema of Genesis,[5] and Morel, through his filming, assumes a God-like position of control in relation to his creation that is consistent with the presumed agency of authorship and the creation of art. Indeed, the narrator invests Morel with a kind of *übermensch* mentality when he says that he

> must have a very overbearing and audacious conscience, which could be confused with a lack of conscience; but such a monstrosity seems to be in keeping with the man who, following his own idea, organizes a collective death and determines, of his own accord, the common destiny of all his friends. (82)

But if Morel is playing God, he is a post-modern deity who can only re-present what already is. When it becomes clear to the narrator that the subject must die in order to enter the eternity of the projected images, he sees Morel's act as one of love for Faustine and declares his approval: "Faustine's beauty deserves that madness, that tribute, that crime. ... And now I see Morel's act as something sublime" (87). This suggests an aestheticization of Faustine; that Faustine is being (re)created as a work of art through Morel's lens. What happens to Faustine's aura, then, is complicated. Does Morel's machine destroy the aura of its natural object by reproducing it, or does it preserve, enhance, even create the aura that surrounds the art work known as Faustine? Faustine is repeatedly reproduced through the continual "rebroadcasting" of her film loop. Is Faustine or Faustine's image degraded through the reproduction? Once again the questions are bound up in issues of authenticity and authority as they relate to the medium of film. Certainly for the narrator there is no "real" Faustine, or rather there is no "Copy," because each Faustine is as "authentic" as the one that preceded her. For the narrator there are only copies, each one as "real" as the last. This, in effect, is the conclusion he eventually comes to when he gives up on positing an "originating" Faustine to supply meaning to the "image."

Benjamin speculated on "whether the very invention of photography ha(s) not transformed the entire notion of art" (229) with regard to the question of authenticity. Bourdieu, in discussing the concern about originality that the medium of photography provokes, states that:

---

[5] See Dowling; and Snook's "Boundaries of the Self."

> If photographic aesthetes in particular are keen to challenge this idea (of originality), it is not primarily because the existence of multiple prints strips photography of the 'aura' attached to unique work. While forgeries and copies do not deprive the original painting of its uniqueness, and even serve to underline it, the proliferation of identical photographs constitutes a uniform sense in which all works are of equal worth; the proliferation of works of comparable style destroys the originality of the style which they are imitating because nothing —or apparently nothing—prevents the copy from equaling the model. (137)

Here Bourdieu calls into question the whole concept of originality as does Morel when he makes the following statement regarding his "creations": "If we grant consciousness, and all that distinguishes us from objects, to the persons who surround us, we shall have no valid reason to deny it to the persons created by my machinery" (62). Morel is telling us what Bourdieu observes: that there is "apparently nothing that prevents the copy from equaling the model."

Benjamin saw a connection between the loss of aura and uniqueness for the art object and the loss of the individual. In place of the work of art, its reproduction; in place of the individual, the image. Instead of insuring continuance, reproduction, ironically, threatens it (Behar 87), despite the perception of the masses that filmic images produced through lenses are associated with "uniqueness and permanence" while images "seen by the unarmed eye" are connected with "transitoriness and reproducibility" (Benjamin 225). Benjamin's ironic fear about diminishment through multiplication is shared by the narrator in *Morel*, who demonstrates a paranoia about reproduction, especially in his fear of uncontrolled population growth (Dowling 60),[6] but also, before he reaches his accommodation with them, to images. Immediately preceding Morel's revelation, the narrator has an uncanny remembrance that the hall of mirrors (one of which he is standing in) was historically a famous place of torture (57). Multiple images are torturous in the challenge they pose to the uniqueness of the originating subject, a torture especially acute for one who has declared his independent subjectivity by seeking hermitage on a remote island.

Photography induces a sense of the schizoid in the observer of the photograph; a sense of estrangement from the self; an uncanny

---

[6] "The masses" are an important thematic concern in Benjamin's work and many other modernist texts (see Tratner). In Morel the narrator exhibits a disdain for the masses appropriate for someone who seeks isolation on a deserted island. But his solipsism, or lack of audience, is, predictably, untenable. One way to read his relation to the images is as a compromise in his problematic relationship to the masses.

sense of the fictive status of the autonomous subject and its agency.[7] Benjamin's remarks about film actors allude to this felt sense of the deconstructed subject. In his discussion about the difference between stage actors and film actors he writes that "the audience's identification with the (film) actor is really an identification with the camera" (230). He quotes Pirandello as saying:

