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SPACE OF THE PERFORMANCE:
AMINTA, THE COURT, AND THE THEATER



Maria Galli Stampino
Washington University in St. Louis

Torquato Tasso's *Aminta*, written in 1573 and performed soon after that date, both as a text and as a performance seems to have been a courtly creation. This aspect has received extensive attention on the part of literary historians, who have stressed how the text reflects courtly ideals and their practical embodiments at court. However, this position is predicated on a semantic inaccuracy, as "courtly" seems to carry two separate meanings: one that is more general, and the other that is particular to the Este court of Alfonso II. As early as 1891, Solerti and Lanza emphasized that even though *commedia dell'arte* troupes were regularly performing at Ferrara, their environment was the courtly one and not the popular one (165). The two elders of Italian theater criticism aimed at subtracting the space of the local theater from the sphere of influence of the so-called popular theater, in order to claim it for the learned circles of the court and the academies, where it could be legitimately performed, i.e., staged, in a classical vein. Later critics have gone further, asserting that the *locus* of production of Tasso's pastoral influenced its content and ideological posture. In 1933, Giuseppe Petronio pointed out that preceding pastoral plays had already been filled with "riferimenti al tempo attuale" (4), hence Tasso could not avoid adopting a similar strategy in his own work:

Tutto ciò e tutto ciò che ne deriva è pur nell'Aminta, e la Corte, non la Corte in astratto, ma quella tal Corte d'Alfonso II con quegli uomini che, movendosi ogni giorno intorno al poeta, eran presenti e s'imponevano alla sua attenzione, non solo poetica, ma pratica; questa Corte dunque è il sottinteso principale del dramma, di cui tante battute e tutta l'impalcatura stessa non possono comprendersi senza di quella, sicché alcuni personaggi non sono che allegorie di uomini vicini al poeta, e tanti versi e tante battute non possono capirsi se non si pensi che non sono tanto per l'in-

terlocutore, quanto per il pubblico, per quel determinato pubblico. (4-5)

According to Petronio, the text, rather than being self-referential, feeds off the circumstances within and for which it had been written. Although this hypothesis justifies the lack of appeal of *Aminta* on subsequent audiences, it does not take into consideration its fame with the popular audiences of the *commedia dell'arte*, for which *Aminta* was a staple.¹

Mario Fubini tempers Petronio's judgment in his introduction to a 1976 edition of Tasso's pastoral. In his opinion, the appeal of this text resides in the bridge that the latter builds between the events on stage and the audience:

Tirsi, vale a dire il poeta, quale a lui piace presentarsi e atteggiarsi in un momento della sua vita di cortigiano e letterato, e Dafne, quale essa sia tra le dame della corte estense, vengono a essere quasi mediatori tra il pubblico della corte e quei personaggi d'Arcadia, e con la duplice parte che è loro propria, di esseri viventi e fra il pubblico e sulla remota scena silvestre, congiungono quel che sembrerebbe così disgiunto e a un tempo, interpreti del sentire del poeta e del pubblico, diventano figure necessarie allo svolgimento dell'azione. (23)

If this is the role played by Tirsi and Dafne on stage, all the other characters seem, by implication, to belong to the theatrical and pastoral frame *tout court*, without any possible links to the people constituting the audience. Giulio Ferroni disagrees: in his opinion, "la pastorale tassiana vuol apparire...come un diretto specchio delle relazioni cortigiane" (556). Consequently, all characters and the network of relationships linking them can be interpreted as a trace (a "mirror") of actual courtly relationships. Dante Della Terza attempts to strike a balance between the two positions:

la favola di Aminta si appoggia ad un'impalcatura cortigiana sì da presentare al limite, se vista nel suo insieme, due diverse strutture di riferimento. Ci sono dei punti, però, in cui realtà cortigiana e favola pastorale si toccano ed opportuni schemi d'interferenza vengono creati dal poeta intorno ad essi al fine di favorire un passaggio da una struttura all'altra senza cadute di tono. La creazione d'un codice uniforme di trasmissione degli schemi della verità poetica e della realtà cortigiana che la sottende consente irreversibili risultati di convergenze di toni e di contenuti. (56)

If “tones” and “contents” seem to converge, it so happens for a specific audience that Tasso envisioned while writing *Aminta*: it “mira, in prima istanza alla persuasione e all’edificazione di uno spettatore insieme ferrarese e cortigiano. È costui che è continuamente sollecitato a riportare l’arabesco evasivo, lo stile circonlocutorio del racconto pastorale verso orizzonti familiari” (51). In other words, for Della Terza Tasso’s pastoral falls into the genre of epideictic rhetoric, aiming at instructing those in power through examples, that is, only indirectly and covertly.² It is clear from the preceding observations that for Della Terza, too, *Aminta* had been composed with a very specific and identifiable audience in mind: the court of Ferrara under Alfonso II.

There is, however, a potential tension between the pastoral setting and its epideictic exploitation, of which Della Terza himself is aware and which he tries to accommodate: “lo stile circonlocutorio non è... veicolo d’evasione dal reale, ma piuttosto rispecchiamento attenuato delle cose, e la vacanza dello spettatore non è oblio di vivere i propri impegni nel travestimento pastorale, ma depotenziamento momentaneo di essi” (52). The performance of *Aminta*, then, is for its audience a time and a place where everyday reality is somehow suspended, and its roles and rules defused. Other critics disagree with such reading: for Douglas Radcliff-Umstead, *Aminta*

functions as a masque where Estense courtiers can don shepherds’ costumes in order to explore the mysteries of love. In place of comparing the inequities of structured social authority at the court and the liberty from moral restraint in the shepherdly realm, Tasso’s play serves to reinforce the reigning order of society and to celebrate the values of a court that provides models of unsurpassed excellence (75)

In other words, for Radcliff-Umstead, far from constituting a distancing from courtly realities, the pastoral is but a means towards the goal of reinforcing the status quo by presenting idealized examples on stage and holding them up to view. However, Giovanni Da Pozzo claims that the pastoral genre in general, and Tasso’s work in particular, aims at building an escape precisely for the courtiers forming its privileged (and sometimes only) audience:

lo spazio ideale che si crea tra scena e pubblico cortigiano finisce per funzionare da luogo in cui è possibile, e più benevolmente accolta da tutti, anche dal principe stesso, la critica al presente e ai presenti, il dubbio o il compatimento sull’eccellenza delle istituzioni e della vita della

corte. Solo che, nella commedia, il gioco dei riferimenti alla contemporaneità e alla sua non sempre aurea esistenza, avviene per necessità in maniera più caustica, per l'insieme stringente degli elementi comici, irridenti che il genere stesso obbliga pure, in qualche misura, a porre in atto. Nella pastorale invece, questo gioco di allusioni avviene necessariamente in maniera assai più sfumata, anzi tendenzialmente non è nemmeno sospettabile, tanto il reticolo dei riferimenti istituzionali del genere tende a trasferire altrove l'attenzione, nei boschi, in altro tempo, in più edenica società. (86-87)

In Da Pozzo's opinion, then, the "depotenziamento" postulated by Della Terza goes as far as to defuse all the issues that are brought up by and in the text, by virtue of the genre to which they belong. Furthermore, one could push Da Pozzo's argument to even more radical consequences; it is precisely because the pastoral genre muffles its criticism as it portrays courtly characters and situations on stage that it can effectively function as an epideictic tool in the hands of the author for the betterment of his audience, particularly the duke and his closest counselors. In other words, the courtly enthusiasm towards the pastoral genre derives from the fact that it embodies a well-balanced mixture of the Horatian *utile* and *dulcis*, without exceeding the rules imposed by political sensitivity in that ambiance.³

Jane Tylus on the other hand rejects any interpretations linking *Aminta* to an extolling goal. If this pastoral is epideictic, it exerts this function by showing the negative aspects of courtly life, thus pointing the way towards its possible improvement. In her opinion, Tasso wrote his pastoral precisely to expose to view the discrepancy between the events on stage and the reality experienced by its audience: he "presents pastoral characters whose "innocent" lives fail to function as a mirror for a court seeking to naturalize its relationship to power" (80). Tasso's tool consists of "insisting on the bad faith of mimetic desire and the essential opacity of the theatrical medium" (81). The fact that the most important events take place off stage and are recounted by a messenger to the characters on stage, far from merely reflecting the Aristotelian insistence on *decorum*, has important ideological consequences for the audience:

Like Dafne watching Silvia watch herself, the audience is reduced to uncomfortable and, in this last case [act V], frustrated voyeurism, for the only figure they do see on stage is an image of themselves. Far from being part of the only

real drama that takes place—Silvia’s gradual capitulation—the courtly spectator of Tasso’s Aminta is barred from the central section, while being made acutely conscious of his or her distance from innocence and of the invasiveness associated with the desire to witness that innocence. The exposè is principally directed at Alfonso himself. Yet the inclusion in the play of various courtiers who assist Alfonso in neutralizing his relationship to the stage, such as Pigna and Tasso himself, suggest that Tasso is far from indicting merely his prince. (92)

She continues:

“by staging Aminta’s recovery and union with Silvia in a realm that the courtiers and ruling powers of Ferrara may not see, the playwright finally protects his fictive characters from the tainted domain of the court. Thus the ultimate gesture of protection becomes the prerogative of the poet, although it does not include him” (93).

All in all, according to Tylus, Tasso aims at protecting his characters from what is perceived as the defiling gaze of the audience; *Aminta* therefore is not the display of an idealized or glorified court, nor its transposition within the fictional realm, but the indirect manifestation of its own faults.

By examining the tradition of the pastoral play vis-à-vis other kinds of performances at the Este court of the time, Alain Godard brings up another important aspect of performed pastorals. He emphasizes the relatively peripheral quality of pastoral performances vis-à-vis the court when compared to staged tournaments. He concludes:

avec les représentations de pastorales qui ne dépendent pas aussi strictement du pouvoir ducal, qui ont lieu le plus souvent hors de toute solennité particulière et en dehors aussi de ces périodes de liannée, comme le carnaval, longtemps seules réservées au théâtre, les responsabilités politiques et hégémoniques de la cour s’estompent; elle n’est plus avant tout le centre des pouvoirs et le point de convergence de la structure sociale, mais le séjour d’une élite cultivée et privilégiée, unie, en dépit des différences de rang, par un même genre de vie et partageant des inclinations et des aspirations communes. (202)

If this is true (and I will try to show that such a position, however interest-

ing, is open to criticism), then the court chooses to display itself under a different guise. Politics does not play as central a role as intellectual pursuits and a common love for knowledge. However, fundamentally the effect does not change: the emphasis shifts towards the *divertissement*, thus partially eclipsing the political display, but the overall interpretation still assumes that Tasso wrote *Aminta* with a specific audience and situation in mind, to showcase one of its constitutive elements.

It is precisely Godard's critical position that allows us to identify an aspect of *Aminta* that has been so far largely neglected. Godard, like all his predecessors, concentrates his attention on the single aspect that is supposedly emphasized in a pastoral performance. However, I want to argue that Tasso's stance vis-à-vis the Este court is not fundamentally defined with respect to its escapist, revolutionary or submissive political position. Rather, with *Aminta* he aims at embodying the court's defining ideology: what I would call "representativity," i.e., the tendency of everything at court to stand for and represent something else. In this respect, *Aminta* is one of various plays that are well suited to becoming a starting point for an exploration of a complex issue: how a theatrical performance is a part of the continuous staging that is life at court and yet distinguishes itself from this theatrical continuum and establishes itself as a staged play. The relevance of such an issue becomes apparent when one considers that this tendency can be observed outside Ferrara, that is, all over Italy and indeed throughout Europe, in the period bridging the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries.

That early modern courts were a space where theatricalization of everyday life occurred is a topic that has been studied extensively, and not just within the field of literary studies. One of the most helpful areas for this kind of endeavor proves to be anthropology. Writing about the state in nineteenth-century Balinese culture, Clifford Geertz asserts:

Court ceremonialism was the driving force of court politics; and mass ritual was not a device to shore up the state, but rather the state, even in its final gasp, was a device for the enactment of mass ritual. Power served pomp, not pomp power.

Behind this, to us, strangely reversed relationship between the substance and the trappings of rule lies a general conception of the nature and basis of sovereignty that, merely for simplicity, we may call the doctrine of the exemplary center. This is the theory that the court-and-capital is at once a microcosm of the supernatural order— "an image of

. . . *the universe on a smaller scale*—and the material embodiment of the political order. It is not just the nucleus, the engine, or the pivot of the state, it is the state. (13)

While it is necessary to temper this assertion to adapt it to the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, since the “doctrine of the exemplary center” mentioned by Geertz went hand-in-hand with the development of a centralized control over the various activities of the state (embodied in a capillary and unwieldy bureaucracy); it is also important to point out how theatrical performances were useful to emphasize the centrality and exemplarity of the court.⁴ Our contemporary categories defining and dividing the theatrical from the everyday need be cast aside in favor of a frame where contamination was the rule; in Kristiaan Aerckeis words,

in [Baroque] feasts and festive performances... “work” and “play” were still closely related, even intertwined “categories.” In other words, the splendid festive “play” performances of the Baroque court constituted a political and philosophical program that was potentially as intense as (and ...probably more entertaining than) many contemporaneous treatises or tracts on absolutism. But it would be fallacious to assume these feasts were merely so many forms of political discourse; they were also, quite simply, festive celebrations, elaborate games, forms of play for a limited number of players... . Together with exuberant perukes and stunning experiments with three-dimensional clothing, the grandiose festive performance was part and parcel of this playful yet serious strategy. (8-9)⁵

Within this continuum of theatricalization, staged performances constituted specific peaks that pointed to themselves as theater.

It is important to recognize that there existed a somewhat fluid yet evident boundary separating the event of the staging from the continuum of everyday courtly theatricality. Indeed this boundary is difficult to imagine and to conceptualize, since it belongs to the keying of ceremonials, where the playful and the serious coexist. The theatrical events staged at court were largely self-referential, yet they also referred to something other than themselves, as they staged characters that belonged to the court and, more importantly, the representative foundation of its everyday actions and behaviors. Such interferences, in Anna Nardo's words, “create logical paradoxes because the definition of the class of actions is itself one of the actions being defined. Although theo-

retically invalid, this confusion of logical types—of the defining frame with what is inside the frame—pervades human life and can provide great pleasure” (10). The appeal of such a paradox seems undeniable for late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century audiences, although it appears counterintuitive to our more rational mind frame. Moreover, the tension between self-referentiality and external reference brings about a keen awareness of both in the audience.⁶ In other words, the frame is emphasized by the constant insistence on the *décalage* between what is contained and what is external to it.⁷ Consequently, in a first important sense the performance is set apart from the “ordinary theatricality” of courtly life, even as its frame helps to contain it within its proper boundaries.⁸

Even in a spatial sense, the frame plays an important role to separate the staging from its viewers. At Pesaro, the stage was virtually indistinguishable from the other pictures that decorated the hall; these were painted in a naturalistic fashion (the anonymous source calls them “simulacri” [659 *verso*]) and separated by stucco moldings. This arrangement helped frame the performance in a separate and artificial setting—just like the views of the *campagna* in the fresco paintings are representations of something that is not physically present, the performers refer back to a reality that is “other” with respect to their presence. Moreover, the overabundance of this frame (in the anonymous reporter’s words, “l’apparato... teneva la longhezza della sala” which was itself “tutta decorata di pitture à quadri di prospettive di paesaggi” [659 *verso*]) helped further separate the two levels of theatricalization by insisting on itself. A similar situation is to be encountered at Parma in 1628, during the marriage festivities for Odoardo Farnese and Margherita de’ Medici. There, a three-dimensional architectural cornice physically framed the *proscenio* and constantly reminded the audience of the main event being celebrated, since it was decorated with the escutcheons of the newlyweds.⁹

In the Parma performance, there is also a temporal lag that marks the boundaries between the normal courtly theatricalization and the event of the staging. There were three distinct liminal indications: the rising of the curtain; a melody being performed by an orchestra; and the arrival of the duke, duchess and dignitaries in the theater. In the period preceding these three events, the court and the invitees are already present in the theater; the time span of their wait emphasizes the differentiation between the two different types of theatricalization.

Lastly, the text of *Aminta* itself provides the audience with a reinforcement of the frame. If we assume that at Pesaro Tasso’s prologue was performed (on the basis of the presence of the choruses, usually forming a whole with the prologue and the epilogue), this part of the text

aims at constituting the time and space of the performance as separated from the rest by insisting on self-deixis and other evident liminal indications. Moreover, at Parma Achillini's prologue followed in the same steps, and even emphasized the events in celebration of which the staging was intended. Thus the distance from the everyday courtly theatricalization was marked and made evident, while at the same time the representation was linked to it.

Staged performances "represent" this theatricalization of everyday life in the two coexisting senses identified by Louis Marin. On the one hand, they re-present, that is, present again something that is absent. On the other, they intensify the presence of what is indeed already there. In the first sense, stagings embody the ideal against which the court models itself, a Neoplatonic entity that is perforce elusive.¹⁰ In the second sense, stagings reassert the power and legitimacy of what they reflect, i.e., the court itself.¹¹ These two layers are always co-present, yet they have often gone unacknowledged by contemporary critics. I contend that in this aspect, *Aminta* and other pastorals did not differ from any other genre, nor the space of their staging from any other that was linked to the court. Following Godard, Da Pozzo maintains that

Alfonso sembra, più degli altri predecessori, ritirarsi nei luoghi di delizia per coltivare un conforto, una consolazione della mente, in modo più intimamente privato ambisce al luogo di spasso campagnolo, quasi per una alternativa alla funzione rappresentativa che è tenuto a sostenere in corte; si ritira a riposare con maggior disposizione a lasciarsi convincere della fugacità di quanto assedia la sua mente e a lasciarsi illudere dalla esaltazione che dalla piccola corte che lo segue fuori le mura viene alla sua persona. (31-32)

It is illusory for Alfonso (or any other ruler) to believe that he can retreat from the public sphere by leaving the town and residing in the *campagna*. In addition, the spectacles always engage the public element of the already public status linked with political power.¹²

Both the Pesaro and Parma performances were public, to the extent that they took place at court, that is, in a public space. This of course does not mean that they were open to everybody; indeed their audiences were carefully selected.¹³ The two performances differ in the degree of restrictiveness and of contamination with non-courtly events. At Pesaro, the larger frame of *Aminta* is the popular one of carnival festivities. Lack of documentation prevents us from asserting with an absolute degree of certainty that the *Aminta* performance was private,

that is, restricted to courtiers and noblemen and women; however, this seems to be suggested by the location of the performance, a temporary “sala” that had been built for the city entry of the newlywed duchess, Lucrezia d’Este, hence presumably reserved to a small and selected audience. Although the performance itself seems to have been closed to outsiders, the occasion was public in a different sense, that is, it was popular. Whether or not Guidubaldo was actually trying to manipulate the festivities to his own advantage, it is obvious that the occasion was popular in origin and tradition, thus rendering the ruler’s hypothetical attempt all the more difficult. Moreover, the carnivalesque circumstances injected an element of misrule in the carefully planned event.

At Parma, on the contrary, the setting for the festivities, including the *Aminta* performance, was both more public and more restricted. The events that were being celebrated were relevant for the young duke Odoardo, his family, the Farnese court in general, and indeed the whole town and entire domain. Yet access to the theatrical events was carefully monitored, as they constituted the apex of the festivities.¹⁴ In spite of the conflicting information regarding the number of people whom the *teatro inferiore* could accommodate, it is clear that the audience attending that *Aminta* performance was extremely select. However, the importance and prestige of such festivities at Parma went beyond the scope of the town and of the Farnese domain, this enlarging even further their “publicness.” Their relevance is openly acknowledged in a passage in a verbose biography of Odoardo Farnese written by Ippolito Calandrini and still in manuscript form at the Biblioteca Palatina at Parma:

Io non stò particolarizzando le belleze formate dal’ingegno dell’Ill[ustrissi]mo et Ecc[ellentissi]mo Sig[on]r Marchese Bentivoglio, et altre superbe rapresentazioni, perch’È furono dotamente cantate dalle Muse di diversi poeti, molto nelle rime versati, et misteriosamente rapresentate nel famoso coro dal famoso ingegno del sod[det]to Co[n]te Bernardo Morando intitolato gareggiamento d’amore, e Parma acquistò tanto honore in questo solennissimo ricevimento con le sue divozioni à Margherita, quanto facesse mai per altro tempo con la spada, soccorrendo, abbattendo, e superando Reggi, essercizi, e Potenze con generose vittorie. (334-35)

Calandrini openly acknowledges that it is through this series of entertainment—and possibly through others like it—that Parma and the Farnese family acquire fame and respect throughout the Italian peninsula.

Indeed, in his opinion the power of the festivities even surpasses that of military feats.

In this sense, semi-official descriptions such as Buttigli's were powerful tools in the hands of the organizers and of the court to represent, in Marin's first sense, the festivities that had taken place. This also helps explain the overabundance of details and the excited tone of these descriptions. The fact, however, that the authority and legitimacy of the court can be represented, in Marin's second sense, in a published description points to an evolution taking place in the concept of the embodiment of power. In the Middle Ages, according to Habermas,

in itself the status of manorial lord, on whatever level, was neutral in relation to the criteria of "public" and "private," but its incumbent represented it publicly. He displayed himself, presented himself as an embodiment of some sort of "higher" power ... Representation in the sense in which the members of a national assembly represent a nation or a lawyer represents his clients had nothing to do with this publicity of representation inseparable from the lord's concrete existence, that, as an "aura," surrounded and endowed his authority. (7)

In the Renaissance and later, however, "the independent provincial nobility based in the feudal rights attached to the land lost its power to represent; publicity of representation was concentrated at the prince's court" (9). Although the sociological concept of the "public" exists, more and more its representation retreated to the enclosed domain of the court. Power does not have to be embodied in a single human being any longer; consequently the ruler can retreat to this privileged dwelling place and displays himself more rarely but more lavishly only under specific circumstances. These displays are carefully concerted and their audience is highly selected, but as "representation must still depend on the presence on people before whom it was displayed" (Habermas 10), both the *Aminta* performances under our scrutiny reveal that they were both restricted to the majority of the population, yet also open to the public due to the relevance to the town and by virtue of the fame they acquired.¹⁵

If late-twentieth-century minds are puzzled as to the relevance of such courtly spectacles to the population at large, who was excluded from them to a very large extent, it may be useful to consider the following passage by Robert Hughes:

some dyspeptic critics feel that commercials are the actual content of network television. And they may be right, if you agree that the main purpose of network television is to create a fictive paradise of desire to which quotidian reality is merely a backdrop, a world rearranged in such a way that we don't have to experience it. In this paradise, information slowly gives way to "infotainment" and events are continually altered by the imperatives of television editing. For most members of a vast audience, an audience far greater than print can claim, TV has taken over their image banks, their modes of social expression. It generates the icons to which they look and the forms of homage they pay to them. (38)

The extent to which the situation depicted by Hughes parallels that taking place at Pesaro or Parma is truly stunning. Remembering the Roman adage *panem et circenses*, contemporary TV network producers and late Renaissance and Baroque festivity organizers share a common goal: inventing and representing (in both of Marin's senses) an alternative reality to the everyday, one that is real although we don't experience it¹⁶. At Pesaro and Parma, this is true for both the audience that had been admitted to the performance and to the population that had been excluded from it, albeit to a different extent. The courtiers absorb the represented reality on stage and project it on their courtly existence, embellishing it.¹⁷ The commoners are struck by the beauty of the "fictive reality" and attracted to it, unaware that it does not exist except on stage,¹⁸ and that their "homage" to the ruling powers is shaped by it.