> The (silent) film actor feels as if in exile—exiled not only from the stage but also from himself. With a vague sense of discomfort he feels inexplicable emptiness: his body loses its corporeality, it evaporates, it is deprived of reality, life, voice, and the noises caused by moving about, in order to be changed into a mute image, flickering an instant on the screen, then vanishing into silence. ... The projector will play with his shadow before the public, and he himself must be content to play before the camera. (231)

Benjamin comments on the above: "For the first time—and this is the effect of film—man has to operate with his whole living person, yet forgoing its aura. For aura is tied to his presence; there can be no replica of it" (231). And later he continues: "The feeling of strangeness that overcomes the actor before the camera, as Pirandello describes it, is basically of the same kind as the estrangement felt before one's own image in the mirror. But now the reflected image has become separable..." (232-231).

This dilemma seems to be played out literally in *Morel*, as the existences of the images, or the "ghosts" as the narrator calls them, come and go with the caprice of the tides. The bodies that Morel uses as "transmitters" literally, to refer to Pirandello's words, "evaporate" and "lose their corporeality." In fact the whole island is dying, presumably as a result of being photographed by Morel's machine, which suggests that the island is a kind of "whited sepulchre," functioning in the kitsch image that Morel has imposed over a rotten underside exhibited only when tidal changes stop the machines from projecting.[8] The narrator makes note of the folk belief that cameras

---

[7] Barthes illustrates this sense of estrangement and lost control when he discusses his reaction to seeing a photograph of himself that he cannot remember having been taken: "This distortion between certainty and oblivion gave me a kind of vertigo.... I went to the photographer's show (the one who had taken the unremembered photo) as to a police investigation, to learn at last what I no longer knew about myself" (85).

[8] In "The Storyteller" Benjamin makes an analogy between a proverb and a ruin in order to make a distinction between a proverb and a story. His distinction seems to have explanatory power for the status of Morel's images: think of the proverb "as an ideogram of a story. A proverb, one might say, is a ruin which stands on the site of an old story and in which a moral twines about a happening like ivy around a wall" (108).

capture souls (82), but interestingly Morel's photographed subjects manifest the opposite of the feared result. The *body is* what is lost as a result of being photographed—it is killed into art and becomes, in a sense, Barthes's "flat death."[9] Despite Morel's assertions and the narrator's suspicions, it is never clear what happens to the "soul," or whether or what kind of consciousness the images possess. It may be that, like a text, the images have no meaning unless someone is there to "read" them, something which the narrator does over and over again. What is clear is that the kind of aestheticized immortality offered through Morel's machine involves sacrificing the body. It is interesting, in light of the narrator's chronic voyeurism and Morel's megalomania, to think of Benjamin's observation about the aestheticized politics of fascism: "Mankind, which in Homer's time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, *now is one for itself.* Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order" [my emphasis] (244).

Morel depicts a scenario where destruction is a prerequisite to immortality, although this destruction is not apocalyptic—neither in the sense of finality or revelation. As quoted above, the narrator describes the existence of the images as one where actions are repeated without any awareness by the subject of the repetition. But as I stated before, it is unclear what sort of consciousness the images have. This unanswered question serves to reconfigure the narrator's, and perhaps the reader's, conceptions of consciousness and agency. This reconfiguration takes place in relation to two other important themes in the story: the question of death and the question of audience and textuality.

For Morel is very much a story about texts and how texts are activated through audiences. As a fugitive, the narrator shows disdain for "invasions by the hordes of increased populations" (70) and seeks isolation. Thus his first reaction to discovering others on what he had thought to be a deserted island is fear as well as annoyance. He makes a statement appropriate to the age of paranoia: "For my

---

[9] Despite Barthes' distinction between film and photograph and his emphasis on stasis in the latter, his ideas about filmic representation seem important here. He tells this story: "In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: she is going to die: I shudder, like Winnicott's psychotic patient, *over a catastrophe which has already occurred.* Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe" (96) [my emphasis]. This description characterizes the narrator's relationship to Faustine. She may in fact even be dead, but this is irrelevant. The sequence of events can only exist for him as "the emanation of a past reality" (Barthes 88).

own safety, I must renounce—once and for all—any help from my fellow men" (19). Because he is a fugitive, he takes care not to be caught in the gaze of others, particularly Faustine's. Yet he is never completely comfortable in the exclusive position of voyeur. He is given a paradoxical warning by the rug merchant before he goes to Morel's island: "There is only one possible place for a fugitive like you—it is an uninhabited island, but a human being cannot live there" (10). While the rug merchant is referring to the mysterious disease that afflicts visitors to the island, metaphorically his statement is reminiscent of Freud's condemnation of voluntary isolation as a means of avoiding the pain of human relationships: it is not a sustainable strategy,[10] as the narrator finds out. His reactions are complicated. After all, the gazer, in a sense, controls. As much as he fears the gaze of others, he desires it because it is in the gaze that one lives. And still the gaze of others cheats him of the annihilation he wants; the annihilation of which he is terrified; that must occur if he is to be recreated as a work of art whose existence can only be made meaningful through a gaze.

Almost immediately upon his arrival the narrator is tempted by Faustine to renounce his renunciation and seek companionship. He tells us that "if she looked at me for a moment, spoke to me only once, I would derive from those simple acts the sort of stimulus a man obtains from friends, from relatives, and, most of all, from the woman he loves" (19). And later he contemplates the possibility of "her glance, enlarging my little world" (24), indicating that his contemplation of her alone is insufficient. He too needs to be seen, although ironically he hopes that "surely she will not judge me by my appearance alone" (19). Moreover he feels compelled to construct and describe his actions as though he has benefit of an audience; as though his actions can only have meaning if he imagines that someone is watching them: "As if I were involved in an argument with someone who insisted that the skylight was not real ..., I went outside to see whether it was really there" (16). When Faustine does not take note of his flower portrait, he remarks, "since I cannot escape, I continue with this monologue, which now is unjustifiable" (30), suggesting that speaking for himself alone is an incomprehensible act.

---

[10] In *Civilization and It Discontents*, Freud writes, "Against the suffering which may come upon one from human relationships the readiest safeguard is voluntary isolation, keeping oneself aloof from other people....Against the dreaded external world one can only defend oneself by some kind of turning away from it, if one intends to solve the task by oneself. There is, indeed, another and better path: that of becoming a member of the human community" (24).

When he speaks of his embarrassment at not being able to understand Morel's machinery he explains his emotions thus: "It was as if someone were looking, as if I were trying to cover up my embarrassment or shame" (77). His attempt to superimpose his image onto Morel's film is again conceived in terms of another spectator: "I performed well: a casual observer would not suspect that I am not part of the original scene" (88). But, conversely, he admires and yet is baffled by the actions of Morel's group because they seem to be acting for no one but themselves: "without any audience ... they are enduring discomfort, even risking their lives, in an attempt to be *original*" [my emphasis] (22).

That performance can't exist without audience suggests that the autonomy of the subject is illusory; that the narrator's position as recluse is ontologically invalid. Margaret Snook describes *Morel* as being about "the subject's struggle and failed quest for independent selfhood" (Boundaries 109). Even such a subject-centered statement as "I am a writer who has always wanted to live on a lonely island" (54) is only conceivable for the narrator as an imagined conversation with Faustine. That his statement concerns writing is significant, since it is the narrator's wish to be able to exert control and define existence through writing. According to Snook, the narrator shows an "awareness of the function of grammatical or linguistic logic in establishing the parameters of the self" (Boundaries 113). A diary is, after all, in many ways an attempt to write a life and often an attempt to write "the truth," which is in turn an attempt at control. As the narrator says, "writing helps me to control myself" (80). But his ability to write the truth is undermined repeatedly by his own reversals and, unbeknown to him it would seem, the editor's intrusions into his text. In fact the movement of the story leads from writing to *being written* in the narrator's relinquishing of authorship (the position of recluse author) to join the existence of the images. There is even the suggestion that writing interferes with action: "Now I shall stop writing in order to concentrate, serenely, on finding the way to stop these motors" (79) as though the consciousness of acting prevents acting. And he also hints that writing and the contemplation that accompanies it is enervating as he tells us (hopefully), "perhaps writing down my idea will make it lose its force" (81).

Importantly this movement towards "being written" parallels his abandoning the hope he places in the idea of the "original" Faustine. He reluctantly admits that "away from this island Faustine is lost with the gestures and the dreams of an alien past," but then he comes to the more hopeful conclusion that if he abandons "his uneasy hopes

of going to find Faustine, (he) can grow accustomed to the idea of spending life ... in seraphic contemplation of her" (87). Fautine's meaning is no longer dependent on the concept of an original Faustine. As Lee Dowling points out, "the fugitive has no more access to (an original) Faustine ... than the reader has to the fugitive, who is, it appears, on the way to realizing his own fictional status" (60). [The narrator ejaculates at one point: "So I was dead! The thought delighted me. (I felt proud, I felt as if I were a character in a novel!)" (47).] Dowling further suggests that the status of the images is comparable to a Derridean sense of writing in that they constitute meaning that is neither fully present or absent; they are "traces" (61). It is the narrator's acceptance of this state that finally allows his story to be told. Immortality—the telling of the story—is based on his death as author and his birth as text.[11] As Benjamin says in his essay "The Storyteller," a life only becomes a "story" at death: "this authority (of death) is at the very source of the story" (94).