In conclusion, the space where the performance takes place is inextricably bound with its reception by the audience. By concentrating solely on the space of the supposed première of Tasso's pastoral, critics have neglected to consider the larger frame of the impact of the pastoral on subsequent audiences under different circumstances at later times. However, by reconstructing the space and the occasion of other performances, the strength of *Aminta* and of other pastorals emerges distinctly. For its courtly audience, Tasso's pastoral creates an elsewhere which is nevertheless present and where ideals are displayed and held up to view. Indeed, I am inclined to believe that it is on the basis of such inherent strength that *Aminta* was staged time and time again, for courtly performances, well into the seventeenth century. Occasionally, like at Parma in 1628, such popularity could backfire, as the audience paid no attention to *Aminta* as they already knew its plot. Still, the organizers of those

wedding festivities included Tasso's pastoral in the roster of events, to bank on its vogue and to elicit specific responses for their highly selected audience.

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1 On this subject, see Ferdinando Taviani's article "Bella d'Asia," particularly 6-9, as well as Taviani and Schino's *Il segreto della commedia dell'arte*, particularly 354-55. It is worth mentioning that all the early printings of *Aminta*, with no exceptions at least until the 1630s, were relatively "poor" ones (only the 1583 and 1590 Aldine editions were decorated, and even then, most of the plates were used again from the first to the second printing), inexpensively bound, and above all, small in size—that is, easy for a traveling performer to pack and take along.

2 This approach is by no means restricted to *Aminta* or to the theater of the Italian Renaissance; for example, Stephen Orgel has argued that Shakespeare's drama creates an argument, not a plot: "This is what critics from Horace to Castelvetro and Sidney mean when they say that mimesis is only the means of drama, not its end. Its end, they assume, is the same as the end of poetry and the other verbal arts—to persuade" (44). On the issue of the usage of epideictic rhetoric during the Renaissance, see Brian Vickers's excellent article "Epideictic and Epic in the Renaissance," especially pages 500-505. I am currently at work on assessing the impact of classical rhetoric on *Aminta* and, in general, on Italian Renaissance theater, for a paper to be delivered at the Southeastern Theater Conference 1996 symposium.

3 In this respect, Louise Clubb's assertion that "when the pastoral world took to the stage and playwrights reached for theatrical instrumentation for the ancient abundance of pastoral situations, characters, topoi, attitudes, and stories, the repertory of tried and proven structures of established genres was at hand, and theatergrams, of comedy especially, were put to work in Arcadia—is obviously not as important and influential as the preceding one that is a setting Arcadia was better suited than the city of comedy or the court of tragedy to represent immaterial reality and universal psychological or spiritual experience, by virtue of being a mental place, natural, private, and oneiric, the inner side of the civilized public and waking scene for the city and court" (14). The emphasis must be placed on how the smallest theatrical units, called by Clubb "theatergrams," are received within their new setting in the pastoral courtly stagings. Clearly a comic repartee used in a pastoral play can retain its amusing quality and provoke laughter in the audience; yet its overall impact on the spectators is different—I would go as far as to say muffled—due to its modified setting, i.e., both the fact that it is included in a pastoral and not in a comedy and that it is performed at court.

4 In this respect, Giulio Ferroni's opinion is only partial when he writes that

l'intera cultura cortigiana cinquecentesca può essere definita come produzione di scena, sistema di rappresentazione, che offre uno spettacolo che si riflette in se stesso, in quanto la corte ne è contemporaneamente produttrice e spettatrice. La "nascita" o l' "invenzione" del teatro s'inserisce in questa più ampia scena culturale; lo spettacolo teatrale viene a proporsi come incontro e sovrapposizione celebrativa delle diverse forme e dei molteplici strumenti della scena cortigiana, dando luogo ad un'apparenza multipla, che non va confusa con più moderne forme di spettacolo "totale:" in essa emergono, in una simultaneità spaziale e temporale, le forme pure delle diverse arti e tecniche, ciascuna delle quali mantiene però la sua autonomia strutturale. (537)

Ferroni assumes that courtly performances were self-enclosed and merely self-referential. However, one cannot avoid considering the broader context that was indirectly addressed through these performances: the court, as well as the entire city and its population. Indeed the courtly space (of the performance as well as of the theatricalized everyday) cannot be defined as private, since it has public relevance beyond its borders—an issue that will be thematized later on in this essay.

5 According to Anna Nardo, since festivities constituted occasions outside the realm of the everyday, they "unleashed the folly that could scramble the order and level the hierarchy—temporarily." However, she adds, "paradoxically, they also helped preserve the social order. By releasing pent-up emotions under controlled conditions, they protected institutions, serving as safety valves that allowed power structures to marginalize and contain dissidence without accommodating its critique" (36). The courtly performances of *Aminta* reflect very little of this kind of "revolutionary" playfulness, as they were ordained by the established power aiming at supervising all aspects of the production. However, at least in 1574 at Pesaro—when Tasso's pastoral had its first documented performance, taking place at a time (carnival) traditionally characterized by misrule—the two aspects, displaying and legitimizing power, while letting the population express their unruliness, went hand-in-hand, thus contaminating each other.

In Erwin Goffman's definition, ceremonials are explained as follows: "Whereas in staged plays this preformulation [of events and characters] allows for a broad simulation of ordinary life, in ceremonials it functions to constrict, allowing one deed, one doing, to be stripped from

the usual texture of events and choreographed to fill out a whole occasion. In brief, a play keys life, a ceremony an event” (58).

6 In this sense, I disagree with Da Pozzo’s interpretation of the space of the performance as uniquely self-referential:

se da un lato, ad esempio, comincia ad essere sempre più ammessa una separazione tra la scena e gli spettatori di essa, e di conseguenza la presenza di un luogo ideale che possa indicare soltanto uno spazio deputato senza l’intento di alludere ad un corrispondente reale preciso, lasciando perciò la sua decifrazione in relazione appunto agli elementi che l’azione andrà portando in luce, d’altro canto tutto un gusto sempre più massiccio viene maturando, di forme teatrali pubbliche durante il cui svolgimento pubblico popolare e pubblico ristretto della corte ugualmente si beano, e per le quali il luogo postulato per l’azione non ha bisogno di alcun sottinteso allusivo, ma è esplicitamente e semplicemente un determinato spazio della città che non rinvia a niente altro da sè. (82-83)

The first element that bears criticism in this assessment derives directly from the physical space represented on stage in the *Aminta* performances. The latter is not a cityscape, but a *luogo di passo* in a natural setting. If critics such as Ludovico Zorzi have maintained that in the case of the *scena di città* the separation between stage and audience is total and that the former is idealized in a paradigm of classical derivation (444-49), this position is clearly untenable within the pastoral domain due to the lack of an identifiable archetype. Secondly, Da Pozzo’s interpretation is only justifiable if we see in *Aminta* an escapist myth, instead of emphasizing the representational strategies at work in the performed text.

7 Or, to cite Nardo: “because play conflates the defining frame with what is inside the frame, a single play action takes place simultaneously on two levels of reality: the player both participates in his action and stands apart framing the action, whereby gaining distance and perspective on himself” (10-11).

8 I cannot agree with Jane Tylus when she writes that in the prologue, “by cloaking himself in such a ‘velo’ (veil), by transforming his potent dart into a mere shepherd’s staff, Cupid symbolizes the allure of a courtly theater that attempts to negate its own theatricality, of a force that disguises its invasive potential” (88). It is precisely in such liminal scenes as the prologue and the epilogue that the frame emerges fully. In particular, in *Aminta* the prologue is remarkably different from the rest of the play in terms of its representational strategy, since it insists on self-deixis to

the detriment of the more interpretation-bound tools that are used throughout the rest of the text.

Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Ducato d'Urbino, classe I divisione B filza X, 654 ff.

9 Giovanni Da Pozzo's interpretation seems exceedingly simplistic:

il presupposto che permette la simulazione è che lo spazio del teatro sia diverso da quello della corte. Nel caso particolare, è sempre apparso come motivo di singolarità il fatto che il luogo stesso su cui poggia lo spazio teatrale è altrove, rispetto al consueto spazio della stessa città, è l'isola di Belvedere, per arrivare alla quale gli spettatori devono attraversare l'acqua del fiume. . . . Nell'*Aminta* il luogo rappresentato sulla scena non è l'Arcadia della consueta finzione e nemmeno la corte, che sta oltre il fiume, ridisegnata nello spazio scenico. Il luogo deputato è il posto stesso in cui si rappresenta la favola, il "luogo di passo" di cui parla il Coro al verso 1211, esteso e allargato a tutto il testo. (146)

The validity of his interpretation is debatable even with respect to the supposed *première* of Tasso's pastoral at Ferrara in 1573. Indeed the location was different from the physical setting of the court, yet the audience comprised only court members (in fact, those who were closest to Alfonso, if we are to assume that the dearth of documents regarding the *Aminta* opening comes from the fact that it was a strictly private performance). Da Pozzo's view also does not help explain how subsequent audiences could have perceived the place of the performance, whenever the pastoral was performed at court.

Much like upon the occasion of masques at the British court, the event that signals the opening of the entertainment is neither the raising of the curtain nor the music emanating from the stage. Rather, it is the fact that the ducal family has taken their seats, as we gather from a semi-official description of the events: "essendo pieni di Dame i gradi tirati per retta linea a destra, e sinistra del verone de' Prencipi, pieni li raggiranti fuori delle loggie di Cavaglieri, piene le prime, e seconde loggie di Prencipi incogniti, e di personaggi forastieri, comparvero gli illustriss[imi] Sig[nori] Cardinali, colla Sereniss[ima] Madama, Sposi, Prencipi, e Prencipesse, i quali dopo di haver salutato le circostanti Dame, e Cavaglieri, s'assiserò a suoi luoghi, e subito s'udì una dolcissima sinfonia di stromenti, sì da mano, come da fiato, nel finir della quale in un balleno díocchi sparve la cortina, e comparve il vacuo del Proscenio. . ." (Buttigli 154).

10 "Qu'est-ce re-présenter, sinon présenter à nouveau (dans la modelité

du temps) ou à la place de... (dans celle de l'espace). Le préfixe re-
 du temps) ou à la place de... (dans celle de l'espace). Le préfixe re-
 importe dans le terme la valeur de la substitution. Quelque chose qui
 était présent et ne l'est plus est maintenant représenté. A la place de
 quelque chose qui est présent ailleurs, voici présent un donné ici. Au lieu
 de la représentation donc, il est un absent dans le temps ou l'espace ou
 plutôt un autre et une substitution s'opère d'un meme de cet autre à sa
 place" (Marin 9).

11 "Le préfixe re- importe dans le terme non plus, come il y a un instant,
 une valeur de substitution mais celle d'une intensité, d'une fréquentativ-
 ité. . . . La représentation reste ici dans l'élément du meme qu'elle inten-
 sifie par redoublement. En ce sens, elle est sa réflexion et représenter sera
 toujours se présenter représentant quelque chose. Du meme coup, le
 représentation constitue son sujet" (Marin 10). Consequently, "dans la
 représentation qui est pouvoir, dans le pouvoir qui est représentation, le
 réel—si l'on entend par réel l'accomplissement toujours différé de ce
 désir—n'est autre que l'image fantastique dans laquelle le pouvoir se con-
 templerait absolu" (Marin 12).

12 Following a short remark by Claudio Varese "iné nei due trattati [the
 Discorsi dell'arte poetica, ca. 1562-65; and the Discorsi del poema
 eroico, 1595], né nelle sue lettere egli [Tasso] parla mai espressamente del
 genere pastorale o dell'*Aminta*" [117-18]), Mario Fubini asserts:

Costante è nel Tasso l'esigenza di render conto non solo ai critici ma
 anche e prima a sé medesimo della ragioni del suo poetare: della sua
 "favola boschereccia" invece egli non ha sentito il bisogno di dare una
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 l'*Aminta* non gli siano state presenti quelle preoccupazioni critiche che si
 manifestano, oltreché nei *Discorsi*, nel maggiore poema . . . e che essa sia
 quindi opera non già di arte ma di natura. (13)

Even if we manage to disregard the romantic terms in which the critic
 couches his opinion, the illusion emerges that Tasso, or any playwright
 for that matter, can express himself more freely when writing for the
 stage than in any other genre. If we posit that there was no clear separa-
 tion between the everyday and the theatrical, it becomes clear that any
 text written for the stage belongs to this unique, partially playful but
 quite serious frame; consequently, the same political, moral, religious
 constraints felt by Tasso when composing his other works (in particular
Gerusalemme liberata) are present in *Aminta*, too, although Tasso did not

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Even if we manage to disregard the romantic terms in which the critic couches his opinion, the illusion emerges that Tasso, or any playwright for that matter, can express himself more freely when writing for the stage than in any other genre. If we posit that there was no clear separation between the everyday and the theatrical, it becomes clear that any text written for the stage belongs to this unique, partially playful but quite serious frame; consequently, the same political, moral, religious constraints felt by Tasso when composing his other works (in particular *Gerusalemme liberata*) are present in *Aminta*, too, although Tasso did not theorize on them at the time. A passage in Francisco López de Aguilar's

“Al Teatro” opening the printing of the 1632 play *La Dorotea*, by Lope de Vega, alerts us to another possible repudiation of Fubini’s opinion: “el papel es más libre teatro que aquel donde tiene licencia el vulgo de graduar, la amistad de aplaudir y la embidia de morder” (52). By the third decade of the Spanish Seventeenth century, a playwright was subject to more external constraints than somebody writing in another genre, due to the size, variety and virulence of his audience.

13 The semantic complexity of the term “public” fully emerges in the following passage by Jürgen Habermas:

We call events and occasions “public” when they are open to all, in contrast to closed or exclusive affairs—as when we speak of public places or public houses. But as in the expression “public building,” the term need not refer to general accessibility; the building does not even have to be open to public traffic. “Public buildings” simply house state institutions and as such are “public.” The state is the “public authority.” It owes this attribute to its task of promoting the public or common welfare of its rightful members. The word has yet another meaning when one speaks of a “public [official] reception;” on such occasions a powerful display of representation is staged whose “publicity” contains an element of public recognition. There is a shift in meaning again when we say that someone has made a name for himself, has a public reputation. The notion of such personal prestige or renown originated in epochs other than that of “polite society.” None of these usages, however, have much affinity with the meaning most commonly associated with the category—expressions like “public opinion,” an “outraged” or “informed public,” “publicity,” “publish,” and “publicize.” The subject of this publicity is the public as carrier of public opinion; its function as a critical judge is precisely what makes the public character of proceedings—in court, for instance—meaningful. (1-2)

The courtly performances under my scrutiny are public in at least two ways: they take place in a space housing state institutions; and they display the kind of representation associated with public recognition.

Traditional interpretations maintain that Guidubaldo II exploited the carnival entertainment of 1574 to steer his subjects’ mind off the harsh repression of an uprising led by the noble and merchant classes of Urbino, a town also under the della Rovere domain. In this light, it is somewhat surprising that no court-sponsored description of the events is extant. Yet, it is possible that such a description existed, but is now lost to us; or that Guidubaldo wanted to influence only the townfolks, and

to this effect word of mouth would have sufficed; or that plans had to be scrapped after the plague hit the dukedom in 1575; or, lastly, that Guidubaldo's death later in 1574 deprived the project of its main promoter, or nullified the main political reason behind it.

14 The Farnese court was not oblivious of the town population; much like other seventeenth-century festivities, the Medici-Farnese wedding was also celebrated with a lavish entry of Margherita in Parma, staged by and for the town.

From 3500 to 6000, according to different sources.

15 Habermas' words:

In comparison to the secular festivities of the Middle Ages and even of the Renaissance the baroque festival had already lost its public character in the literal sense. Joust, dance, and theater retreated from the public places into the enclosures of the park, from the streets into the rooms of the palace. The castle park made its first appearance in the middle of the seventeenth century but then spread rapidly over Europe along with the architecture of the French century. Like the baroque palace itself, which was built around the grand hall in which the festivities were staged, the castle park permitted a courtly life sealed off from the outside world. However, the basic pattern of the representative publicness not only survived but became more prominent (9-10)

echo in Silvia Carandini's:

Per un verso, [in the seventeenth century] agisce ancora lo stimolo a mettere in mostra nelle occasioni festive la sfera personale, a rovesciare all'esterno le superfici interne delle case, ad esibire l'arredo pregiato delle abitazioni di lusso, a trasformare tutta la città in un ambiente prezioso, illuminato e confortevole, e anche a mostrare in pubblico rituali e comportamenti intimi, privati diremmo oggi. Per l'altro verso, allo stesso tempo si precisa una tendenza inversa a circoscrivere il luogo dello spettacolo nel territorio urbano, a chiudere entro recinti il sito di eventi particolari, a ricreare all'aperto una dimensione interna raccolta, controllata e sicura, oppure a trasferire in ambienti chiusi, a stabilmente fissare gli impianti mobili della festa cittadina sempre più specializzando e funzionalizzando le strutture ricettive per il pubblico e per la scena [with the creation of stable enclosed theaters for hire]. (182-83)

16 When writing about a hypothetical Irish National Theatre, William Butler Yeats saw in it "a community bound together by imaginative possessions" (cited in Boland 28). In his opinion, the community built by

SEDUCING THE SEDUCER:
FROM OBLIGATION TO SEDUCTION IN *LA PRINCESSE DE CLÈVES*



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The flowering of new forms of sociability among the elite classes during the 17th century partook of a larger cultural “tendency” which exerted its force in many spheres of social and political life, and to which sociologists and historians refer as the codification and internalization of social controls. Every aspect of elite social life during this period of the *Ancien régime* came to be dominated by a doctrine of *politesse* or *honnêteté*; the practices of etiquette that comprised this doctrine came to regulate each gesture, no matter how insignificant, within the framework of social interaction. Yet thanks to the rigid etiquette structure that grew out of these salon ideals and overlaid every aspect of social existence at the court, the exchanges and codified interactions of courtiers permitted these individuals to situate themselves in relation to each other within the court hierarchy and to derive the particular sense of esteem that was so crucial to them at that time. It is no great exaggeration to state that they defined themselves in the very act of exchange:

Social opinion, which constitutes the prestige of the individual, is expressed by reciprocal behaviour within a communal action according to certain rules. And in this communal action each individual's existential bond to society is directly visible. Without confirmation of one's prestige through behaviour, this prestige is nothing. The immense value attached to the demonstration of prestige and the observance of etiquette does not betray an attachment to externals, but to what was vitally important to individual identity. (Elias 101)

This new *maîtrise de soi* had many implications for the different spheres of life in which it made itself felt; however, its effects were oriented towards the same general goals: the abolition of violence or aggression from all but a very limited number of social interactions, and the curtailment of certain forms of behaviour as being contrary to the new imperatives of *bienséance* and *politesse*. In every forum, tensions were

channeled instead along more symbolic lines: duels, outlawed under Richelieu, were gradually sublimated into less overt—verbal, ceremonial, even sartorial—displays; ultimately, family honour and rank were defended through juridical channels, through lawsuits and parliamentary hearings concerning *enregistrements* and *précedences*. Onstage, violent acts once physically played out before the untroubled eyes of early 17th-century spectators were reduced to a *récit* wherever they could not simply be eliminated as unnecessary according to the increasingly evoked *unité d'action*. In the *cercles* and *ruelles* where noble men and women gathered together, sexual aggression gave way to an elegant space of flirtation in which a series of *faveurs* were gradually yielded according to a set of conventions prior to the final act of possession or union. At this moment in the history of French society, what I call “seduction” in a broad sense (from *seducere* ‘to separate’) develops as a codified form of deferral: the courteous distance between an individual and his (or her) interlocutors, the pleasure-filled delay between the awakening of desire and its fulfillment, the delicious ambiguity between what is said and what is meant, all of which regulate the circulation of pleasure and desire at this transitional moment when the existence of the *noble d'épée* gives way to that of the *courtisan*.

These new oblique forms of sociability stand in direct opposition to the feudal ideal of obligation (from *ob -ligare* ‘to bind together’) that was thought to regulate interactions at an earlier moment in French society. Indeed, the concept of distance or separation is crucial to an understanding of the transition from the apparently straightforward forms of reciprocal exchange based on a gift-counter gift model to the more complicated codes of circulation that regulate the new court society.

Many institutions shaped themselves in and around these cultural tendencies and attempted to exploit them to particular ends—the monarchy itself being not least among them. Another was the salon society which became, through the perfection of the art of social exchange, what J. Starobinski has called

un espace protégé, un espace de jeu, un champ clos où, d'un commun accord, les partenaires renoncent à se nuire et à s'attaquer, tant dans le commerce ordinaire que dans ce qui touche à l'amour... 'idée dominante est celle d'une maximisation du plaisir: l'assouvissement direct que la pulsion amoureuse perd sous l'effet du refoulement et de la sublimation, est contrebalancé (et peut-être compensé), selon la théorie de l'honnêteté, par l'érotisation du 'commerce' ordinaire, de la conversation, etc. La doctrine de

l'honnêteté esthétique le 'renoncement pulsionnel.' Ainsi, tandis que l'Éros se 'civilise', les relations civiles s'érotisent dans leur ensemble, et deviennent le matériau d'une activité esthétique. (131)

In the salons, the twin objectives of *politesse* and *galanterie* are introduced as a catalyst in the reaction that transforms action into words. Sexual aggression is thus channeled in a less crude direction; the immediate gratification of sexual impulses is translated into a verbal ritual of anticipation, a putting-off of one kind of pleasure in exchange for another.