A concern with death is linked not only to issues of presence and absence but also to questions of order and chaos, the latter concerns particularly important for the notion of art that is put forth in the story. For one way to view the kind of art that Morel's machine produces is, as I mentioned before, as *kitsch.* Morel's machine projects a clear pool with living fish, even though the "real" (narrator's) pool is fouled and the fish are dead.[12] Morel's machine projects a pleasant and, most importantly, ordered and safe existence. The narrator, after watching the film repeatedly, makes note of how disgracefully haphazard his own life seems in comparison (75). It is no surprise that the narrator, who originally puts up resistance to

---

[11] Earlier in the story Morel juxtaposes his method of achieving immortality with that of the man Claude who has been excused from the experiment. Claude is working on a novel because "he thinks it will bring him immortality and therefore he does not wish to interrupt his work" (59). Morel makes no judgment about Claude's activity, but the story does seem to set up a comparison between writing and filming. Barthes speaks of the distinction between language and photography in terms of authentication. "In the Photograph" he writes, "the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation (89)... No writing can give me this certainty (of the photograph). It is the misfortune (but also perhaps the voluptuous pleasure) of language not to be able to authenticate itself" (85). And also: "the Photograph... cannot *say* what it lets us see" (100). In some ways, then, it seems that in film, according to Barthes, there is more plenitude than in writing.

[12] It is interesting that here the narrator makes one of the few mentions of a "real' Venezuela prior to the last page. Of the dead fish he say that "it reminds me of the beaches in my country, where huge quantities of fish, dead and alive, emerge from the water to contaminate the air, and receive a hasty burial at the hands of the outraged populace" (16).

Morel's invention, is eventually "seduced" by it, given the disdain he shows for the biological: his contempt for biological reproduction and the "hordes"; and his preference for a theory of immortality that would eliminate the body. The superimposition of his image over Morel's images is one way of reestablishing a performative relationship with others without the messy disorder of biology.

In this way Bioy's story reads as a cautionary tale of Benjamin's fascist aesthetics, and yet the narrative's position is not so clear. The description of Morel's images as controlled, aestheticized reality might be consistent with Benjamin's warnings. The narrator says that "life will be a repository for death. But even then the image will not be alive; objects that are essentially new will not exist for it. It will know only what it has already thought or felt, or the possible transpositions of those thoughts or feelings." But then the narrator reverses himself by adding: "The fact that we cannot understand anything outside of time and space may perhaps suggest that our life is not appreciably different from the survival to be obtained by this machine" (72). Ironically the narrator relinquishes the illusory control of the writer for the predictability of the filmed subject and finds himself "happy to know that I depend on Haynes, Dora, Alec, Stoever, Irene, and the others (even on Morel!)" (88).

A nearly comic moment in *Morel* occurs when the narrator commits what he refers to as an "imprudence":

> I put my left hand in front of the receiver; I turned on the projector and my hand appeared, just my hand, making the lazy movements it made when I photographed it. Now it is like any other object in the museum. ... In a story, that hand would be a terrible threat for the protagonist. *In* reality—what harm can it do. [my emphasis] (81)

It is interesting to juxtapose this scene against a passage in Benjamin's "Storyteller" where he writes about the role of hands in relaying a story:

> The role of the hand in production has become more modest, and the place it filled in storytelling lies waste. (After all, storytelling, in its sensory aspect, is by no means a job for the voice alone. Rather, in genuine storytelling the hand plays a part which supports what is expressed in a hundred ways with its gestures trained by work.) [108]

In light of Benjamin's comments, the narrator's floating, emasculated hand (he later dreams that it breaks off) takes on an interesting significance. The hand in respect to narration has lost its potency; it is no longer a "threat in reality." That it is another piece for "the museum" suggests that it is art but that it is dead and without power. It is merely an object to be catalogued, and it no longer has an

organic function in the narrator's tale. The floating hand is a signal that the narrator is no longer a traditional storyteller, and that the narrative is no longer a traditional "story."

But how are we to read the "museum" in *Morel*? Douglas Crimp says that the museum has historically been a site where heterogeneity has been denied; a place where there is faith in the possibility of order (49). The very concept of the museum, then, is *kitsch*. But Crimp sees the photograph as posing a problem to this principle of heterogeneity. "So long as a photograph was merely a *vehicle* by which art objects entered the imaginary museum, a certain coherence obtained. But once photography itself enters, an object among others, heterogeneity is reestablished at the heart of the museum; it pretensions of knowledge are doomed" (51) Morel's remarks on his museum are edifying in this regard: "The word museum, which I use to designate this house, is a survival of the time when I was working on plans for my invention, without knowing how it would eventually turn out. At the time I thought I would build large albums or museums, both public and private, filled with these images" (67). Morel does not comment further, but he seems to imply that his images are no longer fit subjects for museums or albums; they are no longer a collection of catalogueable oddities. He does not specify how they differ from what he expected, but in light of Crimp's remarks, we may think that the images are not merely reproductions of objects but photographs in Crimp's disruptive sense. From this standpoint they are not kitsch; not copies, but instead images that disrupt the boundaries between the "authentic" and "copy."

But what do we make of the closing paragraphs, where the "real" Venezuela and a "real" woman are introduced to the reader and the narrator expresses his desire for someone to make "a machine that can assemble disjoined presences" (90)? He says he cannot suppress the patriotic emotions he feels for a Venezuela he knows to be corrupt, and yet he must "combat" those feelings. Why? Perhaps his desire to be joined with Faustine is "an attempt to ... restore primordial boundlessness" (Snook, Boundaries 111), which suggests his desire is a restatement of an old, "original" problem. While he has given up on finding an original Faustine, he is not content to live with what he views as merely a projection. He yearns for the genuine; a restoration of the aura. For the desire for joined presences is certainly a desire for wholeness.

And yet he says he is fighting the feelings of nostalgia that the above interpretation suggests he is entertaining. Perhaps it is also possible to understand his statement in terms of audience. Viewing

alone, as an act of epistemological observation, is not enough; he must also *be* viewed if he is to become part of the narrative that constitutes the reproduced story. He too must be "projected," and play, as he says with discomfort at one point, "a dual role, that of actor and spectator" (80). In this we can see a repudiation of the aura as lost idyll and an assertion of what Benjamin called "modern man's legitimate claim to being reproduced" (234).

Wendy Ryner
Department of English
Borough of Manhattan Community College
The City University of New York

Works Consulted

Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida*. Tr. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981.

Behar, Lisa Block de. "La invención de un mundo real." *Adolfo Bioy Casares en Uruguay: de la amistad y otras coincidencias*. eds. Lisa Block de Behar and Isidra Solari de Muró. Montevideo: Centro Cultural Internacional de Salto, 1993.

Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Tr. Harry Zohn. New York: Harcourt, 1968.

Bioy Casares, Adolfo. T*he Invention of Morel and Other Stories*. Tr. Ruth L.C. Simms. Austin: U. of Texas P., 1964.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Photography A Middle-brow Art*. Tr. Shawn Whiteside. Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1990.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Crimp, Douglas. "On the Museum's Ruins." *The Anti-Aesthetic*. Ed. Hal Foster. Seattle: Bay Press, 1983. 43-56.

Dowling, Lee. "Derridean 'Traces' in La invención de Morel by Bioy Casares." *Discurso: Revista de Estudios Iberoamericanos*. 9.2 (1992) 55-66.

Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Tr. and Ed. James Strachey. New York: Norton, 1961.

Levine, Suzanne Jill. "Science Versus the Library in the Island of

Dr. Moreau, La invención de Morel, and Plan de evasión." *Latin American Literary Review* 9.18 (1981). 17-26.

Rochlitz, Rainer. *The Disenchantment of Art: the Philosophy of Walter Benjamin*. Tr. Jane Marie Todd. New York: Guilford, 1996.

Snook, Margaret L. "Boundaries of the Self: Autonomy Versus Dependency in La invención de Morel." *Chasqui: Revista de literatura latinoamericana* 20.2 (1991). 108-115.

_____. "Spatiality in the Novel: Theoretical and Formal Consideration in La invención de Morel." La Chispa, 1983. Ed. Gilbert Paolini. New Orleans: Tulane U.P., 1983. 255-262.

Tratner, Michael. *Modernism and the Mass Politics: Joyce, Woolf, Eliot, Yeats*. Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1995.