The slow evolution towards self-constraint during the “salon” or “precious” decades inevitably brought about specific changes in the speech and behaviour of the new elite, whose groping towards a new, refined style of interaction was chronicled in the *romans* and *nouvelles* of the first half of the century. The most obvious symptom of this new interpersonal consideration or distance is the introduction of a verbal space between interlocutors in the conversations that increasingly occupy the heroes of such works and their admiring readers. The temporal space that serves to delay (sometimes even to replace) action during such interchanges swells under the pressure of the sheer volume of verbiage that fills it: flowery compliments and deferences, protestations of goodwill and displays of humility. As M. Magendie points out,

la courtoisie, pour être sensible, devait se traduire en procédés quelquefois lourds et substantiels. Mais, ces longueurs étaient excellentes pour embarrasser, retarder, et enfin arrêter, les manifestations spontanées des sentiments; elles substituaient des lenteurs apprêtées mais décentes, à l'impulsion naturelle, irréfléchie, et souvent brutale; elles paralysaient la grossièreté native, et tout ce qui comprime et gêne les instincts primitifs, apporte à la politesse une aide précieuse. (1: 186-7)

Thus one of the consequences of this refined loquacity is a lengthening of the communication between any given interlocutors and the delaying of the intended ends of their interaction. Yet the words that proliferate between persons of quality, in their new enthusiasm for the pleasures of a “*doux commerce*”, remain generally limpid in their signification: the refinement displayed by speakers consists solely in the multiplication, rather than a subtle and judicious choice and manipulation, of images and rhetorical figures. Later, when the barriers between the courtiers and the social groups directly below them begin to erode, different, more refined, manners will become the order of the day: at first, an elaborate

layering of compliments that serves to obscure immediate comprehension and/or imitation on the part of the uninitiated, and later more refined techniques of fostering ambiguity, techniques that rely less on “*kyrielles*” of pretty phrases than on meaningful silences, eloquent gestures and subtle words. This latter phase represents one of the final stages in the development of courtly courtesy, and the point at which the codes of seduction are firmly embedded in every domain of personal interaction and exchange.

Needless to say, the development of self-constraints and the resulting distance between individuals had specific implications for relationships between women and men. That such developments were advantageous to women is evident in the increased influence they enjoyed in salon and court society.² Not surprisingly then, women had early emerged as active participants in the movement promoting “civilizing” concepts such as *politesse* and *galanterie*. The *précieuses* in particular promoted the doctrine of *civilité* in all its forms, notably in the domain of amorous relationships. They presided over the social laboratories that were the salons of the early part of the century, and were among the first to explore alternatives to the traditional arguments supporting the nobility’s privileges. The refinement of sociability according to a set of conventions devised collectively in salon conversation gave women a space in which to maneuver and facilitated the negotiation of their role in relationships. Thus, the rules of *galanterie* gave rise to a whole series of categories into which a woman might fall, according to just how long she could delay the moment of surrender: *l’honnête maîtresse*, *la débauchée*, *la cruelle*, *la coquette*, and so forth. However, the *précieuses* went further than any of these in their attempts to create a new form of love from the pleasures of postponement: hence the platonic—and therefore lasting—ideal of *l’amour tendre*.

*Seducing the
princesse*

Mme de LaFayette’s short novel, *La princesse de Clèves*, evokes the transition from the old code of obligation (prescribing directness and reciprocity and embodied in the relationship the heroine’s mother encourages her to establish with her husband) to the new oblique code of seduction (as embodied in her troubling passion for the incomparably attractive duc de Nemours). It recounts the story of the beautiful Mlle de Chartres, a virtuous and dutiful girl brought to the court by her mother in order to contract an advantageous marriage. Soon after her arrival she is wed to the prudent young prince de Clèves, who is passionately in love with her but for whom she feels nothing beyond sincere admiration and respect. She subsequently falls in love with Nemours, the most dashing

of the court's gentlemen. At first uncomprehending of her feelings, the naïve princesse is enlightened by her dying mother as to the nature of her interest in Nemours. Overwhelmed with guilt and encouraged by Clèves' apparent desire for honesty, the princesse decides to confess her passion for Nemours to her husband in the hopes that he will allow her to retire from the court. Yet this confession is quickly revealed to have been ill-judged: Clèves is consumed with jealousy, to the point of his own death. The princesse, horrified, refuses Nemours' proposal of marriage and withdraws from society into a convent where she dies shortly afterwards.

The *nouvelle* constitutes an emotional and social *bildungsroman*, describing the heroine's discovery both of herself and of the world in which she has come to live. What is ambiguous about the narrative, however, is the outcome of that process, for it leads to an intolerable conflict between the values the princesse has been raised to honour and those with which she must comply by virtue of her presence within the courtly milieu. Furthermore, this conflict, often presented in the "corneillian" terms of *amour* versus *devoir*, represents something more complex than a clash of the princesse's moral "raisons de devoir insurmontables" with her passion for Nemours. Within the context of the social transformations mentioned previously, it becomes increasingly apparent that Mme de Clèves is torn between the opposing codes of two different moments in 17th-century society. As a result, she is unable to interact either directly, with Clèves and according to her mother's precepts of *sincérité* and obligation, or indirectly, with Nemours and according to the oblique code of seduction.

The heroine, gifted with a previously unknown "natural" capacity for sincerity, has been raised by her mother to cultivate this quality and to hold in highest suspicion the dissimulation that characterizes relationships at the court—and *galant* relationships in particular. The policy on which such an education is based is one of speech rather than silence: "Mme de Chartres, qui avait eu tant d'application pour inspirer la vertu à sa fille...la pria, non pas comme sa mère, mais comme son amie, de lui faire confidence de toutes les galanteries qu'on lui dirait, et elle lui promit de lui aider à se conduire dans des choses où l'on était souvent embarrassée quand on était jeune" (44-5). Thus the heroine's first experience of speech is as a medium of direct and reciprocal exchange. The ideal vision of love that Mme de Chartres offers to her daughter is similarly direct and reciprocal: "elle lui faisait voir aussi combien il était difficile de conserver cette vertu, que par une extrême défiance de soi-même et par un grand soin de s'attacher à ce qui seul peut faire le bonheur d'une femme, qui est d'aimer son mari et d'en être aimée" (41). Curiously though, the absolute lack of affective reciprocity between her

daughter and her daughter's fiancé does not appear to trouble her greatly: "elle ne craignit point de donner à sa fille un mari qu'elle ne pût aimer en lui donnant le prince de Clèves" (50). It is only once the match has been made that Mme de Chartres appears to perceive the imbalance and attempts to stimulate her daughter's feelings, although hardly in terms calculated to inspire in her anything approaching Clèves' passion: "elle [Mme de Chartres] prit de grands soins de l'attacher à son mari et de lui faire comprendre ce qu'elle devait à l'inclination qu'il avait eue pour elle avant que de la connaître et à la passion qu'il lui avait témoignée en la préférant à tous les autres partis, dans un temps où personne n'osait plus penser à elle" (51).

Clèves, for his part, behaves in a way that seems to correspond precisely with the ideals presented by Mme de Chartres to her daughter: his direct and respectful manner towards Mlle de Chartres reassures her when it comes time to accept him for a husband. By the same token, it does nothing to foster the kind of passion that Clèves hopes to inspire in her; thus, in spite of her initial "*trouble*" on encountering him at the jeweler's shop, she is easily able to "se remettre, sans témoigner d'autre attention aux actions de ce prince que celle que la civilité lui devait donner pour un homme tel qu'il paraissait" (42). Whatever excitement and emotion potentially aroused by this initial meeting and the almost magical quality of their sudden reunion at the *cercle* of the king's sister—effects that Clèves has, himself, felt to their fullest extent—are completely negated by the heavy-handed efforts of the prince and Mme de Chartres, who emphasize Clèves' virtuous and direct behaviour on all occasions and endlessly present him to the princesse as a man to whom she apparently owes a debt of gratitude. The princesse is able to accept the prospect of her future with tolerable equanimity if with no particular enthusiasm; her mother's abstract precepts have not taught her the difference between the feelings of "*estime*", "*reconnaissance*" and "*bonté*" that she has for Clèves and the "*passion*" that he harbours for her (50). She does not doubt that a relationship of mutual respect and admiration will fulfill the expectations that he and Mme de Chartres apparently have, and consequently does not understand when Clèves reproaches her for not being able to satisfactorily reciprocate his emotions. It is only when she encounters Nemours that she begins to perceive the gulf that separates her mother's ideals and the kind of passion that flourishes at the court.

Indeed, Mme de Chartres' theoretical warnings and precepts quickly reveal themselves to be a woefully inadequate preparation for the reality of the court and no match for the oblique charm of Nemours. The duc's universal, and therefore ambiguous, manner of appealing to

women typifies the mechanism of courtly seduction at work. The narrator explains, “Il avait tant de douceur et tant de disposition à la galanterie qu’il ne pouvait refuser quelques soins à celles [aux femmes] qui tâchaient de lui plaire: ainsi il avait plusieurs maîtresses, mais il était difficile de deviner celle qu’il aimait véritablement” (37). As I have noted, ambiguity and seduction have by this time become closely allied within the classical doctrine of civility.

One of the ways in which the new self-restraint manifested itself in social life was a capacity to dissimulate spontaneous emotions behind a mask of nonchalance:

Courtiers have to know how to adjust their features, their words and their movements exactly to the people they meet and to the occasions on which they meet them.... The increasing compulsion to self-constraint opens new pleasures to them, new enrichments and refinements, in short new values.... At any rate, self-control becomes for them a high personal value. The specifically courtly way of being civilized, resting on self-constraint that has become second nature, is one of the things distinguishing court-aristocratic people from all others, an advantage they believe they enjoy. (Elias 240)

Nemours’ almost perfect control throughout the *nouvelle* is a virtuoso display of such a capacity. His even-handed show of *galanterie* and the ambiguous compliments in which he specializes obscure his genuine intentions and create a pleasurable game among the other courtiers, a game in which their speculations endlessly fill in the ambiguous space that looms between the duc’s polished words and his genuine feelings.

Everything about Nemours associates him with the code of seduction. His unusual, almost storybook meeting with Mme de Clèves at the *bal des fiançailles* is the first of a series of encounters during which he dazzles the princesse with his unprecedented mastery of the style of interaction that has come to regulate *le commerce* in the world of the court. In spite of her mother’s warnings, she is unable to prevent herself from being attracted, even as she recognizes the intended ambiguity that both gives rise to the pleasure and reinforces the distrust that she has been taught to feel for this kind of *galanterie*. From his first compliments, Nemours weaves a web of mystery and flattery around his immediate recognition of the princesse and her supposed lack of knowledge of his own, perfectly obvious, identity, drawing her into an indirect exchange in which she cannot refuse to participate:

Le roi et les reines... les appelèrent quand ils eurent fini [de danser] sans leur donner le loisir de parler à personne et leur demandèrent s'ils n'avaient pas bien envie de savoir qui ils étaient, et s'ils ne s'en doutaient point.

—*Pour moi, Madame, dit M. de Nemours, je n'ai pas d'incertitude; mais comme Mme de Clèves n'a pas les mêmes raisons pour deviner qui je suis que celles que j'ai pour la reconnaître, je voudrais bien que Votre Majesté eût la bonté de lui apprendre mon nom.*

—*Je crois, dit Mme la dauphine, qu'elle le sait aussi bien que vous savez le sien.*

—*Je vous assure, Madame, reprit Mme de Clèves, qui paraissait un peu embarrassée, que je ne devine pas si bien que vous pensez.*

—*Vous devinez fort bien, répondit Mme la dauphine; et il y a même quelque chose d'obligeant pour M. de Nemours à ne vouloir pas avouer que vous le connaissez sans l'avoir jamais vu. (54)*

Flustered and no doubt wishing to avoid all appearance of participating in the very sort of verbal *galanterie* of which her mother has warned her, the princesse is betrayed into a gauche denial of the dauphine's return compliment to Nemours. Yet the dauphine adroitly manages to implicate her lady in waiting in the exchange by translating her direct denial into an indirect admission of interest. This pattern of conversation will be characteristic of the exchanges between the princesse and Nemours throughout the rest of the *nouvelle*. Nemours' declarations are always tantalizingly indirect and, as such, completely unanswerable.³ How is our heroine, a woman raised to value directness and honesty, to respond to a discourse capable of mutating her direct negations into a response that is their complete opposite? This seductive quality of Nemours' discourse, the ambiguity of his words and the indirect meanings they imply, create and heighten an air of mystery and complicity between them: this is what is responsible for the "trouble" the princesse experiences in the duc's presence: "L'inclination qu'elle avait pour ce prince lui donnait un trouble dont elle n'était pas maîtresse. Les paroles les plus obscures d'un homme qui plaît donnent plus d'agitation que des déclarations ouvertes d'un homme qui ne plaît pas" (85). One might go so far as to make the observation that, in the world of the court, the more

oblique a man's words are, the more intriguing and attractive he is. Had Nemours taken the approach Clèves did (which won the princesse's esteem and her mother's consent to their marriage), the princesse would have been obliged in all good conscience to rebuff him, and she could perhaps have more easily and more justifiably avoided him on future occasions. Given that he does not, what defenses has she, a woman steeped in *sincérité* since birth, against the oblique and erotic charm of a Nemours?

As it stands, even her attempts to evade him are significant according to the subtle codes that regulate meaning in the closed environment of the court, and convey an involuntary message of their own: "Elle [Mme de Clèves] exécuta enfin la résolution qu'elle avait prise de sortir de chez son mari lorsqu'il [Nemours] y serait; ce fut toutefois en se faisant une extrême violence. Ce prince vit bien qu'elle le fuyait, et en fut sensiblement touché" (86). The princesse is powerless in the face of a social mechanism that can function even in the silence of *le regard* and *la rougeur* and that, once it has begun to function, can persist in spite of absence, even in spite of death. Such is the nature of seduction: to be that which is at once said and unsaid, that which can be understood and responded to and yet not directly confronted, denied or avoided, as the princesse naïvely attempts to do.

Mme de Clèves' gradual understanding of this mechanism precipitates the two critical moments of the text, those at which the absolute incompatibility of the codes of seduction and obligation is unequivocally revealed: her confession and the moment at which she refuses to accede to Nemours' open declaration of love.

Troubled by the realization that her feelings for the duc represent a betrayal of her mother's expectations and her husband's trust, Mme de Clèves makes a final, desperate attempt to behave in accordance with the code of sincerity and obligation. Encouraged by her husband's earlier (theoretical) assertion that he would welcome such a confidence, the princesse accords to Clèves what he himself terms "la plus grande marque de fidélité que jamais une femme ait donnée à son mari" (123), perhaps hoping by this act to make up somehow for her lack of passion. Her confession is clearly offered as a kind of gift or sacrifice, (implicitly) demanding an equally generous act of understanding and forgiveness in return: "conduisez-moi, ayez pitié de moi, et aimez-moi encore, si vous pouvez" (122), she asks, having made a clean breast of her feelings. From her point of view, to confess is the most reasonable course of action, given her own great and "natural" tendency towards *sincérité*, which has

been fostered by her mother and apparently encouraged by her husband. She has become aware of the difference between her own code of conduct and that of the court, and clearly expects this particular exchange to occur outside the court's domain. Her husband's immediate response does offer some hope that he has received her confession in the spirit in which it was offered, and means to reciprocate in the manner she had hoped: "La confiance et la sincérité que vous avez pour moi sont d'un prix infini: vous m'estimez assez pour croire que je n'abuserai pas de cet aveu. Vous avez raison, madame, je n'en abuserai pas et je ne vous en aimerai pas moins" (123). However, the next words from his lips, instead of being the counter-gift he has promised, constitute a demand for further information: "Mais, madame, achevez et apprenez-moi qui est celui que vous voulez éviter." He will reciprocate her gift with his love and understanding when he considers her initial gesture to be complete and not before; instead, he counters her demand with one of his own: "ayez pitié de moi vous-même, madame...j'en suis digne" (122).

Clèves is too much the courtier to be able to effect an exchange with his wife according to her standards of direct reciprocity. When she appears reluctant to name her beloved, instead of accepting what she has told him directly, the prince—too used to scrutinizing all information for ambiguity—weighs her confession for an indirect meaning: "Ah! Madame, reprit tout d'un coup M. de Clèves, je ne vous saurais croire. Je me souviens de l'embarras où vous fûtes le jour que votre portrait se perdit. Vous avez donné, madame, vous avez donné ce portrait qui m'était si cher et qui m'appartenait si légitimement. Vous n'avez pu cacher vos sentiments; vous aimez, on le sait; votre vertu vous a jusqu'ici garantie du reste" (124). Offered by the princesse as the first movement in a direct reciprocal exchange that would bind her more closely to her husband, the *aveu* is misunderstood by the prince de Clèves within an entirely opposite, oblique system of signification; it drives a wedge between the two of them, causing him henceforth to evaluate all of her words and actions for a meaning other than that of their face value:

Il [M. de Clèves] alla d'abord dans la chambre de sa femme et, après lui avoir parlé quelque temps de choses indifférentes, il ne put s'empêcher de lui demander ce qu'elle avait fait et qui elle avait vu; elle lui en rendit compte. Comme il vit qu'elle ne lui nommait pas M. de Nemours, il lui demanda, en tremblant, si c'était tout ce qu'elle avait vu, afin de lui donner lieu de nommer ce prince et de n'avoir pas la douleur qu'elle lui en fit une finesse. . . .

—*Je ne croyais pas, reprit Mme de Clèves, quelque soupçon que vous ayez sur M. de Nemours, que vous puissiez me faire des reproches de ne l'avoir pas vu.*

—*Je vous en fais pourtant, Madame, répliqua-t-il, et ils sont bien fondés. Pourquoi ne le pas voir s'il ne vous a rien dit? Mais, Madame, il vous a parlé; si son silence seul vous avait témoigné sa passion, elle n'aurait pas fait en vous une si grande impression. Vous n'avez pu me dire la vérité tout entière, vous m'en avez caché la plus grande partie..... (150, emphasis added)*

The fatal consequences of her confession illustrate the lack of reciprocity between M. et Mme de Clèves and reveal to the princesse that a relationship according to the principles of directness and sincerity is unfeasible within the milieu of the court: the attempt to create a bond between herself and her husband has accomplished nothing beyond burdening Clèves with an intolerable jealousy from which he cannot, in the end, free himself.

Mlle de Chartres enters the court completely innocent (notwithstanding her mother's warnings) of the real temptations and dangers that *la galanterie* will represent for her. Her very first experience of Nemours reveals the subtle workings of the court's code of seduction, which prove capable of betraying her own directness (her spoken negations as well as her silent refusal to participate) into complicity with their own oblique system of meaning. She begins to learn firsthand of the erotic lure of such indirect exchanges, yet also of the uncertainty that arises from their very ambiguity. Just as it is the princesse's confession that shatters her belief in the possibility of a reciprocal relationship with Clèves, the same event alerts her to the fact that she will be equally unable to sustain such a relationship with Nemours. The duc's intrusion into the scene of the *aveu* and his inability to prevent himself from circulating the story warn the princesse that he is no different from the other men of the court, and is therefore unable to break with the courtly code of seduction. Her experiences in this milieu have taught her the incompatibility of marriage (of any durable, reciprocal form of relationship) and passion. Mme de Clèves has learned that passion is regulated by a code that is inconsistent with direct exchange and that real reciprocity serves only to kill passion instead of prolonging it.

This is much the explanation that she offers to Nemours during their one interview after the death of her husband and prior to her depar-

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ture from the court: “M. de Clèves était peut-être l’unique homme du monde capable de conserver de l’amour dans le mariage... peut-être aussi que sa passion n’avait subsisté que parce qu’il n’en aurait pas trouvé en moi. Mais je n’aurais pas le même moyen de conserver le vôtre: je crois même que les obstacles ont fait votre constance” (173). Her refusal of his offer of marriage at this time, however, does not constitute an unambiguous refusal of Nemours himself or of his love: “Il est vrai, répliqua-t-elle, que je sacrifie beaucoup à un devoir qui ne subsiste que dans mon imagination. Attendez ce que le temps pourra faire. M. de Clèves ne fait encore que d’expirer, et cet objet funeste est trop proche pour me laisser des vues claires et distinctes” (175). Indeed, a few sentences later, the princesse succeeds in leaving him with a goodly measure of hope as she withdraws: “croyez que les sentiments que j’ai pour vous seront éternels et qu’ils subsisteront également, quoi que je fasse” (175). Her own experiences of courtly seduction have convinced her that she would not long be able to keep Nemours’ passion alive with obstacles within the framework of marriage; however, if she absents herself without unequivocally having refused him, she may be able to prolong his feelings more than she might otherwise have done so.⁴ In such a way does her act of voluntary exile become an act of deferral, and her apparent refusal of passion a means of conserving it against all odds. Her departure, generally interpreted (and, I believe, consciously intended on the part of the princesse) as a desire to remain faithful to the memory of M. de Clèves (and as an affirmation of the code of obligation), is in fact ambiguous for it can be read as functioning within (thus confirming) the courtly mechanisms of seduction. It creates a space in which to affirm the very values she appears to be rejecting.

In effect, the princesse arrives at the same solution as the *précieuses* when faced with the impermanence of mutual passion: a permanent deferral of satisfaction in order to preserve love eternally. The latter advocated replacing the admiration of beauty “incarnée dans un corps aimable” with a more spiritual kind of adoration of the beloved’s many perfections: an adoration that is most effectively carried out in the imagination, in the absence of the beloved’s distracting physical charms: “il faut donc que le courtisan contemple la beauté pure ‘au dedans en l’imagination, qu’il a la forme abstraite de toute matière, la rendant par ce moyen amie à son âme” (Magendie 1: 320). In addition, the courtier is thus able to keep the beloved with him day and night, “sans avoir peur de la perdre”; he can maintain his emotions in a constant state of perfection, never risking a disillusionment or a discord that might threaten

them. In the eyes of the *précieuses*, a love of the imagination can only be superior to one of the flesh; thus, absence can be a means of making it greater, more perfect. Mme de Clèves, perhaps partly conscious of the element of deferral in her withdrawal from society, subscribes to much the same kind of theory in order to sustain Nemours' feelings for her, and perhaps also in order to satisfy her own ideal of perfect love. The walls behind which she encloses herself away from the gaze of Nemours (first at Coulommiers and later in her distant *maison religieuse*) become a space into which, in her absence, the duc can project his own ideal of the princesse and his idealized feelings for her:

Ce prince se présenta à son esprit, aimable au-dessus de tout ce qui était au monde, l'aimant depuis longtemps avec une passion pleine de respect et de fidélité, méprisant tout pour elle, respectant jusqu'à sa douleur...quittant la cour, dont il faisait les délices, pour aller regarder les murailles qui la renfermaient, pour venir rêver dans des lieux où il ne pouvait prétendre de la rencontrer... (167, emphasis added)

Of course, endless deferral is hardly guaranteed to render love eternal, although in Nemours' case it does extend his passion "des années entières" before his feelings are inevitably extinguished from lack of stimulation. Distracted by severe illness and the duties of her semi-religious life, Mme de Clèves, too, manages to "overcome" her passion, although it remains dormant beneath the surface of her hard-won indifference: "Enfin M. de Nemours y alla lui-même, sur le prétexte d'aller à des bains. Elle fut extrêmement troublée et surprise d'apprendre sa venue. Elle lui fit dire...qu'elle le priait de ne pas trouver étrange si elle ne s'exposât point au péril de le voir et de détruire, par sa présence, des sentiments qu'elle devait conserver" (179-80). When she dies shortly thereafter, she leaves not only "des exemples de vertu inimitables" but an example of undying love.

By pointing out the ambiguous affirmation of court values embedded within the princesse's departure I do not, however, wish to conclude that she has been "won over" to the new codes and that her desire to remain true to Clèves is thereby a meaningless gesture towards older values in which she no longer truly believes. *La princesse de Clèves* should not be read as a pure defense of an older set of values against the invasion of a new reigning ethos, nor merely as a representation of the corruption and defeat of the former by the latter. Mme de Clèves must be understood

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as a figure on the threshold between the two social codes and her perverse act of social suicide as a skillful manipulation of both, producing a unique “double discourse” that conveys meaning within the limitations of both codes at once.

Norbert Elias speaks of a phenomenon he calls “aristocratic romanticism” in his discussion of the “courtization” of noble society during the first half of the 17th century. He associates the popularity of the pastoral among the nobility at this time, when a sense of change and loss had already begun to make itself felt, with a kind of “nostalgia” for a way of life and a set of values that they idealized in a “romantic” vision of the countryside: “It became an opposite image to urban court life with its greater constraints, its more complex hierarchical pressures and its heavier demands on individual self-control” (215). *La princesse de Clèves* can certainly be read within a similar context, although the nostalgia and the rejection of the court civilization are neither as clear nor as undiluted as they are in Elias’ reading of the 17th-century pastoral, for example. Mme de LaFayette’s choice of a historical decor for her *nouvelle* is to a certain extent analogous to the use of a pastoral setting in a work such as *L’Astrée*; from this point of view, the death of Henri II, *dernier roi-chevalier*, takes on an importance beyond the need to establish the historical background to the central love story. The fact that the fictional and idealized court of Henri II in the novel resembles that of Louis XIV to an uncanny extent in no way detracts from the idea that the historical setting constitutes a partial rejection of modern court life. As Elias points out in the case of d’Urfé, the author is to a certain extent a product of the society he is criticizing: “certain values, certain commands and prohibitions of the non-mimetic world have become second nature. They too reappear in the mimetic world of their creation. Even in mirror of the pastoral romance, society retains the structural peculiarities that the people of the nobility take for granted as a part of their world and of any desirable world” (248). Thus the codes and patterns of the new court society of which Mme de LaFayette appears so suspicious are accompanied and compensated by a certain splendor (*magnificence, éclat*) that she praises with no contradiction being apparent to her. For this reason, *La princesse de Clèves* cannot be read as a unilateral warning against the courtly codes of seduction. The text’s particular blend of effusive praise and criticism of the court’s interest in *le paraître* reflects something of the same attraction overlaid with suspicion characterizing Mme de Clèves’ attitude towards Nemours.

Indeed, an unmitigated condemnation of court life and manners would be surprising in a text authored by a woman as well-versed in

the court society as Mme de LaFayette, for many years a habituée of Paris salons and later *dame d'honneur* of the first Madame. Put simply, it seems unlikely that a text produced collectively or semi-collectively⁵ at the very heart of 17th-century elite society would present a unidimensional criticism of the very systems of court life and interaction in which the authors themselves willingly participated, and it is even less likely that such a text would enjoy the modest success that *La princesse de Clèves* did among other members of that society. That a questioning of (and a resistance to) the new social system might constitute one aspect of the text's meaning is perfectly plausible, even very likely. Mme de Clèves, after all, is generally recognized and admired throughout the text as being a woman so radically different in her behaviour from others at the court that she can only be understood in the negative, so to speak.⁶ Yet in spite of this radical difference, underscored throughout the novel, in a world that considers deferral an erotic game—one of the refined pleasures particular to court life—the modesty and reserve of Mme de Clèves must on some level appear to be a kind of exotic variant on the theme. Even before her departure, her outward demeanour of unattainability appears as merely an exaggerated form of deferral, and she herself represents another kind of challenge, a particularly difficult fortress to be conquered: the Carcassonne of Coulommiers.

The prestige-oriented world of the court was one structured around a hierarchy of status based on birth but also (and perhaps more importantly) on more transitory, subjective criteria, such as favour. The hierarchy was therefore at once stable and unstable, and the courtiers were forced to develop a particular sensitivity to the external signs of prestige (most obviously manifested in etiquette, whose function was to document and display the power of the participants and their status within the hierarchy, at least at the moment of each particular manifestation) in order to protect or advance their own particular position. That position depended on the establishment and maintenance of differences between each individual and those below. The whole point was to gain (if one was fortunate) successive power-positions by minimizing the distance separating oneself from those above and to maintain it between oneself and those whom one has surpassed:

court people personify the objective; for it was always with people and their positions relative to each other that they were primarily concerned. In their etiquette, too, they did not come together for etiquette's sake. To enact their existence, to demonstrate their prestige, to distance themselves

from lower-ranking people and have this distance recognized by the higher-ranking—all this was purpose enough in itself. But in etiquette this distancing of oneself from others as an end in itself find its consummate expression. It constituted an action of court society within which the graduated opportunities of prestige it offered were assembled together. And the performers demonstrated that they were the holders of these opportunities, made visible the distancing relationship that both united them and distinguished them from each other, and so publicly certified the order of rank they accorded each other. (Elias 100-1)

La princesse de Clèves does not dwell overlong on the details of such struggles and tends to minimize the agonistic relationships between courtiers in favour of a more unified, outwardly magnificent portrayal of court life; nevertheless, the princesse's decision to leave the court can to a certain extent be understood within a context of competition and distancing. For, however bizarre and self-negating her abandonment of a social life among the nobility may have appeared to a court readership on one level, her decision can also be understood as a desire to protect her own uniqueness and the uniqueness of the relationship in which she is involved, both of which contribute to her prestige among other courtiers. Her act of self-distancing, an act meant to emphasize her difference from all other women, becomes a symbolic means of conserving, even of increasing, her status among her peers. It is therefore by no means irrelevant to this discussion that the *nouvelle* ends with a paean to the princesse's inimitability.

The thought of using virtue as a means of gaining in prestige was not unknown to the courtiers of the 17th century, nor did it appear wholly anomalous to them in spite of the fact that the ideal of directness and reciprocity to which the princesse's *sincérité* aspires is more closely allied to the anachronistic ethos of obligation. The entire notion of *honnêteté* which regulated status in the salons and at court was partly based on an ideal of virtue; indeed, Mme de Clèves' behaviour can be seen as an exaggerated representation of the behaviour expected of an *honnête femme*. However, whereas the princesse's *sincérité* is undoubtedly genuine, the virtuous behaviour of the *honnêtes gens* was often subject to considerable questioning by the inhabitants of a world based on self-control, and therefore the dissimulation of more spontaneous, genuine emotions such as ambition, envy, or that ubiquitous passion, *amour-propre*. In this context, *La princesse de Clèves* participates in the same ideological

currents as the works of some of the century's leading *moralistes*, as well as in the kinds of debates concerning the notion of *honnêteté* as a moral or an aesthetic quality.⁷

The ambiguity of the princesse's final decision, when considered within a larger social context, encompassing the ongoing debates over the *précieuses'* conception of love or the nature of *honnêteté*, illustrates the vital connection between literature and society during the seventeenth century. A profoundly social activity, the creation and circulation of literary texts were bound up with the development of autoconstraints and the interiorization of social controls. It was in the interior space created by the need to master direct impulses as well as in the closed circles of the salons and the court that the category of literature was born as an experimental space, in which elite groups could fictionally explore diverse attitudes towards social problems and new forms of interaction. In this sense, Classical literature existed, not merely as the mere mirror of social transformations, but as a point of transformation itself: a means of expression and a privileged space of communication.

Notes

¹ Maurice Magendie makes a distinction between these two concepts in his seminal work on La politesse mondaine: “La synonymie de ces deux termes n'est pas acceptée par tous, et ils correspondent à deux notions un peu différentes, suivant la condition sociale, le tempérament des personnes qui les emploient” (xxxix). However, within the limits of our study their relative synonymy is not problematic; as Magendie points out, “Les gens du monde [members of the elite, as I refer to them here, and with whom this study is primarily concerned] se préoccupent surtout de sociabilité. . . . Pour eux, la politesse et l'honnêteté sont à peu près confondues.”

² From the 16th century on, manuals of civility such as Il cortegiano, La conversation civile, and Le Galateo recommended the frequentation of ladies to those desirous of becoming perfect courtiers, in order to benefit from their innate gentleness and douceur: “Who does not know that without women we can take no pleasure or satisfaction in this life of ours, which, but for them, would be uncouth and devoid of all sweetness, and wilder than that of wild beasts? Who does not know that women alone take from our hearts all vile and base thoughts, woes, miseries, and those troubled humors that so often attend such things?”

And if we will carefully consider the truth, we shall see also that in our understanding of great matters women do not distract but rather awaken our minds, and in war they make men fearless and daring beyond measure. . . . Do you not see that the cause of all gracious exercises that give us pleasure is to be assigned to women alone?" (Castiglione 256).

³ "Mme de Clèves entendait aisément la part qu'elle avait à ces paroles. Il lui semblait qu'elle devait y répondre et ne les pas souffrir. Il lui semblait aussi qu'elle ne devait pas les entendre, ni témoigner qu'elle les prît pour elle. Elle croyait devoir parler et croyait ne devoir rien dire. Le discours de M. de Nemours lui plaisait et l'offensait quasi également . . . elle y trouvait quelque chose de galant et de respectueux, mais aussi quelque chose de hardi et de trop intelligible. . . Elle demeurait donc sans répondre, et M. de Nemours se fût aperçu de son silence, dont il n'aurait peut-être pas tiré de mauvais présages, si l'arrivée de M. de Clèves n'eût fini la conversation et sa visite" (85).

⁴ The omniscient narrator's speculations hint at much the same conclusion concerning the efficacy of obstacles as a means of stimulating passion: "La seule chose qui l'assurait [Nemours] qu'il ne s'était pas trompé était l'extrême tristesse de Mme de Clèves, quelque effort qu'elle fit pour la cacher: *peut-être que des regards et des paroles obligeantes n'eussent pas tant augmenté l'amour de M. de Nemours que faisait cette conduite austère*" (128, emphasis added).

⁵ It is not my intention here to dispute the authorship of La princesse de Clèves, still debated among critics. Whether Mme de LaFayette was solely responsible for the actual writing of this particular nouvelle does not alter the fact that almost all literature linked to noble groups at this time was to a large extent collective. Courtier-nobles were much given to literary pursuits: not only collective composition of portraits and poetry, but a more general exchange and circulation of ideas and texts, the reading aloud and commenting of texts before their release into a wider public domain. From what we know of Mme de LaFayette's works and of her social milieu, many of the works attributed to her were influenced to a greater or lesser degree by the other members of her circle.

⁶ "Ce chagrin m'apprend ce que j'aurais appris d'une autre femme, par la joie qu'elle en aurait eue" (129); "Tous ceux qui épousent des maîtresses dont ils sont aimées, tremblent en les épousant, et regardent avec crainte, par rapport aux autres, la conduite qu'elles ont eue avec eux; mais en vous, Madame, rien n'est à craindre, et on ne trouve que des sujets d'admiration" (172).

⁷ For an introduction to this polemic regarding the aesthetic and moral aspects of *honnêteté*, *politesse*, and *civilité* see Magendie, as well as Starobinski's essay "Sur la flatterie" (included in *Le remède dans le mal*). An earlier version of this essay exists in *Nouvelle revue de la psychanalyse* 4 (1971): 131-51. It is from this earlier text that the quotations in my paper are drawn.

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“IL RUOLO DEL MITO DELL'ERMAFRODITA DURANTE IL RINASCIMENTO E
LE SUE MANIFESTAZIONI NELLA LETTERATURA DELL'EPOCA”



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Nella letteratura del Cinquecento rifiorisce in modo prodigioso il mito dell'ermafrodito. Mentre è presente come fonte storica nei vari trattati d'amore, in altre opere rinasce tenuamente con la sembianza di un gioco divertente. Con lo scambio dei ruoli sessuali attraverso il travestimento o il comportamento che oltrepassa le norme generiche tradizionali, i protagonisti si trovano in un territorio nuovo che induce l'individuo a concepirsi in modi innovativi. Nascono intrecci che dimostrano l'abilità di uscire dagli angusti ruoli rigidi che li costringono. Di rilievo sono i momenti di crisi quando la reazione del protagonista è spesso determinata più in base ai sentimenti del cuore che alle regole prescritte dal galateo maschile o femminile. Con l'opportunità di allargare la ristrettezza dei ruoli prescritti dalla società, i protagonisti dimostrano la loro autonomia e vulnerabilità e perciò vincono le qualità umane che trascendono i ruoli sessuali ed è esaltata la potenzialità dell'individuo. Nel presente saggio vorrei esaminare l'emergenza del mito nelle seguenti opere: *la Calandria* di Bernardo Dovizi di Bibbiena, *I Dialoghi D'amore* di Leone Ebreo, il *De Amore* di Marsilio Ficino e il poema *Orlando Furioso* di Ariosto. Vorrei iniziare la mia discussione con una breve indagine sul brano del *Simposio* di Platone in cui il mito dell'ermafrodito trova la sua origine. Partendo dallo spunto storico, spero di mettere in rilievo il modo in cui i neoplatonici come Ficino e Ebreo hanno plasmato i pensieri di Platone per adattarlo alla loro forma di sincretismo. In seguito, vorrei discutere il trattamento del mito apparentemente leggero nelle altre opere menzionate.

La questione trova la sua origine nella divertente fiaba della creazione dell'uomo raccontata da Aristofane nel *Simposio* di Platone largamente conosciuto durante il Rinascimento. Secondo il racconto di Platone, il poeta comico spiega che originalmente c'erano tre tipi d'essere umani, ognuno in possesso di una natura doppia: l'uomo che aveva due lati maschili, la donna che aveva due lati femminili e l'ermafrodito che era composto sia dal lato maschile che dal lato femminile. Siccome questi esseri si sono dati ad una vita di corruzione e orgoglio, il dio Zeus li ha

puniti dividendo ognuno in due. Come risultato, quelli che erano maschi prima furono costretti a cercare un consorte maschio, quelle che erano femmine a cercare una consorte femmina e quelli che erano ermafroditi furono costretti a completarsi riunendosi con la parte che mancavano. La divisione forzava gli essere umani alla ricerca della loro forma originale. Lo stato di armonia proposta da Aristofane dipendeva dalla riunificazione delle due parti e il completarsi con il compagno giusto capace di soddisfare sia il lato spirituale che il lato fisico.

Il contenuto di Platone contrasta notevolmente con il trattato di Ficino, uno dei maggiori filosofi neoplatonici del rinascimento. Nel *de Amore*, scritto venti secoli più tardi, si osservano le manipolazioni necessarie per costruire una filosofia sincretistica compatibile con le sue convinzioni di cristianità. Sia la forma del *Simposio* che la filosofia di Platone si prestavano a questo fine personale di Ficino che si concentra e difende il lato spirituale del mito platonico allontanandosi il più possibile dalla chiarezza di Platone. Nel quarto discorso Ficino parla delle due luci in dotazione all'uomo; una innata che può percepire le cose inferiori ed uguali e una infusa che percepisce quelle superiori. La divisione dell'intero, ha avuto origine quando l'uomo ha usato soltanto una di queste luci (quella naturale) e non ha curato la spirituale. Questa negligenza del lato spirituale lo ha condotto verso gli appetiti carnali che Ficino condanna in quanto considera "la rabbia Venerea" e l'appetito sessuale come un'insana perversione contraria all'idea di amore. L'uomo può ricevere la luce divina attraverso il nutrimento del lato spirituale e il desiderio di imparare. Manipolato in questo modo, il mito non è più un'allegoria per l'amore umano; diventa l'allegoria di una creatura terrestre che vuole recuperare la sua luce divina attraverso l'amore per Dio. La forma del *Simposio*, l'autorità del nome dell'autore e il mecenatismo dei Medici servivano a Ficino. La fedeltà al *Simposio* era di importanza secondaria.

All'inizio del Cinquecento, Leone Ebreo riprende il filo di Platone scrivendo un altro trattato d'amore. Nel 1535 sono stati pubblicati i *Dialoghi d'amore* in cui esplora le dimensioni spirituali e fisiche dell'amore. Ebreo si affianca al mito dell'ermafrodito del *Simposio* in quanto anche lui immagina il primo essere umano come una creatura composta che sarà eventualmente divisa in due, maschile e femminile. Ebreo però non ammette il composito doppio maschile o il composito doppio femminile di Platone. L'interpretazione del mito della creazione di Ebreo insiste sulla fonte biblica che precedeva Platone. Visto sotto questa luce, il mito platonico è incorporato nella tradizione biblica. La divisione della creatura ermafrodita facilita la procreazione e non è inter-

pretata come punizione per la caduta del Adamo in quanto Ebreo insiste che la caduta precedeva la divisione.

Non e` il fine del perfetto amore: anzi il vincola piu` e collega con gli atti corporei amorosi; che tanto si desiderano quanto son segnali di tal reciproco amore, in ciascuno de due amanti. Ancora perche`, essendo gli animi uniti in spirituale amore, i corpi desiderano la possibile unione, accio` che non resti alcuna diversita` e l'unione sia in tutto perfetta; massime perche`, con la corrispondenza de l'unione corporale, il spirituale amore s'augmenta e si fa piu` perfetto. (289)

La spiegazione di Ebreo della creazione e conseguente divisione chiaramente esalta la procreazione umana nella quale unione e` celebrata la perfezione totale dell'individuo. Il trattamento di Ebreo contrasta notevolmente con quello di Ficino che doveva negare il lato erotico. La celebrazione della procreazione nei *Dialoghi* trova la sua radice nella tradizione ebraica in cui il matrimonio e la procreazione sono componenti centrali per la realizzazione dell'individuo. Percio` il significato piu` importante dei *Dialoghi* sarebbe il ruolo della giustapposizione che subordina *Il simposio* alla storia della creazione biblica e la tradizione rabbinica. Ebreo specifica che la fiaba di Platone trova la sua origine nelle parole del profeta biblico Mose`;

(secondo Mose) Non l'ha gia` favoleggiata con questa particolarita` e chiarezza, ma ha posta la sostanza sotto brevit`, e Platone la prese da lui e l'amplio` e l'orno` secondo l'oratoria grecale, facendo in questo una mescolanza inordinata de le cose ebraiche. (291)

Quando la sacra storia di Mose` e` stabilita come la fonte della filosofia platonica, l'autorita` di Platone e` messa in posizione secondaria. Comunque, appoggiandosi all'autorita` di Platone, Ebreo poteva introdurre la sua filosofia e il suo messaggio (derivato dalla tradizione ebraica piu` o meno sconosciuta) nel mondo intellettuale cristiano del suo momento storico. In questo caso, l'autore si e` servito della statura di Platone (e il fatto che fosse largamente conosciuto) per proporre il suo programma di sincretismo particolare. Scendendo dalla montagna, andiamo adesso al carnevale.

Nella *Calandria* di Bernardino Dovizi, allestito a Urbino per la prima volta nel 1513, il trattamento del mito dell'ermafrodito e` espresso attraverso i travestimenti dei protagonisti e lo scambio attuale del

ruolo sessuale richiamando certamente la fonte latina plautina dei Menecmi. . Mentre la confusione derivante e` ingrediente essenziale del processo comico, l'autore sfrutta il meccanismo della commedia per introdurre un tema piu` profondo. Secondo l'analisi di Alonge, il mito dell'androgino e` il nucleo tematico della commedia. La molla della vicenda e` proprio nella ricerca di se,` contrapposto agli amori banali di Fulvia e Calandro. Approfondendo l'ipotesi, si osserva che il gioco fra i personaggi di Lidio e Santilla fa vivere sulla propria pelle l'esperienza mancante dell'altro. In questo modo, Santilla (vestita da uomo) prova il potere e autonomia` del sesso maschile. Nella prima scena dell'atto secondo Lidio, travestito da donna, dice:

Credendosi sempre ognun che io maschio sia, ho trovato venture tali che ben ne son stati li fatti nostri; ove che, se io nel vestire e nel nome mi fussi mostro essere donna(come sono in fatto), ne il turco, di cui eravamo schiavi, ce aria venduti, ne` forse Perillo riscossici, se saputo avesse che io femina fusse, onde in miserabil servitu` sempre ci conveniva stare.” (29)

A mio avviso, questo e` un momento culminante di *political awareness*. Lidio (vestito da donna) trova “un esperienza di subalternita`” nella vicenda con Fulvia che gli fa provare un lato dell'esistenza femminile. In altre parole, Lidio travestito sperimenta la profonda e costante sottomissione dello stato femminile. Trovandosi improvvisamente senza il suo potere maschile si rende conto della “miserabile servitu`” e impotenza delle donne alla quale sarebbe stato condannato.

Nel terzo atto, Bibbiena lancia la proposta dell'ermafrodito nella battuta fra la serva Fannio e Ruffo il negromante. Attraverso la battuta comica in cui Ruffo storpia spiritosamente la parola “ermafrodita”, la possibilita` di un'interpretazione legata al mito e` cautamente messa in scena:

Fannio: Sappi che Lidio mio patrone e` ermafrodito.

Ruffo: E che importa questo merdafiorito?

Fannio: E` ermafrodito, dico io. Diavol! tu se' grosso!

Ruffo: Be', che vuol dire?

Fannio: Tu nol sai?

Ruffo: Per cio` il dimando.

Fannio: Ermafroditi sono quelli che hanno l'uno e l'altro sesso.

Ruffo: Et e Lidio uno di quelli?

Fannio: Si, dico.

Ruffo: E ha il sesso da donna e la radice d'uomo?

Fannio: Messer si. (60)

Il trucco dello scambio e la suggestione dell'ermafrodito lanciato comicamente serve per condurre l'azione della commedia ad un altro livello dove la profondamente desiderata unione dei due gemelli separati puo' realizzarsi. Alla fine del quinto atto, quando l'incontro fra i due gemelli prende luogo, l'interpretazione di un momento sublime di completazione tramite l'unione delle due parti e' indicata :

Lidio: Tu sei Santilla mia?! Or ti conosco: dessa sei. Oh sorella cara, da me tanto desiderata e cerca. Or son contento, or ho adempiuto il desiderio mio, or piu' affanno aver non posso.