VEINTE POEMAS MÍNIMOS
(Segunda serie[1])

(*Advertencia*: no deben leerse más de cinco poemas en una sesión de lectura).

Ricardo Krauel

I.

Amanecí en una página;
y odié el amanecer.

II. ANTE WITTGENSTEIN.

¡Silencio!
No derrames tu voz
si no funda la palabra.

III. CAPRICHO.

La razón de mis sueños
haría de mí un monstruo.

IV.

Tardé en descubrir
que es más sensible la imaginación
que los sentidos.

V.

Pregúntale a la flor
de quién robó su aroma,
que acusa su rubor
fragancia mentirosa.
Pregúntale a la flor.

VI. CREACIÓN.

Sueño
y te florezco en mi verso,
rosa azul del olvido.

VII.

Sumábamos nuestras diferencias
en una aritmética del desamor.

VIII.

Tú eres mi único lector,
tú, completo desconocido.

IX. POÉTICA.

Luz, espacio, movimiento:
todo cabe en un punto.

X.

Cubrirte de olvido
es descubrirme.

XI. ANTE D.

No hay mayor placer
que recordar los tiempos aciagos
desde la felicidad.

XII.

Vete, verde, vete,
que ofendes mi recato.

XIII.

Mis versos,
líneas que un avión reactor
va dejando en
el cie-
lo

XIV.

La juventud es un valor absoluto.

XV.

Sobre todo me humaniza
descubrir los pensamientos
de las cosas.

XVI.

En el vuelo del instante
te encontré al fin, eterna.

XVII.

La soledad es una mala compañera.

XVIII.

Yo sólo esperaba
en la esperanza.

XIX.

Estar contigo, Federico,
es abrir cada día
una ventana al milagro.

XX.

Música y poesía,
escondidas enemigas.

Ricardo Krauel
Department of Romance
Languages and Literature
Princeton University

Sandy Feinstein

Habituation

This stubborn root won't be pulled up by sun,
blind to yellow petals poking through iron gates,
great armfuls of pungent white blossoms cradled as a child.
It prefers cold rain, like the groves of olives and winter wheat,
new grass where feral toms hunt field mice and calicos
yowl in response to early spring. Gripping the red earth
with no intention of being dislodged, as if it had seen it all before
and all light was the same. The songs of spring, a weary round
of bird beaks and bees taking what they will, a leafy nest,
nector for the queen. Underground, it won't grow
but dry and brittle it will break, someone's tinder
in another year, ashes, or not even that to notice.

March 2

night beyond dark glass
rattling in spring wind
last evening prayer
written on the air

letters that are heard
in between the moon
full of white in tune
turning

March 3

I would say something about new colors
appearing without notice, violet brachs
hanging like snapdragons, with the ease
of custom, as expected as dust and light
dappling the thorns and wrought iron
through which they poke.
I don't have to be anywhere. It is early yet,
time enough to stop, to notice
they are not flowers,
pale veins purpling dyed leaves.
I sniff a branch and smile at nothing.

March 4

a jackhammer sounds its continuous report outside one window,
slows to a muffle, as if taking a few short breaths, then restarts
pummelling the earth to get back under ground. Out the back
window, a rooster crows, like the jackhammer, unseen.
In between its long late morning calls, children shout in unison,
school songs beyond the chicken coop and construction.
Men walk on the tops of buildings moving stones at the edge
of a dirty band of sky below a brighter bowl of blue pyramid
quiet as diurnal rotation killing all these sounds imperceptibly.

Jabr Citadel Meets Mari on her Birthday

Sand mixes with clay bricks, independent crusaders
blown through old mortar, buffing the surface hit hardest
by battering wind off the wide Euphrates swirling despite dams
on both sides of the border. Ruined by weather or warriors
chipping away at the towers like so many jerboa slowly nibbling
through Eid, leaving teeth marks for roofs and walls.
Like the once indigenous creature, you crack seeds, sunflowers,
leaving the husks with the empty shell of the mosque
unaccustomed to women scaling it, charging the iron
ladder, its skewed rungs gapped as the ruins, yanking
the rope and climbing to the crude entrance where a teenage
boy in jeans stares at the feat and watches you climb
inside the minaret until you arrive, a dark bird flapping its wings
to keep from being buffetted against the precipice and thrown
from the high window, the last casualty of old skirmishes,
a victory no Ottoman will claim over this renegade
Armenian celebrating forty by challenging all assumptions.

Sandy Feinstein
Penn State Berks