Santilla: Deh! fratel dulcissimo! Io pur te vedo e sento. A pena creder posso che tu desso sia, vivo trovandoti ove io per morto lunga stagion te ho pianto. Or tanto maggior letizia mi porta la salute tua quanto io manco la aspettavo. (86)

Il momento commovente di agnizione e' accentuata dalle parole "ora," "desiderata" e "cerca" enfatizzando la perfezione del momento quando i due gemelli si riconoscono e metaforicamente ritrovano la loro unita' nel senso platonico. Attraverso il gioco divertente dei travestimenti, mi sembra che il Bibbiena ci proponga un riconoscimento e un ripensamento dei limiti tradizionali che possono impedire lo sviluppo dell'individuo. Il comportamento di Lidio e Santilla quando sono travestiti ammette un altro mondo di possibilita' e suggerisce che l'unificazione spirituale dell'individuo puo' comprendere ambedue le qualita', quelle maschili e quelle femminili. Sullo sfondo della banalita' dei rapporti incentrati sugli appetiti carnali di Fulvia e Calandro, Bibbiena mette in rilievo il lato spirituale del mito. La felicita' di Lidio e Santilla si trova non soltanto nell'accoppiamento con la consorte giusta, realizzato attraverso il matrimonio eterosessuale convenzionale ma nell'unione spirituale di tutte le parti dell'individuo.

Ammettendo una ridefinizione o un ripensamento dei limiti sessuali derivata dal mito, si possono identificare diversi momenti in cui si nota un equivoco sessuale nell'*Orlando Furioso*. Qui mi limitero' a discutere alcuni episodi in cui le donne sorpassano i limiti tradizionali. Nel primo canto, arriva l'amazzone Bradamante travestita da cavaliere;

*Ecco pel bosco un cavallier venire,
il cui sembante e` luom galgiardo e fiero:
candido come nieve e` il suo vestire,
un bianco pennoncello ha per cimiero.(27)*

Nella sconfitta che segue Bradamante distende Sacripante per terra in modo che finisca sotto il peso del suo cavallo. Il dolore di Sacripante non si limita soltanto a quello che e` accaduto. Come se questo non bastasse, viene a sapere che era proprio una donna che lo ha fatto cadere;

*tu dei saper che ti levo` di sella
l'alto valor d'una gentil donzella.(29)*

L'episodio mette in luce comica l'orgoglio cavalleresco mentre propone il modello di una donna forte e capace che s'impadronisce della situazione portando a termine l'incontro nel momento opportuno.

Forse l'evidenza piu` forte di una donna che supera i limiti tradizionali imposte dalla societa` cavalleresca e` proprio Angelica. Nel ventinovesimo canto Angelica trova Medoro ferito; in questo episodio, ella si trova finalmente sola. Per la prima volta, Angelica non e` inseguita da qualche cavaliere che "vuole proteggerla." E` contentissima di essere liberata dai fastidiosi cavalieri e di sentirsi padrona del suo destino:

*Poi che 'l suo anello Angelica riebbe,
di che Brunel l'avea tenuta priva,
in tanto fasto, in tanto orgoglio crebbe,
ch'esser pareva di tutto 'l mondo schiva,
Se ne va sola, e non si degnerebbe
compagno aver qual piu` famoso viva:
si sdegnava a rimembrar che gia` suo amante
abbia Orlando nomato o Sacripante.(499)*

Si e` osservato gia` nel primo canto il distacco di Angelica quando scopre Sacripante piangente. Egli e` pieno di amoroso affetto mentre lei pensa gia` al modo in cui lo potra` utilizzare come guida per "riveder la sua ricca stanza." Sacripante vuole afferrare il momento e infatti si prepara per "il dolce assalto". Angelica, fredda e intenta a sfruttarlo, ragiona in modo calcolatore. Il tema della fuga e la freddezza di Angelica impiantato nel primo canto percorre tutto il poema. Quando vede Medoro, sente un'emozione insolita e un innovativo rispetto al comportamento precedente;

*Quando Angelica vide il giovinetto
languir ferito, assai vicino a morte,*

*che del suo re giacea senza tetto,
piu` che del proprio mal si dolea forte;
insolita pietade in mezzo al petto
si senti` entrar per disusate porte,
che le fe' il duro cor tenero e molle,
e piu`, quando il suo caso egli narrolle. (499)*

Questo e` il momento in cui Angelica esercita per la prima volta la sua volonta` e acquista la sua umanita`. Svanisce la figura della donna sfuggente e inafferrabile. Con l'innamoramento Angelica diventa una donna forte che segue la volonta` del suo cuore. Nell'atto di comportarsi con autonomia instigata dalla sua volonta`, Angelica si mette in contatto col suo potere personale. E' importante sottolineare la natura di questo potere che si mostra nella liberazione dell'individuo e non nella dominazione degli altri tramite la forza e la violenza. Il codice cavalleresco e le convenzioni della societa` contrastano spiccatamente con questo nuovo modo di comportarsi. In questo episodio mi sembra che ci sia la proposta di una nuova definizione dell'amore che lascia indietro il vecchio concetto cavalleresco. Non di minore importanza e` comunque il modo in cui la transizione si effettua; il comportamento di Angelica e` autonomo, sincero e basato sulla sua libera scelta.

Tra i tanti momenti che colpiscono il lettore nell'*Orlando Furioso* sono quelli in cui i protagonisti sono descritti in un gesto di compassione o vulnerabilita`. Come Lidio e Santilla trovano la loro unione spirituale nella loro unione finale, anche i protagonisti dell'*Orlando Furioso* trovano il culmine della loro umanita` nell'espressione del loro amore. I momenti di vulnerabilita` quando qualcuno dimostra improvvisamente una capacita` o una forza al di la` dei limiti sessuali, creano una dimensione profondamente umana. L'umanita` risulta definita dalle somiglianze, non dalle differenze fra i due sessi.

In conclusione, nella rifioritura del mito dell'ermafrodito mi sembra evidente un'evoluzione nell'argomento che manifesta due tendenze. La prima tendenza e` osservata nei trattati d'amore in cui gli scrittori come Ficino e Ebreo si sono appoggiati concretamente al mito per sviluppare la loro filosofia. L'autorita` di Platone e` sfruttata per lo scopo personale dell'autore. La seconda, osservata nel gioco della commedia e in certi episodi del *Orlando Furioso*, propone l'allargamento e la ridefinizione dei ruoli sessuali tramite l'unione nel senso platonico. E' lanciato il suggerimento che l'integrazione del lato maschile e femminile possa completare l'individuo, portando all'unificazione interiore e liberando tutta la potenzialita` umana.

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In the last decade of the XIXth century, a wave of terrorist attacks shook the calm façade of the Belle-Epoque in France. Thirteen “*attentats*,” perpetrated between 1892 and 1894, claimed the life of 10 victims, including that of President Sadi Carnot. Dynamite—discovered in 1868—was used in the productions of bombs with which the anarchists attacked such institutions as *la Chambre des députés*, and the Church of *La Madeleine* (Sonn 237). These attacks formed part of an anarchist strategy called “*la propagande par le geste*” which justified random acts of violence as catalysts for larger social revolts. “*La propagande par le geste*” captured the imagination of artists and writers of the time as the frontier between art and politics became more porous. On the one hand, the violent acts perpetrated by the anarchists became aestheticized; on the other hand, artistic works were politicized as symbolic “bombs.” Anarchy then seems to be the compromise between the fascist’s aesthetic politics and the communist’s didactic art (Benjamin 210).

In this paper, I would like to show that an “aesthetic” logic of devaluation, which in fact hid the market forces that shaped the modernist narrative, rose from a dialogue between the political and the aesthetic, and that anarchism played a pivotal role in this dialogue by allowing the artists to maintain a political stance while pursuing purely aesthetic concerns. An autonomous artistic field emerged from this precarious compromise and allowed the forging of formalist strategies that de-emphasize content in order to exalt form. The formalist discourse colonized in turn other social phenomena, such as violence, which became an object of beauty. Finally, I would like to study several “*fait divers*” written by Félix Fénéon and Alfred Jarry as examples of this aestheticization and textualization of violence.

Anarchism as a viable political project did not come into being until the mid-nineteenth century and it can be divided into two phases: an individualist anarchism that manifests itself roughly from the assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1881 to the Procès de Trente in France which ended

Anarchy

the era of “*attentats*” in 1894. The second strain is commonly referred to as “anarcho-communism” and it dominates the last six years of the XIXth century and the beginning of the XXth century until the First World War. The latter strain seemed to have had less of an impact in the artistic community, except maybe for the Neo-Impressionists closely associated with Félix Fénéon. “Anarcho-communism” is in fact a problematic movement. On the one hand, it cannot reconcile the individualist impulses inherent in the anarchist ideology with the building of a community that would undermine the individual’s freedom. On the other hand, one could say that “anarcho-communism” was a backwards-looking movement insofar as it wanted to re-establish the artisan’s mode of production in independent, federated communities. “Anarcho-communism” embodied the Romantic legacy of Rousseau via Proudhon and Kropotkin of an idealized, harmonic past that should be restored.

The individualist strain of anarchism, on the contrary, was the logical outcome of the bourgeois ideologies. This “movement” was influenced by the theories of Nietzsche and Stirner and culminated with the revolutionary Bakunin. The main strategy of the anarchists was “*la propagande par le geste*” which justified random acts of violence as an exaltation of a subject’s individuality. This strain of anarchism became a pivotal point in the development of the modernist aesthetics. In fact, many artists came to see their works as examples of propaganda by the deed. Retté, for example, referred to Rimbaud’s upside-down sonnet as “the first bomb” that exploded “in the temple of the Rule” (Sonn 205). Sonn, quoting Pierre Quillard, explains that “‘Good literature is an eminent form of propaganda by the deed’, not by its propaganda value but by its very existence. He argued that simply by contrasting itself with the sordid reality of society, a beautiful work of art constituted an act of revolt” (215). Similarly, Mallarmé drew an analogy between the book and the bomb and in his defense of Félix Fénéon during the Procès de Trente, he proclaimed that “Certainly there were not any better detonators for Fénéon than his articles. And I do not think that one can use a more effective weapon than literature” (Sonn 255). The “propaganda by the deed” thus provided a powerful metaphor that allowed artists to politicize their works.

Yet, anarchism had further implications for the modernist aesthetic. Paradoxically, out of this dialogue between politics and art, artists established an independent space for their work. As Peter Bürger argues in his *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, the institution of art, though already formulated via Kant and Schiller, did not in fact become completely independent from the praxis of life until the end of the nineteenth century, in what he terms *Aestheticism*:

It is true that the institution of autonomous art is fully developed, but within this institution, there still function contents (Gehalte) that are of a thoroughly political character and thus mitigate against the autonomy principle of the institution... The self-criticism of the social subsystem that is art can become possible only when the contents also lose their political character, and art wants to be nothing other than art. This stage is reached at the end of the nineteenth century, in Aestheticism. (26)

Anarchism provided the discursive space that allowed a complete divorce between a political content and an aesthetic form. Sonn explains, for example, that “As a self-conscious avant-garde, these artists sought to conjoin aesthetic and political radicalism without hampering the autonomy of either. Anarchism seemed to many the only possible avenue for political engagement and artistic freedom” (141). The anarchist politics of individual freedom were translated into the aesthetic realm not as a didactic message, but on the contrary, as the artist’s poetic license. Signac, for instance, celebrated the artist’s independence by rejecting Proudhon’s call for didactic art. According to Signac, an artist helps the revolutionary cause by solely concentrating on aesthetic pursuits: “Novels by Flaubert, the Goncourt brothers, Zola, and their emulators, written with a purely literary aim in mind, according to lived experience, have served the revolutionary cause much more potently than all the novels in which political preoccupations take precedence over the literary aspect” (Hutton 249). Furthermore, he extended his analysis to the visual arts by claiming that Millet, “remaining a peasant, completely taken up with his art, produced a work with a far more pronounced social dimension than some canvas with philosophical pretensions by the thinker and painter Courbet” (Hutton 250). Signac’s effort to save art from a didactic discourse had far reaching implications. By dissociating the intent of the author from the political message conveyed by art, Signac opened up the space for a separation between the form of the work and its content: “It would thus be a mistake—committed all too often by the best-intentioned revolutionaries, like Proudhon—to make it a standard demand that works of art have a precise socialist thrust, for that thrust will appear more strongly and eloquently in the pure aesthetes... .” (Hutton 251). Paradoxically, anarchism opened up the space for a formalist discourse, and to abstract art: “The Neo-Impressionist were never able to desert figurative subject-matter, but because Signac and Cross had an important direct influence on Matisse, Braque, Puy, Valtat, K.X. Roussel, and other fauve painters, their struggle with this

crucial problem [of the relation between art and politics] had important consequences” (Herbert 481).

Once this uneasy compromise between art and politics was achieved, the artistic realm was free to play with form and color. As Sonn explains, “When contemporary Symbolist critics such as Rémy de Gourmont virtually defined Symbolism as anarchist poetics, they were referring not to the level of engagement but to the degree to which the poet’s semiotic project at formal, semantic, and pragmatic levels was congruent with anarchist ideals” (212). Not the message of the work of art, but rather its play between signifiers and signifieds qualified it as “anarchist.” Mallarmé probably seized upon this opportunity to “explore the possibilities of sound, rhythm, and multivalent meaning... Mallarmé recognized the anarchist implications of signifying freedom through poetic discourse, and he clearly believed that poetry should not be a didactic political instrument but rather should embody anarchist ideals” (Sonn 212). Anarchy thus opened up the way to modern painting and literature, with its disjunction between the signifier and the signified. Once this autonomous field of signifiers was established, the aesthetic strategy could be fully developed, a strategy that aimed at “dissociating... form from function,” the “denial of purposefulness,” and the “pursuit of the synthetic and harmonious whole” (Sonn 235).

The aesthetic mode, once formulated within an autonomous artistic field, colonized other social phenomena: at the end of the nineteenth century, violence, for example, was elevated to and glorified as an object of beauty. The anarchists’ “*la propagande par le geste*,” for example, became synonymous with “le beau geste”: “Not just words but deeds would be beautiful, if carried out in style” (Sonn 214). As a passage taken from *La Revue Anarchiste* attests, the *attentats* were perceived as artistic works. The author of the piece describes the attack on the Serbian minister perpetrated by Léauthier. He writes that “The act of this last [Léauthier] is particularly sound: an immense beauty is revealed by the act in itself. . .from the conditions where it is elaborated and from the superb attitude of the avenger... I esteem it very beautiful and very useful... .” (Sonn 256). The formalist discourse is accentuated by the vocabulary employed in this passage: “the act in itself,” “the attitude of the avenger.” The writer is not so much drawing meaning from the act of violence, but rather he is reading it for its inherent structures. Yet, as if nervous about the consequences of such a discourse, the author introduces at the last moment the notion of “utility” claiming that the act is an example that will “make those who possess reflect, and inspire in them the terror of reprisals” (Sonn 256). Thus, even though the violent act is

almost liberated here from its utility to become an independent element worthy of beauty, at the last moment it is reappropriated within a discourse of exchange value. In other words, the economic discourse is not entirely camouflaged by the aesthetic one. Another similar incident occurred when Tailhade declared that Vaillant's bombing of the Chamber of Deputies was beautiful: "What do the victims matter if the gesture is beautiful? What does the death of some unidentified persons...matter if, by it, the individual is affirmed?" One cannot fail to notice the Nietzschean overtones of such statements. Again the notion of utility is not completely absent from Tailhade's statement, but its utility has shifted from the communal example of Léauthier's act to the individual expression of Vaillant. Yet, Sonn explains that the *attentats* of the anarchists attest to "the purely symbolic and nonutilitarian nature of 1890s violence" (239).

The conjunction of aesthetics and politics gave rise to a whole new discourse that elevated violence to an art and in so doing, rendered the meaning of violence in the social sphere illegible. In fact, the aesthetic mode, by "denying purposefulness," helped to masquerade the utilitarian philosophy that upholds the capitalist ideology. Eventually, the aesthetic became an epidemic that gripped the whole social sphere, and led thus into the post-modern condition, in which, as Baudrillard reminds us, everything is aestheticized: "*Ce à quoi nous assistons, au-delà du matérialisme marchand, c'est à une sémiurgie de toute chose à travers la publicité, les médias, les images. Même le plus marginal et le plus banal, même le plus obscène s'esthétise, se culturalise, se muséalise*" (Baudrillard 24).

If the aesthetic colonizes the social by relocating violence in an artistic discourse, violence in turn infiltrates the aesthetic as the representations of violence proliferate in literary and artistic works. In the space that separates the political and the aesthetic stands "*le fait divers*" which serves as a bridge between the real and the fictitious, and permits the textualization of violence. Structurally, therefore, the "*fait divers*" plays a similar role as the anarchist and "*la propagande par le geste*," which was coincidentally, also known as "*la propagande par le fait*." That the anarchist and the "*fait divers*" had a similar role is further upheld by the fact that two prominent *fin-de-siècle* anarchists, Félix Fénéon and Alfred Jarry, wrote this type of "news" story. By writing these articles, these anarchists continued "*la propagande par le geste*." Jarry's "*fait divers*," for example, written for *La Revue Blanche* between 1901 and 1902 and later regrouped with other journalistic writings in *La Chandelle verte*, were separated between two headings, the "*spéculations*" of 1901 and the

Le fait-divers

“gestes” of 1902. The use of the word “geste” must be replaced in the political context: the “geste” of “*le fait divers*” continues the anarchist’s “*la propagande par le geste*.” In an article entitled “Barnum,” for example, Jarry writes: “. . . *tous les gestes, sont à un degré égal esthétiques, et nous y attacherons une même importance. Une dernière au Nouveau Cirque réalise autant de beauté qu’une première à la Comédie-Française. Tel mariage mondain ne mérite pas de nous distraire de la cérémonie des justes noces de tel étalon dans un haras, ni telle course d’automobile de la performance, plus modeste mais édifiante, accomplie par une procession*” (332). This definition shows the delicate balance between art and politics that surrounded the “*propagande par le geste*.” On the one hand, Jarry’s choice of the word “geste” inscribes his writings in the *political* tradition of the anarchists; on the other hand, however, the aesthetic mode colonizes the political, and thus, “*tous les gestes, sont à un degré égal esthétiques*.” In this way, the political statement becomes null through its aestheticization, for it becomes meaningless. The *fait divers* stands in the liminal space that separates art and politics and it participates in the aestheticization and textualization of violence.

This textualization of violence, and thus its derealization, becomes manifest in Fénéon’s *Nouvelles en trois lignes*. First of all, the title itself attests to the ambiguous status of the *fait divers*. “*Nouvelle*” can refer to the real when it means “news”; yet, it is also a literary genre, a “story”, which participates in the world of fiction. Between the real and the imaginary, the “news/story” creates the “new” through language. In the absence of language, no event can become “new(s).” This is the second way in which Fénéon’s writings point to the textualization of the real: by its emphasis on linguistic form, on its haikuesque aspect, “*trois lignes*,” the formal aspects of the news story become salient as the content recedes to the background. Fénéon’s laconic style squeezes the real into a minimal, artificial structure reminiscent of the sonnet and other poetic devices. Not only the formal characteristics of the “*nouvelles*,” but also their content help to shift the perceptions of violence. In fact, by stressing the arbitrary nature of violence, Fénéon announces the absurdist trend of XXth century literature. Apparently, technical changes opened up a new set of violent possibilities in the social sphere: automobiles, trains, and tramways figure prominently in Fénéon’s as well as Jarry’s commentaries of every day accidents. The first “*fait divers*” in *Les Nouvelles en trois lignes*, for example, relates the following incident: “*Rattrapé par un tramway qui venait de le lancer à dix mètres, l’herboriste Jean Désille, de Vanves, a été coupé en deux*” (307). The reader also learns that “*M. Chevreuil, de Cabourg, sauta d’un tramway en marche, se cogna*

contre un arbre, roula sous son tram et mourut là” (344), or “*Dans un accident d’auto, à Eloyes (Vosges), M. Colombain s’est rompu des côtes et deux fois une jambe; sa femme aussi blessée*” (357) and again, “*Des train ont tué Cosson, à l’Etang-la-Ville; Gaudon, près de Coulommiers, et l’employé des hypothèques Molle, à Compiègne*” (358). The names of the victims become irrelevant, blank spaces to be substituted over and over again by different names: the accident is elevated to the status of an archetype where the players can be easily replaced. In this way, violence is decontextualized from the social forces that produce it. Fénéon’s stories also divert the attention from social violence by focusing on “private” violence: a whole series of “*fait divers*” stress suicides, passionate murders, and domestic violence. The reader learns, for example, that “*Jugeant sa fille (19 ans) trop peu austère, l’horloger stéphanois Jallat l’a tuée. Il est vrai qu’il lui reste onze autres enfants*” (344), or, “*Malmené par l’amour, le gendarme Léonce-Paul Isnard s’est pendu dans sa cuisine de la caserne de Draguignan*” (389). In this way, “*le fait divers*” opens up to the public a whole series of private affairs, and in so doing, shifts once again the attention from the social sphere to the dramas of the individual. This should be seen as a strategic move to hide the forces of power that shape the flux of violence in the social.

Finally, through the sheer repetitiveness of violent acts as well as the use of humor, Fénéon’s stories help to anesthetize its audience to the context. Much like today, where the audience is bombarded with a pornography of violence, the constant repetition of violent acts derealize and dematerialize them. The use of humor, as well, makes the content of the story more tolerable to the audience. Fénéon writes, for example, “*En se le grattant avec un revolver à détente trop douce, M. Ed. B... s’est enlevé le bout du nez au commissariat Vivienne.*” Humor thus works as a filter through which a violent content can be allowed to penetrate the textual. Fénéon’s *Nouvelles en trois lignes* help in this way to derealize violence by emphasizing its arbitrary nature and by shifting its perspective from the social to the private in a humorous and repetitive manner.

Nevertheless, some of the “*nouvelles*” have a definite political message such as the one in which Fénéon writes: “*Avec leurs enfants au sein, des femmes ont exposé au directeur des trams toulonnais la cause de ses ouvriers. Il résiste*” (318). Halperin, who wrote a biography of Fénéon, states that “unlike minimalists today, sometimes accused of making ‘less of less’ in stories whose main point appears to be pointless, Fénéon remains an activist—terrorist/moralist—whose moral point of view is clearly stated regarding any issue” (357). Though it is clear that certain “*nouvelles*” carry a moralistic message, to generalize that all of them are

thus charged is to overlook the shifting attitudes towards violence that emerge from Fénéon's discourse. Like the anarchists, these "*nouvelles*" form a boundary between the political and the artistic, a hybrid genre which can fall on aestheticism or didacticism at any given point.

Alfred Jarry's writings in *La Chandelle verte* exemplify even better this tension of the "*fait divers*." No doubt that some of Jarry's pieces are extremely politicized; probably one of the most interesting is the one entitled "Paris Colonie Nègre" in which Jarry criticizes the eurocentric view of imperialist France. In this story, the police are looking for a black man who left a café without paying. With a satirical twist, Jarry states: "*Que nos fonctionnaires prennent garde de traiter comme un vulgaire flou ce noir, en qui nous n'hésitons pas à reconnaître et à saluer un explorateur. . .*" (287). Jarry uses the figure of the black man to criticize the behavior of the French in Africa. He explains that "*Nul doute que, si on ne l'eût interrompu, il [the African explorer] n'eût pas tardé à planter quelques drapeaux, brûler des monuments choisis et emmener plusieurs personnes en esclavage*" (288). There is no question, then, that Jarry uses some of "*les faits divers*" as a means to express his political views.

Yet, if the political content might be more conspicuous in Jarry's writing than in Fénéon's, paradoxically, its aestheticizing elements are also more salient. As Beaumont explains,

Numerous articles in La Chandelle verte express his fascination with language, not as a medium of communication, but as form. . . Beyond the puns, the deliberate misinterpretation of metaphors, the tendency to treat words as autonomous objects divorced from meaning and context, lies Jarry's conviction that all concepts and beliefs on which our civilization, and indeed 'civilization' itself, rests are mere constructions of language: that all 'reality' resolves itself, in the final analysis, into a purely linguistic reality, in autonomous linguistic structures, written forms, mere sounds (225).

Bordillon agrees with Beaumont when he writes "*le pré-texte est nécessaire et inutile, le texte compte seul, et malgré les apparences, La Chandelle verte se rapproche moins de l'entreprise morale ou dénonciatrice des confrères de Jarry que de L'Amour absolu et de son 'rêve mallarméen'*" (Jarry 804). Not the real event concerns Jarry, but its linguistic possibilities; "*le fait divers*" is then a laboratory where "formalist" experiments can take place. Jarry thus participates in the aestheticization of violence, as in the piece entitled "*L'Homme au sable*," based on an attack upon a woman by a

masqued individual. In the article, Jarry treats the crime as an art; he tells his audience that the individual who committed the crime must want to enter into "*La société des Connaisseurs en assassinat*" as described in De Quincey's essay "On Murder as a Fine Art". Jarry writes about "*la préciosité même de ses procédés*" and concludes that the assassin "*est, si nous osons ainsi dire, un euphuiste dans son art*" (293). The use of the word "*euphuist*" in this context shifts the attention from the crime to the manner in which it was conducted; not "what" but rather "how" becomes important. Jarry continues thus: "*...il improvise des armes nouvelles sur le théâtre de son crime*" (293). This emphasis on the theatricality of the crime derealizes the act itself. Furthermore, Jarry pays particular detail to the weapons and elevates them to works of art: "*nous nous plaisons à nous le figurer taillant patiemment les bords du verre meurtrier selon des dentelures harmonieuses*" (293). The words "*tailler,*" "*dentelures,*" and "*harmonieuses*" emphasize the aesthetic aspect of the crime. Yet, Jarry twists again the plot of the story to call into question the very reality of the crime; the individual caught by the police is not the one who committed the crime but rather "*ce personnage fantastique, ami des ténèbres et qui n'a lutté en voyant la lumière que défendre son incognito: le marchand de sable*" (294). The reference to sand is connected to one of the weapons used by the criminal; Jarry, however, takes the real material of this weapon and uses it to question the event itself. By placing the article in a fantastic tradition of ambiguity, the author questions the reality of violence.

"*Le fait divers*" participates then in the process by which violence was textualized and thus cloaked in a formalist discourse. In this way, violence could hide its mechanisms in the social. This derealization of violence has many echoes in the literature of the XXth century. Gide, for example, in *Les Caves du Vatican* writes about "*l'acte gratuit*" which resembles in many ways "*la propagande par le geste.*" The Surrealists, similarly, are going to declare that "*L'acte surréaliste le plus simple consiste, revolvers aux poings, à descendre dans la rue et à tirer au hasard, tant qu'on peut, dans la foule. . .La légitimation d'un tel acte n'est, à mon sens, nullement incompatible avec la croyance en cette lueur que le surréalisme cherche à déceler au fond de nous*" (Breton 74-75). This sounds very much like one of the "*fait divers*" that plague our newspapers today. Finally, Robbe-Grillet will also use the formalist discourse of violence in *Projet pour une révolution à New York*. Robbe-Grillet describes thus a rape scene: "*...Non, pas comme ça, à genoux. Voilà, c'est bien: tournée vers le mur. Appuyez-vous avec les avant-bras. Courbez la nuque: c'est plus joli. Déhancez-vous un peu. Ouvrez les cuisses davantage. Et cambrez-vous le*

plus possible. Voilà! (98). Robbe-Grillet's character treats the victim as a model posing for a painting. Furthermore, he writes: "*Sans vous changer de position ni vous contenir davantage, on pourra d'abord, pour des raisons purement plastiques, faire couler un peu de sang sur ces fesses blanches*" (99). The aestheticization of violence had thus far reaching implications for the literature of the XXth century as attested to by the works of Gide, the Surrealists and Robbe-Grillet.

In this paper, I have tried to show that anarchist politics were crucial in the formation of the aesthetic strategy which, by emphasizing form rather than content, helps to forge a discourse that "devalues" and thus hides the economic structures based on exchange. Though forged during the modernist epoch, the aestheticization strategy is still very much alive today. The pornography of violence that assaults us every day, in the news as well as in the movies, still participates in a logic of textualization. The anarchist's "*propagande par le geste*" seems also to be still alive, as the Unabomber's exploits demonstrate. Finally, violence has also colonized our leisure time in video games like Street Fighter, and in the music that we listen to, particularly in rap lyrics. If this aestheticization hides the political and economic interests at work, then it remains to unmask the power structures invested in such a pornography of violence.

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FLAUBERT'S "MEDIEVAL TRIFLE":
"LA LÉGENDE DE SAINT JULIEN L'HOSPITALIER"



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In mid-September 1875, having abandoned, yet again, his monumental project *Bouvard et Pécuchet* and facing the possibility of near financial ruin and the loss of Croisset, Flaubert began writing the first of his *Trois Contes*, "La Légende de saint Julien l'Hospitalier." It was during perhaps the bleakest period of his life, then, that he turned to his "petit conte," which he viewed as both a distraction and a kind of remedial literary exercise: "je vais me mettre à écrire la légende de 'Saint Julien l'hospitalier', uniquement pour m'occuper à quelque chose, pour voir si je peux encore faire une phrase, ce dont je doute" (Fasquelle 216).¹ This was not, however, Flaubert's first attempt to write about the legendary saint. Twenty years earlier, in the spring of 1856, having just completed *Madame Bovary* and resumed the editing of *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, Flaubert began the vast preparatory reading for his tale (*Corr.* 2: 614).² He returned to it briefly in the summer of 1874, during the early stages of his work on *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, though it was not until the autumn of the following year that he actually began writing. The tale was completed in about five months time, between September 1875 and February 1876. There is still more to be said, however, about the story of Flaubert's relationship with Saint Julien. A number of critics have shown that his first acquaintance with the legend dates back to 1835. As Victor Brombert points out, this would mean that the "gestation" of the tale took place over a period of *forty* years (219n3). Flaubert's long, indeed life-long, preoccupation with the Saint Julien legend attests not only to the abiding significance of its themes for him, but also to the profound nature of the work itself—his so-called trifle—in the unconscious processes of the writer.³

So what is the story of Saint Julien l'Hospitalier? Or of greater interest to Flaubert: *who* is Julien? The structure of Flaubert's tale remains, for the most part, faithful to the original Christian legend. When Julien is a young man he encounters a stag while hunting who predicts that he will kill his mother and father. Afraid the prophecy might come true, he

flees with his dreaded secret to a far-off land. He is victorious in battle and marries a beautiful foreign princess. Julien's parents, in the meantime, roam the earth in search of their beloved son. By a twist of fate, they end up at Julien's castle when he is not there. Upon his return, he finds a man and a woman—his parents—in his own bed. Thinking that his wife is with another man, he kills the couple. When his wife appears suddenly, he realizes, to his horror, his tragic mistake. Julien and his wife, together, devote themselves to good works in the service of others. One day, after many years, Julien offers his hospitality to a leper. He turns out to be a messenger of the Lord and tells Julien that he and his wife will rest in His divine graces (de Voragine 31-34).

In Flaubert's version of the legend, there are at least two noteworthy formal differences: the story begins with Julien's birth and ends with Julien living and dying without the company of his wife, alone. These changes in the structure of the original narrative are significant in that they allow Flaubert to inscribe more explicitly in the text the two founding myths of Western culture: Christ and Oedipus.⁴ Like Christ, Flaubert's Julien comes to his mother in a manner that resembles the Immaculate Conception: "A force de prier Dieu, il lui vint un fils" (57); and like Oedipus, he is made fatherless by his own hand. The hope and promise of the Christ story are coupled in the text with the tragic fatality of Oedipus, and together they beget another "fatherless" son, the Julien of Flaubert's legend. Julien, for his part, also remains childless in the tale. The one who sees himself in his dreams as "our father Adam" never engenders a child of his own, that is to say never becomes a father. Instead, the father of humanity—"notre Père Adam au milieu du Paradis, entre toutes les bêtes" (77)—figures in Julien's imagination not as one who gives life, but as one who takes it away: "en allongeant le bras, il les faisait mourir" (77). In his fantasy, then, creation becomes destruction, or one could say that where life once was death now is. Why, for Julien, does death put itself in the place of life?⁵ Or to formulate the idea in more psychoanalytic terms: why does he seem unable to abide aliveness, in what is other and in himself? Why, ultimately, for Julien, is subjectivity fatal? The answer to this question—Julien's question, his destiny—is inscribed, I would like to suggest, in "la constellation fatidique, qui présida à sa naissance même" (Lacan 185).⁶

The "fateful constellation" evoked here in Lacan's words refers to the subject's "constellation familiale," the history of his own lived experience and his prehistory, that is to say his parents' "history" (Norton 111, n. 90). It is no accident that Julien's story begins with his parents, that the very first words of the tale are "le père et la mère de Julien"—the

father-mother constellation that presides over the text and over the child. Their history—Julien’s prehistory—is first presented in two short descriptive passages, and then more prescriptively in the form of two prophetic revelations. The first encounter with the father and mother is, in a manner of speaking, from the “outside”—a description of their physical appearance and bearing; the second, by way of the two prophecies, from the “inside,” giving a glimpse of their psychological make-up. The relation between outside and inside is a particularly complex one in Flaubert’s tale, and might be read in this context as a preliminary example of a certain blurring between what is real and what is imaginary that is at work throughout the text, and in Julien himself. It is perhaps not surprising that Julien, as Shoshana Felman points out, “radically *confuses inside and outside*” (Felman 62), the real and the imaginary, given the ambiguous relation between the two in his parents’ history. The two prophetic visions serve to illustrate this ambiguity. One evening during the three days and four nights of festivities in honor of Julien’s birth, “la nouvelle accouchée,” alone in bed, awakens suddenly to find before her what appears to be a hermit. The figure approaches her bedside and says, “sans desserrer les lèvres”:

— <<Réjouis-toi, ô mère! ton fils sera un saint!>> (58)

To Julien’s father, who also finds himself alone, outside the castle, having just escorted the last of the guests to the door, a beggar suddenly appears out of the morning fog, and “bégaya d’un air inspiré ces mots sans suite”:

— <<Ah! ah! ton fils!... beaucoup de sang!... beaucoup de gloire!...

toujours heureux! La famille d’un empereur.>> (58-59)

In the wake of their respective prophecies, both mother and father have doubts about the origin of the communication that came to them—was it from a source *outside* of themselves or an *internal* fantasy of their own conjuring? The day after the apparition of the old hermit, Julien’s mother wonders, “[s]onge ou réalité” (58); similarly, though Julien’s father attributes his vision of the beggar to his own mental fatigue, the idea of its reality persists in the form of a doubt, “il doutât même de l’avoir entendue” (59). Whatever their “reality,” both prophecies reveal the psychology of Julien’s parents’ desire.

Shoshana Felman focuses on the conflicting and contradictory nature of this desire in her discussion of the oracles in “Flaubert’s Signature: ‘The Legend of Saint Julian the Hospitable.’” The oracles

represent, according to her, “two heterogeneous ambitions, two irreconcilable parental desires... two narcissistic constellations radically foreign to each other” (Felman 49). For Felman, the difference between the mother and father of the tale “corresponds to the stereotypical sex roles of the man (Patriarch-Adventurer) and the woman (always, in some sense, the Virgin-Mother) in Western culture” (51). While this is absolutely true with respect to the substance of each prophecy, and while she is right to insist upon the contradictions that at once polarize Julien’s parents and reveal the radical nonrelation between them, such a schematization (exclusively in terms of gender) is itself belied by the ambiguous gender imagery of Flaubert’s text. This is most clear in the two short paragraphs where we first encounter Julien’s parents. For these paragraphs, in presenting the differences that set the mother and father apart from each other, simultaneously bespeak an utter lack of differentiation between the two, between who is “mother” and who is “father,” between who is the “man” and who is the “woman.”

The ambiguity in question here is a consequence of a deliberate reassigning of the stereotypical attributes of masculinity and femininity. Julien’s father is associated with a certain “feminine” sensuality, passivity and languor; and his mother with a certain “masculine” will, agency and asceticism. If we consider Julien’s father solely on the basis of his later prophetic vision—that is, in terms of the internal inscription of his desire—it is perfectly coherent to read him as the embodiment of the masculine archetype “Patriarch-Adventurer.” If, however, we flesh out his character by taking stock of the details provided earlier in the text, then the paradigm does not hold; and in fact becomes fairly comical and parodic. Here is Flaubert’s initial description of Julien’s father, the so-called Patriarch-Adventurer:

Toujours enveloppé d’une pelisse de renard, il se promenait dans sa maison, rendait la justice à ses vassaux, apaisait les querelles de ses voisins. Pendant l’hiver, il regardait les flocons de neige tomber, ou se faisait lire des histoires. Dès les premiers beaux jours, il s’en allait sur sa mule, le long des petits chemins, au bord des blés qui verdoyaient, et causaient avec les manants, auxquels il donnait des conseils. (57)7

The last sentence of the paragraph tells us, “Après beaucoup d’aventures, il avait pris pour femme une demoiselle de haut lignage” (my emphasis). One can only imagine what these “adventures” might have been... In contrast, Julien’s mother, “un peu fière et sérieuse,” actively runs a tight ship:

Son domestique était réglé comme l'intérieur d'un monastère; chaque matin elle distribuait la besogne à ses servantes, surveillait les confitures et les onguents, filait à la quenouille ou brodait des nappes d'autel. (57)

Of even greater significance, perhaps, is the description of her person. The phallic attributes of her form, her angularity and hardness are in stark contrast to the softness and sensuality of her fur-clad spouse. Moreover, they project beyond her person so that she seems to defy both the boundaries of her bodily self and the physical limits of the domestic space: “Les cornes de son hennin frôlaient le linteau des portes; la queue de sa robe de drap traînait de trois pas derrière elle” (57, my emphasis). The incongruous nature of the imagery in the passage taken as a whole is startling, and as with Julien’s father, results in a kind of grotesque caricature. For these not so subtle images of an aggressively male sexuality (“cornes,” “queue”) are precisely what clothe and adorn—literally give form to—Julien’s mother, the reincarnated Virgin-Mother. (The paragraph ends, let us recall, with the phrase “A force de prier Dieu, il lui vint un fils.”) Here again, as in the case of the father, we see that the Virgin-Mother archetype—the emblem of the imaginary discourse of Julien’s mother’s desire—collapses into itself when confronted with the gender ambiguities that mark her initial presentation in the text.

The gender dynamics in Flaubert’s tale are therefore much more complicated than a reading grounded in the black and white terms of cultural stereotypes about gender would imply. For we now see that while Julien’s father is in spirit connected to the material/social/outside world (the stereotypical domain of men), the visual signs that articulate the letter of this relation are drawn from a discourse encoded as “feminine”; and that the same holds true for Julien’s mother whose relation to the spiritual/asocial/inside (stereotypically the cultural domain of women) is articulated visually through signs that are encoded as “masculine.” If the logic of the above propositions seems tenuous or inconsistent, it is in part because of the near illegibility of the boundary between inside and outside, and in part because of the shifting variables that the propositions themselves put into play: the visual image which “speaks” and yet, because it is, after all, only an image, does not *really* speak; the almost palpable silence of the imaginary, which is effectively silenced by Julien’s parents’ decision to keep their prophetic visions a secret from each other: “Les époux se cachèrent leur secret” (59). To recast the scene in Lacanian terms, one might say that by virtue of “their secret,” Julien’s parents consciously reject the *intersubjective* space of the

Symbolic (i.e. language) in favor of the *intrasubjective* space of the Imaginary.⁸ Ambiguous gender identity, then, is not the real problem; the real problem, as for Lacan, is the real. The indeterminacy in the text between “masculine” and “feminine” while significant in and of itself functions more critically, I would like to suggest, as a symptom of Julien’s profound incapacity to differentiate between what is real and what is imaginary; or, between what is self and what is other. Nevertheless, the entire problematic of gender identity as it is thematized in the parents’ lack of sexual differentiation and determinacy serves as an important signpost marking a time and place that might be characterized as *pre-oedipal* (and therefore pre-verbal).

Julien’s own deep-rooted confusion is played out again and again in “La Légende” in his difficult, oftentimes painful and ragefully sadistic relations with the other. Three moments vividly illustrate this point: his encounter with the mouse (part I), with his own reflection in a fountain (part III) and, most dramatically, with his parents (part II). If the scenes in parts II and III of the tale stage Flaubert’s unique versions of the Oedipus and Narcissus myths, the scene in part I has no obvious mythic subtext, no explicit originary narrative that speaks through it (except, of course, for its general architecture which places us in a Christian context). Here we find Julien in the chapel—in his place: “aux côtés de ses parents”—during mass, when he sights for the first time “une petite souris blanche qui sortait d’un trou, dans la muraille” (61). The following Sunday, the idea that he might see the mouse again troubles and excites him (“le troubla”); and to be sure: “Elle revint; et chaque dimanche il l’attendait, en était importuné, fut pris de haine contre elle, et résolut de s’en défaire.” Finally, in a premeditated fashion, Julien waits for the mouse and kills it using a stick; “Il frappa un coup léger, et demeura stupéfait devant ce petit corps qui ne bougeait plus.”⁹ In the episodes that follow this first murder, Julien seems driven to extinguish any sign of life or vitality, indeed anything that *moves* (which is in vivid contrast to his own statue-like immobility in the chapel: “si longs que fussent les offices, il restait à genoux sur son prie-Dieu, la toque par terre et les mains jointes” [61]; where he is shown to be “sage comme une image”). The killing that ensues becomes more obsessive, as well as more explicit sadistic and sexual—where his hands were formerly joined in prayer, they are now transformed into a weapon of destruction. In the case of the wounded pigeon, we read: “La persistance de sa vie irrita l’enfant. Il se mit à l’étrangler” (62).¹⁰ To return to the “little white mouse,” critics across the board interpret it as an obvious substitute for Julien’s

mother: it is white and the color white is associated with her earlier in the text (“Elle était très blanche” 57); it appears in the chapel, what one critic calls “le lieu par excellence de la mère” (Bellemin-Noël 59); and there is the repeated use of the feminine pronoun “elle.” I would like to suggest that the symbolic meaning of the mouse is more richly ambiguous and polyvalent, that the mouse figures in the text as a literal embodiment of the pre-oedipal indeterminacy I just spoke of. Not only, then, a substitute for the mother, but also —and at the same time— for the father and for Julien himself (cf. Felman 53). Translated into the idiom of psychoanalysis, the mouse might be read symbolically as breast, phallus and child. In each instance, the imagery of Flaubert’s text is quite clear: mouse as breast—“Au bout de très longtemps un museau rose parut, puis la souris tout entière”;¹¹ mouse as phallic object—“une petite souris blanche qui sortait d’un trou”; and mouse as child, where the mouse comes to fill the hole (“un trou, dans la muraille”)—or empty space—between the parents. Julien’s relation to the mouse is therefore vastly more complicated than a reductive one-to-one correspondence between mouse and mother would suggest. For the mouse is the locus of not one, but multiple symbolic identifications: not merely “mother”—though this may indeed be the primary identification—but the entire blur of the “family constellation.”

Even at the very end of the tale, when Julien is an old man, this “fateful constellation,” as Lacan put it, continues to preside over him: “sous un berceau de pampres, un adolescent à cheveux blonds entre un vieillard couvert de fourrures et une dame à grand hennin” (93).¹² This “memory” of his youth, a memory that is at once strangely Edenic and chillingly impersonal, condenses both the place he occupies between his parents —Julien is, as his name suggests, the *lien* between them— and the contradictions and ambiguities they embody. Almost immediately, however, the image he has conjured is obliterated by another, more overtly morbid vision: that of his dead parents: “tout à coup, les deux cadavres étaient là.” Julien finds himself, once again, face to face with an image that bespeaks his own alienation and dereliction. Earlier on in part III, at the moment he sees his reflection in the pool of a fountain, it has already become apparent that he has no affective tie to any person, place or thing. He is represented as a sort of alien being, one who is alienated—that is to say, quite literally, *a-liéné*. His fleeting encounters with humans and animals alike serve merely to reflect negatively back to him his own sense of exclusion, aloneness and lack of place and purpose in the world. Julien’s nonrelation to anything outside of himself is sug-

gested at this juncture by the repeated use of the prepositions “dans” and “sur” which bring out the relationality and belonging that seem to characterize, in contrast to the desolation and homelessness of his own existence, “l’existence des autres” (90). It is in the natural order of things, for example, to find “les poulains *dans* les herbages, les oiseaux *dans* leurs nids, les insectes *sur* les fleurs”; or to see, like Julien, “les longues tables de famille où des aïeux tenaient des petits enfants *sur* leurs genoux” (90, my emphasis). The use of the plural in all of the above propositions is also significant in that it underscores Julien’s singularity and orphan status. “Repoussé de partout” (89), Julien retreats into solitude only to find no real refuge or comfort there; in fact, it is when he is alone with himself that he is most prey to the inclemency of his perceptions and his horrific “visions funèbres” (93). The seemingly benign elements of the natural landscape, for instance, appear to Julien—are, in effect, “read” by him—as a cruel allegory of his parricide:

Il rechercha les solitudes. Mais le vent apportait à son oreille comme des râles d’agonie; les larmes de la rosée tombant par terre lui rappelaient d’autres gouttes d’un poids plus lourd. Le soleil, tous les soirs, étalait du sang dans les nuages. (90)

It is precisely this “impitoyable pensée” which afflicts him even when his body is subjected to the most excruciating physical pain and deprivation, torturing him “à travers les macérations de la pénitence” (91). No mortification of the flesh, it seems, can distract him from his loss, and from the lacerating guilt and mental anguish which torment him day and night: “et chaque nuit, en rêve, son parricide recommençait” (90).¹³ To be sure, the outside world proves to be an inhospitable, even hostile, place for Julien. We read that “[d]ans les villages...on fermait les portes, on lui criait des menaces, on lui jetait des pierres” (89); that the animals whom he beholds “avec des élancements d’amour” reject him as if fleeing before an approaching leper: “tous, à son approche, couraient plus loin, se cachaient effarés, s’envolaient bien vite” (90). And yet, however much the exterior landscape might be unsympathetic and unwelcoming, Julien’s *paysage intérieur* is no more hospitable to him. One might even say of Julien that he is his own worst enemy: “Sa propre personne lui faisait tellement horreur qu’espérant s’en délivrer il l’aventura dans des périls” (91, my emphasis).

Julien’s dissociation of himself from himself suggested at this point in the text (note Flaubert’s striking use of the *object* pronoun “l’”)

is but the prelude to the real flight into psychotic dissociation that takes place in the fountain scene immediately thereafter. No longer able to bear the weight of his suffering, Julien, we are told, “résolument de mourrir” (91).

Et un jour qu'il se trouvait au bord d'une fontaine, comme il se penchait dessus pour juger la profondeur de l'eau, il vit paraître en face de lui un vieillard tout décharné, à barbe blanche et d'un aspect si lamentable qu'il lui fut impossible de retenir ses pleurs. L'autre, aussi, pleurait. Sans reconnaître son image, Julien se rappelait confusément une figure ressemblant à celle-là. Il poussa un cri; c'était son père; et il ne pensa plus à se tuer (91).

The above passage, despite its simple language and apparent clarity, is an extraordinary *mise en scène* of the complex psychological dynamics at work in the text: between narcissism and desire, the life-instinct and the death-instinct, the “identity” of the ego and its relation to its objects.¹⁴ In his rewriting of the Narcissus myth, Flaubert inscribes a number of significant differences. If Ovid's original myth tells the story of a mistaken identity where the self discovers that the other who is the object of its desire is itself, Flaubert's version suggests that what the self discovers is not itself as object, but an object as—or *in the place of*—itself. The confusion between subject and object, between who is who, in the latter scenario makes the whole question of “narcissistic” desire problematic. In the context of the original myth, Narcissus's desire may ultimately be what is most fatal to him, but there is no mistaking that it is his *own* desire. With Julien, however, desire appears as something entirely split off from himself, and seems to reside in the object (the father). One might say that Flaubert's reinscription of the Narcissus myth presents a distorted mirror-image of narcissism that reflects back to us not a scene of desire, but the *death of desire* itself. Julien may indeed survive, unlike Narcissus, but it is at the expense of his own desire, even if this desire happens to be a suicidal one. His narcissism (what little he had) must be sacrificed, the text seems to suggest, in the name of keeping the desire of the father alive.¹⁵ The logic of psychotic dissociation that structures the passage serves to illustrate the workings of this dialectic, and goes something like this: even though his father is already dead, upon confusing himself with the father's image, Julien cannot kill “himself” because to do so would be to kill his father. This model leaves us with a number of paradoxes: with Julien condemned to live because of an interdiction (or inhibition) to fulfill his desire for death; with the dead

father being more alive in death than Julien is—has ever been or ever will be—in life.

As Serge Leclaire points out in *On tue un enfant*, “il ne suffit point, tant s’en faut, de tuer les parents, encore faut-il tuer la représentation tyrannique de l’enfant-roi: ‘je’ commence en ce temps là” (13). He goes on to say: “Ce qui est à tuer, c’est une représentation présidant, tel un astre, à la destinée de l’enfant de chair” (21). Leclaire identifies this astral representation as the parents’ unconscious desire (“*cette représentation narcissique primaire*” 14) which is embodied phantasmatically in the image of “l’enfant merveilleux” or the *infans*, the one who does not speak.¹⁶ According to Leclaire, “pour vivre, il faut que je tue la représentation tyrannique de l’infans en moi” (14). This phantasmatic murder, which is not something that takes place “une fois pour toutes,” but “chaque fois qu’on se met à parler vraiment, à chaque instant où l’on commence à aimer” (14), is for Leclaire the necessary precondition for real subjectivity. In other words, a death or putting to death must necessarily take place—in the imaginary—so that there might be birth and the possibility of life in the real. One might say that the primordial ontological question, then, is not “to be or not to be,” but rather “to kill or not to kill”—the “primeval” form, perhaps, of the “symbolized,” more elegant formulation “to be or not to be.”

In her analysis of the Adam myth in “Flaubert’s Signature,” Shoshana Felman suggests a “textual correlation between naming and killing” (60). “In the case of Julian,” she writes “the act of killing is suggestively substituted for the act of naming or of speaking, implying...a relationship between silence and murder. Julian *kills* because he does not name” (60). While it is true that Julien does not name or really even speak in the tale (the instances of direct discourse in the text are rare and when he is shown to speak, he seems to be a sort of “perroquet répétiteur” [Leclaire 98]: “Quand Julien put *réciter toutes ces choses par coeur*, son père lui composa une meute” [63, my emphasis]), it seems that the dialectic between naming and killing might be further refined in light of Lacan and Leclaire’s theories. I would like to suggest that Julien *kills* not because he does not name or speak, but because he does not kill. In more explicitly Lacanian terms, the syntax might go something like this: because Julien does not kill (in the Imaginary), he does not—i.e. *cannot*—name or speak (in the Symbolic) and therefore kills (in the Real). In the first of the two hunting sequences in the tale, one wonders precisely who or what Julien is trying to kill off in his murderous pursuit of the animals. There is at this moment in the tale (and even more explic-

itly in the second hunt) an unsettling sense of some invisible enemy, an unknown and unknowable force to be reckoned with. In this context, we begin to see the full significance of the fact that Julien's parents do not speak their desire, that "the discourse of the other" is literally kept secret. It seems that desire figures mutely in "La Légende" as an idiom that has no shared grammar or syntax. If the ego, as characterized by Freud, comes into being as a kind of "verbal nucleus" (Lacan 186), then what happens to it in the absence of any verbal mediation? In other words, what if the parents fail to give the child what Lacan calls "le don de la parole"? This failure, as Flaubert's rewriting of "La Légende de saint Julien l'Hospitalier" brings home, is the origin of Julien's drama—or more accurately perhaps, his *trauma*. A trauma which, true to the etymology of the word itself, might be described as a sort of primordial ontological *wounding*, that of "le malheur de n'être, de naître jamais" (Leclaire 96). What does it mean to be born? What is the relationship between the advent of (human) being and the advent of language? And lastly, what is the fate of the *infans* if this birth is a failure, if it is, as the muteness of the text communicates to us, stillborn?¹⁷

Indeed, life within the castle walls of Flaubert's legend seems inhabited by an uncanny, almost morbid silence. Words and the vitality they bring with them, like a breath of fresh air, only ever come from the *outside*. And when they do, they seem as exotic and unfamiliar as the wares of a foreign trader, "des choses singulières d'un usage inconnu" (60). This is the world into which Julien is born; a world in which it seems that speech is a relic of the past, where Julien's parents speak neither directly to each other nor to their son.¹⁸ In the fairy-tale-like opening pages of the story, the castle is presented as self-contained and self-sufficient. It is quite literally a world-unto-itself, in its own world, where there is little or no contact with the outside. The castle also appears to be poised somewhere at the end of History, in a time and place where there no longer seem to be any real wars, only war *stories* (60). Where knights once did battle, in the openings of the castle's crenellated walls, swallows now build their nests. And on days when the sun is too strong, the castle guard lays down his bow and retires for a long nap. In truth, a certain sleepiness and torpor pervade the entire household:

les armoires regorgeaient de linge, les tonnes de vin s'empliaient dans les celliers, les coffres de chêne craquaient sous le poids des sacs d'argent. (56, my emphasis)

The effects of the excess described here resemble the uncomfortable, weighed-down feeling that comes after a rich, heavy meal. All one wants

to do is go to sleep. And just as the coffers are full of money that remains untouched and out-of-circulation —money that does not exchange hands— so too is the text full of words that remain unspoken, unexchanged. And so too does the weighty silence of these words exert its own pressure on the text, creating tiny cracks in the story's surface.¹⁹

Born into such a world, the child Julien seems fated to live the uncanny experience of something that is there but not there, something that is absent, because of its exclusion from the symbolic order of language, and yet implacably present by virtue of its existence in the imaginary of others. Not surprisingly, the boundary between the real and the imaginary risks becoming, in such a world, totally obscured. To return to Leclaire's model, I would like to suggest that Julien's question, the question of his destiny, might be reformulated in the following way: "how might I kill the representation of my parents' narcissistic desires without actually killing *them*?" Or, "how might I be born without literally being the death of my parents?" Once again: what does it mean to be born? to be born into language? For Flaubert, as for Lacan and Leclaire, it is nothing less than the child's humanity—his capacity to speak and desire—that is at stake in this question. Julien may indeed be transfigured into a "saint" at the end of the tale, and at that moment, experience "une abondance de délices, une joie *surhumaine*" (97, my emphasis), but his final transfiguration only brings out more starkly the pathos and tragedy of one who has never known what it is to be human

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Notes

²⁰Flaubert writes despairingly of his situation in the same letter of 3 octobre 1875: "L'avenir ne m'offre rien de bon et le passé me dévore. Je ne pense qu'aux jours écoulés et aux gens qui ne peuvent revenir. Signe de vieillesse et de décadence. Quant à la littérature, je ne crois plus en moi, je me trouve vide" (Fasquelle 216). The parallels between Flaubert's "état d'âme" and the Julien of his legend are striking; but the critical attention and elaboration they merit is beyond the scope of the present analysis.

²¹In this letter, Flaubert also speaks with great enthusiasm of his desire to return to Paris in the Fall with "le *Saint Antoine* fini et le *Julien l'Hospitalier* écrit," adding, "[j]e pourrais donc en 1857 fournir du Moderne, du Moyen Age et de l'Antiquité" (*Corr.* 2: 614). The detail is noteworthy, I think, to the extent that it shows us that Flaubert ultimately considered "La Légende" to be as significant a work as two of his more conspicuously "grandes oeuvres," *Madame Bovary* and *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*.

²²"Comme je voudrais vous voir pour vous lire ma petite bêtise

moyenâgeuse!” wrote Flaubert, in a more sanguine mood, to George Sand in May 1876 (Jacobs 533). Throughout the correspondence Flaubert refers to “La Légende” as a work of little or no consequence (Jacobs 522; Dumesnil 228; Fasquelle 218). In a letter written in January 1876, he refers to it as “[m]a petite historiette (religioso-pohétique et moyenâgeusement rococo)” (Dumesnil 234)!

²³For a more comprehensive discussion of the presence of Western myth in Flaubert’s tale, see Shoshana Felman’s beautiful essay, “Flaubert’s Signature: ‘The Legend of Saint Julian the Hospitable,’” 57-61. The reading of “La Légende” that I am proposing here is greatly indebted to her analysis.

²⁴The two subtexts here are Freud’s well-known declaration “Wo Es war, soll Ich werden” and Lacan’s translation of it, “Là où était ça, le *je* doit être” (209).

²⁵Lacan’s discussion of subjectivity in “Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse” sheds some light on the nature of Julien’s question: “Ce que je cherche dans la parole, c’est la *réponse* de l’autre. Ce qui me constitue comme sujet, c’est ma *question*” (181, my emphasis). Later on in the same essay, in speaking of the role of the analyst in the analytic setting, Lacan writes: “Pour savoir comment répondre au sujet dans l’analyse, la méthode est de reconnaître d’abord la place où est son *ego*, cet *ego* que Freud lui-même a défini comme *ego* formé d’un *nucleus verbal*, autrement dit de savoir par qui et pour qui le sujet pose *sa question*” (186).

²⁶The description of Julien’s father is much more evocative of Emma seated by a window than of, say, King Arthur. Later on in part II of the tale, we find Julien striking a similar pose: “accoudé dans l’embrasure d’une fenêtre” (77), daydreaming *à la Bovary*.

²⁷The primacy of the image returns ironically at the end of the tale with respect to Julien’s ultimate destiny, when Julien is reduced to the impoverished state of hermit/beggar. In a certain perverse sense, then, his parents’ prophetic visions are realized. But instead of embodying the glorious words that were *spoken* to them, Julien actually assumes the less glorious image of those who did the speaking, the hermit and the beggar. Their “impediments” to “proper” speech seem all the more significant in this light.

²⁸The magical quality of this murderous blow, its implied lack of effort and expenditure, foreshadow the imagery of Julien’s later Adam fantasy (77).

²⁹The passage continues: “et les convulsions de l’oiseau faisait battre son coeur, l’emplissait d’une volupté sauvage and tumultueuse. Au dernier roidissement, il se sentait défaillir” (62). The sexual scenario described here is yet another example of the lack of a demarcated boundary between subject and object that is thematized in the tale. Given the logic of the preceding sentence, it follows that the “dernier roidissement” might just as easily be attributed to Julien as to the pigeon.

³⁰The image of the mouse/breast and the aggression directed towards it bring to mind the work of Melanie Klein and her idea of the “bad internal object”; the “bad” (as opposed to the “good”) object being associated with pain, persecutory anxiety and the death-instinct.

³¹It is striking that Julien remembers himself not as a young child, but as an adolescent. In other words, the period of life that seems to return most vividly to him in memory is not childhood, but the time and place *between* childhood and adulthood: the limbo of adolescence.

³²On the subject of the relationship between physical pain and internal, mental pain as a symptomatic response to the loss of an object, see Freud’s discussion in “Anxiety, Pain and Mourning,” *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, 105-109; and “Mourning and Melancholia” in *Collected Papers* 4, 152-170.

³³Cf. J. Culler’s very different bias about Flaubert’s later work, whose characters he deems to be “less rich, less interesting as psychological cases” (129). With respect to the specific case of Julien, he maintains that in the narrative of “La Légende,” “there is little attempt to construct a plausible psychology by identifying its sources and displaying its effects on experience” (130). The analysis here seeks to dispel any such notion.

³⁴Or the father as the substitute for *both* parents, and therefore as the figure standing for parental narcissism in general. For the same indeterminacy embodied by the mouse-object is thematized, though less explicitly so, in this scene as well. If one compares the description of Julien’s parents in part II with that of the father in this scene, there are several details that simultaneously evoke the mother. Already in the former scene, words that were originally associated with one spouse are attributed to the other (“neige” in relation to the mother, “une statue d’église” in relation to the father 81; cf. 57). The image of the “barbe blanche” might also be associatively linked with Julien’s mother (72). Cf. Michal Ginsburg’s reading of the scene as an illustration of the absolute *difference* between the mother (“unified and homogeneous”) and father (“heterogeneous” and “unstable”), and of Julien’s alienation as a conse-

quence of his identification with the latter (165-170).

³⁵With respect to the image of “l’enfant merveilleux,” we might recall that Julien’s parents see their infant son as “un petit Jésus” (59). Freud’s view of parental love as “nothing but parental narcissism born again” (49) is also quite relevant here. In spite of the differences between them, Flaubert still writes of Julien’s parents: “tous deux chérissaient l’enfant d’un *pareil amour*” (59, my emphasis); in other words, a love that is in both cases the expression of their own narcissism.

³⁶Like Julien. The French word *mort-né* is at once less euphemistic and more visually evocative. For in *mort-né*, it is as if the ontological moments of death and birth are presented in virtually the same time and space, even though they remain forever separated by the hyphen between them. *Mort-né*: a word that presents itself as the visual inscription of a birth that is always already condemned by the death that precedes it; its “pre-history.” This word seems to capture the essence of Julien’s story, one that takes place *en souffrance* in the space between *mort* and *né*. A space, that is in a sense a non-space (in Derrida’s terminology, “sous-rature”) by virtue of the bar that brings these two “realities” together, but simultaneously functions as the signifying mark of the blankness between them.

³⁷The absence of “human” speech in the text is made even more palpable by the presence of prophetic speech, whose origin is, by definition, sacred or divine. The latter is given a voice in Flaubert’s text—it literally *speaks*—whereas human speech is, for all intents and purposes, kept *silent*. This also gives us some insight into Flaubert’s understanding of what the nature of a “realist” text might be. In the context of “La Légende,” prophetic speech (i.e. that which is actually spoken in the words on the page) seems to belong to the world of fairy-tale—or fiction *as* fairy tale; while human speech, by virtue of its silence and textual non-presence, lies somewhere beneath the words on the page, and might correspond to the mute nature of the communication of Julien’s *real* (and Flaubert’s “realist”?) story.

³⁸ See Lacan’s gloss of “la phrase de Mallarmé quand il compare l’usage commun du langage à l’échange d’une monnaie . . . que l’on se passe de main en main ‘en silence’” (128). The structure of Mallarmé’s metaphor is echoed later on in the essay when he evokes the example of “les hirondelles de mer” and the symbolic “exchange” value, noted by ethnologists, of “le poisson qu’elles se passent de bec en bec” (151).

ASSERTIONS OF 'ALGÉRIANITÉ':
INTELLECTUAL PRODUCTION OF A COLONIAL IDENTITY



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Marcel Florenchie, a French settler to Algeria and author of several colonial memoirs, entitled a 1932 essay *Terre algérienne*. Fourteen years later in 1946, he published a similar essay on North Africa called *Terre française*. This shift in adjective is also a metaphor; it is representative of a complex and fluctuating colonial framework. Had Algeria become French, a trans-Mediterranean extension of France, or was it distinctly “algérienne” in culture and tradition? This ambiguity is central to the colonial relationship between metropolitan France and Algeria, and to the link between members of the Algerian population and French identity. Colonial literature provides an excellent vantage point from which to examine expressions of identity among the country’s varied settler and indigenous groups. Algerian novels and essays do not tell the *whole* story, but they do tell a *different* story, one that is largely unrecorded in census data, administrative documents or personal identification papers.¹

On July 5, 1830, the French military captured the city of Algiers. During the next two decades, larger and larger parts of the North African coast progressively fell under its jurisdiction. The contours of a country named Algeria were charted by military officials, and by 1848, legislators declared Algeria a part of French territory.² French law recognized virtually all colonial populations as either French subjects or citizens by the end of the nineteenth century.³ For indigenous Berbers, Arabs and Jews, for the numerous settlers from Spanish, Italian and Maltese ports, or even for French men and women who had migrated from southern departments such as the Vaucluse and Aveyron, was Frenchness an accurate definition? Or did a separate colonial or Algerian identity take shape? This paper will explore the emergence of a distinct colonial identity, the birth of “algérianité,” in literature of the early to mid-twentieth century.

Algerian novelists and essayists of the colonial period, especially those of European ancestry, describe a keen sense of “algérianité” in their works. They create a distinctly North African literary context in which

a new “Algerian” man and woman emerge. The protagonists of North African novels confidently and sometimes defiantly assert their Algerian identity. Such manifestations of Algerian identity are echoed by essayists who reiterate the tangibly distinct character of the land and people. They even allude to brewing nationalist desire among Algerians in the 1930s and 1940s.

The annalists of colonial Algerian society and identity include such prominent authors as Louis Bertrand, Robert Randau and Emmanuel Robles.⁴ Louis Bertrand was a particularly important figure. This native of the Lorraine had come to Algeria in the late nineteenth century to teach in a “lycée.” A future French Academician, Bertrand became so enamored with the country and its population that he remained, and Algerian society became the context for a great many of his novels.⁵ Bertrand and his cohort led colonial literary circles, and helped to establish a body of literature “by” Algeria as opposed to one “on” Algeria.⁶ These founding fathers of the *roman colonial* influenced a generation of younger writers such as Lucienne Favre, Ferdinand Duchêne and Paul Achard, many of whom were born in North Africa. Writers in the “algérianiste” tradition, they also used North Africa and specific Algerian social groups as the setting for their work.

A smaller number of prominent and insightful authors, including Albert Camus, Gabriel Audisio, Jean Méliá and Jean Pélégri, devoted much of their intellectual production to Algerian society, but wrote from a somewhat different perspective. These authors made up a literary genre Jean Dejeux refers to as “L’école d’Alger.” Unlike “algérianiste” authors, writers from the “école d’Alger” were less preoccupied with definitions of Algerian identity and instead promoted humanist issues. By the 1950s, Arab and Berber writers such as Ferhat Abbas, Kateb Yacine, Mouloud Feraoun, Mohammed Dib and Mouloud Mammeri also produced novels and essays in French, but I do not include their work here, among “algérianiste” texts, for reasons that will become clear below.

The French-born novelist and essayist Ferdinand Duchêne offers a suggestive definition of colonial Algerian identity in a 1929 essay. “One can be Algerian without too much difficulty,” he remarks. “It suffices to have been born in Algeria and to have parents of European ancestry ... This is the connotation of the word ‘Algerian’ in the colony - transplanted European” (Duchêne, *Ceux* 8).⁷ A keen observer of colonial Algerian society, Duchêne notes an exclusionary element to this definition: “For them [Algerians], Mohammed is not and must not be an Algerian; he is an *indigenous* Algerian.” “Nor do they ever say,” he con-

tinues, "that Juda Levy, a French citizen (which they themselves in many cases are not) is Algerian; in referring to him they say, the Jew" (Duchêne, *Ceux* 8). There was thus a racial stipulation to Algerian identity. Colonial definitions of "Algerianness" were based on *jus soli* or birthright in Algeria, but also applied a notion of *jus sanguinis* or blood ties, which restricted classification to those of European descent.⁸

This colonial conception of "Algerianness" is illustrated in the fictive characters of European novelists. Cagayous, perhaps the most noted of all Algerian literary figures, proclaims: "Algerian we are!" An inhabitant of the popular quarter of Bab-el-Oued in Algiers, Cagayous is representative of poor, often illiterate migrants of Mediterranean descent. Crude, violent and highly suspicious of others, perhaps even anti-Semitic, Cagayous defends the exclusionary nature of Algerian identity: "If the Algerians had not reacted violently to the Dreyfus Affair, the French of France would have thought that Algeria was inhabited by foreigners and hillbillies, half-Italian and half-Spanish" (Audisio, *Cagayous* 100). Paul Achard's Titouss is another fictive settler equally defiant in his "algérianité." His parents emigrated from the neighboring Mediterranean island of Malta, but when questioned about his identity by colonial representatives, he immediately asserts his claim to "Algerianness." Titouss is informed by his interrogators that Algerian is not a nationality, but he indignantly refuses to believe this (*L'homme* 150). Similarly, Pierre Sanchez, a settler to Algeria from the south of Spain, asserts his colonial sense of self. Questioned about his identity by officials, as was Titouss, he denies being either Spanish or French. "... Pierre Sanchez specifies what he is - Algerian" (Duchêne, *Mouna* 7).

Fictive settlers such as Pierre Sanchez, Titouss and Cagayous, descendants of the vast Mediterranean region and born on the North African coast, fully believe that they are Algerian. Is this assertion simply the artistic fruit of imaginative authors, or does it reflect recorded sentiment among settlers? In their character descriptions, novelists describe the Algerian experience as having created a people with specific traits and culture. Expelled from their countries of birth by poverty or hostile political regimes, migrant groups began to think of themselves as Algerians after years of struggle and strife attached them passionately to this land. Their battle to survive and prosper in Algeria intensified identification with the country. "We are no longer exiles," claims Jean Mélia, a settler of Italian descent. "Algeria has become our homeland. We live every minute of the day with Algeria on our minds" (Mélia 70).

The characteristics that made existence in North Africa possible are what most define Algerians. The Algerian is described as "miserly,

temperamental, violent, given to excesses, uneducated, [and] lacking in social graces” (Duchêne, *Fièvre* 19). Capable of great physical feats, Algerians appear untiring in their efforts to combat harsh conditions and cultivate the stingy, arid soil.¹⁰ Captivated by a romantic notion of the colonial effort, novelists portray Algerians as rugged pioneers, self-created in their heroic struggle to conquer their very own “Western frontier.” It is not surprising that there are numerous references to America in colonial Algerian literature.¹¹ Colonial authors describe Algerians as a hybrid people (of European descent), who, like Americans, had fused within a kind of North African melting pot. European settlers had come to North Africa and become Algerians as the early pioneers in the free world had become Americans. Writers compare the youthfulness and energy of the Algerian and American peoples who could each take credit for flourishing societies, modern cities and new nations.

Novelists contend that Algerians are distinct in ways that are not based purely on the physical strength and endurance of pioneering settlers. More “refined” elements of Algerian culture allegedly distinguished settlers from metropolitan Frenchmen and from the Arab and Berber masses. Alvarez, a character of Spanish descent, announces that Algerians such as himself have different culinary practices than the French (Randau, *Martin* 87). Consumption of “la Mouna,” a pastry, at Easter time for instance, marked an annual affirmation of “algérianité.” “Whoever has not heard of ‘la Mouna’ cannot be Algerian,” Ferdinand Duchêne comments. “‘La Mouna’ constitutes a ritual and becomes a criterion. It is determined by the sign of the Zodiac: Easter is dominated by ‘la Mouna’” (*Mouna* 25).

If holidays and special foods are defining features of Algerian identity, so too is language. Writers attribute a distinctive form of communication - “Pataouète” - to Algerians. The linguist Francis Lanly acknowledges “Pataouète” as a combination of languages, fusing Spanish, Italian and Arabic terminology and syntax to a French base. He calls it “an Algerian dialect” (Lanly 22). Novelists such as Paul Achard use “Pataouète” as the chosen mode of communication amongst Algerians. The most skillful manipulator of “Pataouète” is certainly Cagayous, anti-hero of the popular novels by Musette. His usage of the local vernacular is most pronounced or distinct when making obscene or insulting comments about Jews, the French or other maligned groups.

The linguistic influence of Cagayous is such that Gabriel Audisio refers to the Algerian dialect as “le Cagayous” or “le parler Cagayous” (*Cagayous* 19). It is unclear whether “le Cagayous” evolved into a distinct form of communication or whether it was simply the

poorly spoken French of Mediterranean settlers. It did, almost inevitably, become more and more like “le français naturel” or French spoken in France. Access to schooling within the French system in Algeria and severed contact with Spain and Italy tended to homogenize language.

Specific traditions, a rugged, pioneering spirit and, arguably, language thus defined Algerians. “Algérieniste” authors took the imaginative process one step further by giving settlers distinctive physical traits. European emigrants not only assumed Algerian identity in North Africa, they became Africans. Colonial chroniclers describe a physical transformation, a darkening of the skin, a toughening of the body and spirit. When settlers return to their ancestral countries, they are unrecognizable due to this metamorphosis. Marcel Florenchie comments that while back in his native Corrèze as a young child, local people marveled at his blackness (*Terre algérienne* 20). In novels, fictive settlers proudly evoke their “Africanness.” One exclaims to another, “above all old man, let’s be Africans” (Randau, *Colons* 27). Gomez, a settler of Spanish descent, proclaims that his “Africanness” distinguishes him from those who had not spent as much time in Algeria (Randau, *Martin* 15). Colonial authors rename Algeria “AfroFrance” or “Eurafrique,” and its inhabitants “les franco-africains.”¹² It would seem from such depictions that contact with the African continent had made natives of these migrants. The Muslim novelist Mohammed Dib comments through one of his characters that one would almost be led to believe that Arabs and Berbers are foreigners in Algeria, and settlers “the actual natives” (*L’incendie* 45-6).

The aforementioned author Louis Bertrand, known as “l’Africain” among his contemporaries, defended the supposed indigenous ancestry of European settlers. He noted that they could be natives or Africans as a result of deep Latin roots in North Africa. Much of Bertrand’s literary work is devoted to celebrating Latin influence in North Africa, transmitted by a powerful Roman empire that reigned for five hundred years.¹³ The Romans had allegedly left cultural vestiges on the North Africa coast; novelists refer to the lingua franca of colonial Algeria as “latin d’Afrique.” In Louis Bertrand’s estimation, European settlers are the modern inheritors of this Latin tradition. They became Africans in carrying on what their Roman forefathers had begun centuries earlier.

Assertions of cultural, linguistic and even racial distinction concerned French officials. It was feared that such sensibilities might potentially

undermine French authority in North Africa, and lead to separatist sentiment.¹⁴ Novelists describe discontented individuals who toy with the idea of autonomy. “By God,” an irascible settler exclaims, “let’s free ourselves!” “In Paris, people think that there are two types of Frenchmen in the world, those from Europe, the masters, and those from overseas, the servile. Men of Algeria, we will only obey laws that are good for Algeria and that we have discussed in advance” (Randau, *Colons* 27).¹⁵ A weathered villager comments, “... I personally accept our separation from France. After all, a Motherland is outdated, ... and a burden ... What is all of this, what do we owe the Metropole at present? We are strong and France inhibits us ...” (Duchêne, *Fièvre* 30).

The essayist Jean Paillard, noting this sentiment, proposed an actual transformation of Algeria from its currently administered colonial state to a rethought and reshaped dominion (108-09). R.C. Llamó submitted an idea for even more radical change, suggesting that Algeria be divided into racially separate states. “It is a question of separating in order to come together,” he claims (44). Algerians would inhabit what Llamó calls “Euralgérie,” preserved from indigenous masses and able to perpetuate their unique culture, while Arabs and Berbers would inhabit separate territories.

Such divisive views are reflected in the colonial interpretation of “algérianité,” described in the novels and essays cited here. This definition barred Arabs, Jews and Berbers from the colonial Algerian community. Although exclusionary rhetoric is prevalent in colonial literature, a small number of writers objected to the restricted nature of Algerian identity. “Liberal” European intellectuals such as Albert Camus and Gabriel Audisio suggested that all races and religions be included in a new definition of Algerian identity. Neither gave credence to the notion of pure races, and each spoke instead of Mediterranean hybrids.¹⁶ Audisio defines “algérianité” as “a synthesis of proximate races fused by French culture” (*Jeunesse* 112). Jean Pomier, a European author in the same political vein, describes the term “Algerian” as an as yet ill-defined social category in colonial society (15).

Arab and Berber writers rejected the notion of an exclusionary colonial identity. Mohammed Dib and Ferhat Abbas denounced Louis Bertrand and the “algérianiste” school as overtly racist.¹⁷ They claimed that such literary production contributed to hostility between indigenous and settler groups, and served to consolidate the rigid colonized/colonizer boundaries described later by Albert Memmi and Frantz Fanon.¹⁸

I would argue, in conclusion, that “algérianiste” novels reveal a great deal about certain aspects of colonial Algerian society. Like other sorts of literature, they relate various perspectives, social conditions and cultural proclivities from a particular period.¹⁹ Given their inherent biases, by no means do they *say* everything. They do not address the concerns of the Arab-Berber or Jewish populations for instance. Critics contend, as a result, that the “reality” conveyed in such literature is skewed, that the *roman colonial* served as a distraction or “production de l’aveuglement” (Gourdon, Henry, Henry-Lorcerie 100). They claim that Algerian novelists wrote to justify European presence in North Africa, to legitimate their place in colonial Algerian society, to assert their dominant position while denying the existence of others. This is a convincing argument, yet one cannot necessarily expect to find Arab and Berber voices in these texts. “Indigénophile” authors such as Elissa Rhais, Albert Truphémus and Victor Trenga comment on Jewish and Muslim sensibilities largely ignored by the “algérianistes.”²⁰ The Muslim novelists mentioned above do not delve into European settler society, but rather examine an indigenous sphere unexplored in the corpus of texts analyzed here.

The descriptions and definitions of “algérianité” recorded by authors of European ancestry are particularly revealing in light of the fact that this category had no legal bearing. French law during the colonial period did not recognize anyone living in Algeria as *Algerian*: “Judicial discourse (controlled largely by metropolitan French authorities) refuses to attribute [Algerian status] to the inhabitants of Algeria whoever they may be ...” Furthermore, “when the law finally recognizes an Algeria inhabited by ‘Algerians,’ it [Algeria] ceases to be French” (Henry 52). There was thus no law recognizing a specifically Algerian category, European or indigenous, in this French colonial territory. No Algerian passport, Algerian identifying papers or official documentation distinguished Algerian persons from French ones.²¹ Yet European novelists and essayists insisted that Algerian identity existed. If “algérianité” did indeed crystallize, it evolved independent of state assistance. France and French institutions did not encourage the propagation of such a sensibility.²²

Many of the cited authors were “Algerians” themselves and sought acknowledgment of their specificity. Rejecting the colonial status quo, Frenchness, they attempted to define through the written word the character of an officially in-existent group. At the very least, they succeeded in calling attention to their presence. Reports authorized by the colonial offices of the Government-General note Algerian sentiment among settler populations.²³ Early and contemporary social scientists

also recognize the emergence of “le peuple algérien” in their studies.²⁴ “Algérianité” existed to the extent that impassioned authors desired, imagined and described it, and to the extent that particular groups acknowledged this contention. Benedict Anderson argues convincingly how texts help to generate and conceptualize a sense of connectedness between peoples.²⁵ Writers and intellectuals, “Algerian” or otherwise, can certainly play an important role in helping to create recognized social categories.

Note

¹I am informed by the theoretical framework developed by cultural historians such as Lynn Hunt. See Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: California UP, 1989).

²For an excellent survey of this colonial history, see Charles-Robert Ageron, *L'histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine* tomes I, II (Paris: PUF, 1964).

³In 1865, Arabs and Berbers became French subjects according to law. French citizenship was offered to members of the Muslim elite under certain conditions. The Crémieux decree of 1870 gave Algerian Jews collective French citizenship. Vichy officials revoked it seventy years later. A liberal naturalization law in 1889 granted non-French European immigrants French citizenship.

⁴See Jean Dejeux, *Bibliographie de la littérature “algérienne” des français* (Paris: CNRS, 1978).

⁵Some of Bertrand's more noteworthy books include *Le sang des races* (Paris: Ollendorf, 1899) and *Pépète et Althusar* (Paris: Fayard, 1904).

⁶Much of the literature “on” Algeria consists of nineteenth-century travel writing. See Jean Dejeux, *op. cit.*

⁷All translations in the text are my own.

⁸French citizenship and identity have historically placed strong emphasis on *jus soli* compared to other European nations. See Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992).

⁹Cagayous is the creation of Musette, who immortalized his adventures in a series of dime-store novels written between 1895 and 1920. Musette, alias Auguste Robinet, had an intimate knowledge of the lower European classes in Algiers. See Emanuel Sivan, “Colonialism and Popular Culture in Algeria,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 14-1

(January 1979) 21-54.

¹⁰See Aimé Dupuy, "La personnalité du colon," *Revue d'histoire économique et sociale* XXXIII, (1955) 77-103, 166-205.

¹¹See Gabriel Audisio, *Jeunesse de la Méditerranée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1935).

¹²See works such as René Maunier's *Coutumes algériennes* (Paris: Domat-Montchrestien, 1935), and Robert Randau and Abdelkader Fikri, *Les compagnons du jardin* (Paris: Domat-Montchrestien, 1933).

¹³For Louis Bertrand's conception of "latinité," see *Les villes d'or. Algérie et Tunisie romaines* (Paris: Fayard, 1921), and *Sur les routes du sud* (Paris: Fayard, 1926).

¹⁴French parliamentary debate in 1945 warned of the rumblings of independence among European settlers.

¹⁵Such thoughts evoke a similar philosophy espoused by American revolutionaries in colonial America.

¹⁶See works such as Jean Méliá's *Dans la patrie française, la patrie algérienne* (Alger: La Maison des livres, 1952), Gabriel Audisio's *Amour d'Alger* (Alger: Charlot, 1938) and *Algérie, Méditerranée. Feux vivants* (Limoges: Rougerie, 1958), as well as Albert Camus' *Noces suivi de L'été* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954).

¹⁷See in particular the series of essays by Ferhat Abbas in *De la colonie à la province. Le jeune algérien* (Paris: Editions du jeune parc, 1931).

¹⁸Albert Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé précédé du portrait du colonisateur* (Paris: Buchet/Chaste, 1957); Frantz Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre* (Paris: Maspero, 1961).

¹⁹See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993) and Morroe Berger, *Real and Imagined Worlds: The Novel and Social Science* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1977).

²⁰Elissa Rhâis, *Les juifs ou la fille d'Eléazar* (Paris: Plon, 1921); Albert Truphémus, *Ferhat, instituteur indigène* (Paris: France-Afrique, 1935); Victor Trenga, *Berberopolis* (Alger: Rives, Lemoine, Romeu, 1922).

²¹In census reports of the twentieth century, demographers do not specify an "Algerian" category.

²²Gérard Noiriel argues that circulating symbols of a governing state such as passports, identity cards and even money, are what most serve to generate a sense of national identity. See Noiriel, *Population, immigration et identité nationale* (Paris: Hachette supérieur, 1992).

²³See Archives d'Outre-Mer (AOM), 8 X 445, *La question espagnole en Algérie*, 1942.

²⁴See Victor Demontès, *Le peuple algérien. Essais de démographie algérienne* (Alger: Imprimerie algérienne, 1906) and Philippe Lucas and Jean-Claude Vatin, *L'Algérie des anthropologues* (Paris: Maspero, 1975).

²⁵Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983).

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ECOS MAIMONIDIANOS EN LA POESÍA DE
JUAN DE MENA Y EL MARQUÉS DE SANTILLANA



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La poesía de Juan de Mena (1411-1456) y el Marqués de Santillana (1398-1458) atestigüa un fenómeno poco estudiado de amplias repercusiones literarias en el siglo XV español: la diseminación popular de ideas aristotélicas por mediación hispanojudía. Una lectura cuidadosa de estas obras pone de relieve la presencia—a veces, explícita, otras, cifrada en imágenes literarias—de temas quintaesenciales de esta tradición filosófica: la teodicea, la Providencia divina, la polémica creacionista y los límites de la razón demostrativa. En algunos casos, ciertas peculiaridades en el tratamiento literario de estos temas delatan, por otra parte, una posible etiología de signo hispanojudaico. No hay que tomar partido en el debate sobre el putativo linaje judeoconverso de Mena¹ para apreciar su posible receptividad al acervo intelectual de las aljamas españolas. Tampoco hay que incurrir en vagas elucubraciones filogenéticas para documentar históricamente las fuentes hispanojudías a las que tanto Mena como Santillana pudieran tener acceso. La crítica ya ha comenzado a evaluar los tres vehículos diseminadores del saber filosófico hispanojudío en la España cristiana del siglo XV, a saber: (1) las traducciones contemporáneas de clásicos hebraicos al castellano como el *Sefer ha-Kuzari* de Halevi² y el *Moreh Nebuchim* de Maimónides (éste último, el *Mostrador de los Turbados* en la traducción de 1432 de Pedro de Toledo, hallado en la biblioteca de Santillana)³; (2) la redacción de compendios de filosofía hispanohebraica de amplia circulación también en el vernáculo—el caso de la *Visión Deleytable* de Alfonso de la Torre, el tratado de filosofía maimonidiana más influyente en la España cristiana del siglo XV⁴—y, finalmente, (3) el contacto directo con judíos (y aun conversos) “sabidores” de estas materias no sólo en las aljamas mas aun en las cortes españolas hasta los albores de la Expulsión (e.g. el caso de los filósofos judíos Abraham Bibago, Joseph ben Shem Tov, Hasdai Crescas e Isaac Abravanel).⁵

En este ensayo, examinaremos brevemente la presencia de dos temas filosóficos en esta poesía: la relación de la fortuna con la Providencia y el debate cosmogónico. Esperamos que este ejercicio con-

tribuya a dilucidar la fortuna literaria de esta tradición filosófica en el último siglo de la España medieval.⁶

La literatura imaginativa y religiosa del siglo XV español registra una amplia gama de interpretaciones medievales para la fortuna clásica, dos de las cuales son predominantes: la escolástica y la astrológica. La fortuna escolástica, según la describe Boecio en *De consolacione*, vincula el *caso* o la *ventura* en su sentido aristotélico-tomista de lo accidental con la agencia providencial de la causalidad divina. Podemos consignar esta subordinación de la fortuna boeciana a la Providencia en los poemas del *Cancionero de Baena* escritos por clérigos—fray Alonso de la Monja, fray Lope del Monte, fray Diego de Valencia.⁸

En cambio, la interpretación astrológica concibe la fortuna como término designatorio para el efecto conjunto de los influjos astrales sobre el mundo sublunar. Esta fortuna coincide con el determinismo astrológico cifrado en la noción de los “fados.” Charles Fraker, en su estudio sobre el *Cancionero de Baena*, atribuye esta concepción astrológica de la fortuna en la Europa cristiana bajomedieval a una tradición de comentaristas de la *Divina Commedia* del siglo XIV que entronca con la diseminación popular de ideas astrológicas de filiación musulmana.⁹ Los poemas de Villasandino, Lando e Imperial en el *Cancionero de Baena* y las *Coblas de Fortuna* del valenciano Jacme March delatan la influencia—directa en el caso de Imperial, indirecta en el resto (según Fraker)—de esta interpretación astrológico-determinista de la fortuna dantesca (*Inferno* VII: 67-96) en el siglo XV español.

Con una gran destreza, el *Laberinto* de Juan de Mena combina ambas interpretaciones en su evocación alegórica de la diosa Fortuna. Fiel a su concepción escolástica inicial (coplas 9-12), la Fortuna mudable cuya esencia estriba en la “desordenança” está subordinada a los designios inescrutables de la Providencia divina. La Providencia es “la gobernadora y la medianera de aqueste gran mundo” (copla 24): la Fortuna arbitraria la sirve aunque con renuencia.¹⁰ La visión alegórica subsecuente de la casa de la Fortuna da paso, sin embargo, a la interpretación astrológica. La Providencia “principessa y disponedora de...suertes y *fados*” (copla 24) también gobierna “aqueste gran mundo” por medio de las configuraciones astrales de los siete planetas, las emanaciones celestes mediadas por la Fortuna a través de las cuales los habitantes del mundo sublunar “son inclinados a disposición de las virtudes y costelación de la materia de cada una espera” (coplas 67-68). Los decretos astrales de la Fortuna pueden ser irrevocables, según nos lo confirma el poeta al narrar la historia del Conde de Niebla (coplas 159-187), llegando a ser

instrumentos divinos de un determinismo astral casi absoluto.

La crítica ya ha consignado algunas de las fuentes literarias más relevantes para la fortuna de Mena, sobre todo su deuda palmaria con la fortuna dantesca y con la tradición boeciana.¹¹ Esta fusión de ambas fortunas—la astrológica y la escolástica—como agentes de la Providencia también tiene otras resonancias no advertidas—algunas muy específicas—de la tradición hispanojudía de la *Visión Deleytable*. Primeramente, vemos aquí poetizada una concepción ecléctica de la Providencia natural abierta a la astrología cuyo esbozo contemporáneo más claro lo hallamos precisamente en la interpretación alfonsina de *MNII*, 48 y III, 17-18. La *Visión Deleytable* (I, 24-25) ofrece una explicación fuertemente naturalista de la Providencia divina y la mediación sublunar de su causalidad eficiente que conjuga ambas concepciones de la fortuna bajo rúbricas distintas. Distinguiendo estrictamente entre la fortuna en el sentido escolástico de lo accidental y los *fados* como rúbrica de los influjos astrales, Alfonso de la Torre define la Providencia como la mediación causal de la voluntad divina en el mundo sublunar a través del efecto conjunto de la fortuna, los *fados*, la *natura* y el libre albedrío. La fortuna escolástica y los *fados* astrales quedan igualmente subordinados a la Providencia según fuera dispuesto por la voluntad divina en *illo tempore*.¹²

Esta astrologización del naturalismo maimonidiano y su análisis concomitante de la Providencia goza de importantes precedentes en el pensamiento hispanojudío de la baja Edad Media. Maimónides mismo repudia tajantemente toda noción astrológica.¹³ Eso no impide sin embargo que varios pensadores judíos post-maimonidianos reinterpretaran algunas doctrinas esotéricas del *Mostrador de los Turbados* en términos astro-deterministas, sobre todo a raíz de la controversia predestinaria entre Abner de Burgos y Yitzhaq Policar en el siglo XIV.¹⁴ La reivindicación de la astrología en el análisis de la Providencia natural y la causalidad divina en la *Visión Deleytable* (precisamente el tipo de saber filosófico-astrológico que Mena preconiza en la figura de Enrique de Villena)¹⁵ contrasta con las concepciones puramente escolásticas de la Providencia en la literatura de la época. La subordinación providencial de ambas fortunas en el *Laberinto* y su apertura al determinismo astral se aproximan mucho más a las fuentes hispanojudías de la *Visión Deleytable* que a la inspiración eclesiástica de sus contemporáneos cristianos.

En segundo lugar, la concepción literaria de la casa de la Fortuna en Mena (y sobre todo de la Fortuna astrologizada en Santillana) también evoca una imagen bíblica central para la tradición filosófica hispanojudía: la visión del trono de Dios de Ezequiel o *Ma'aseh merkavah*. Esta visión profética (Ez 1 y 10), objeto de extensa especulación esotéri-

ca desde tiempos rabínicos, cobra especial importancia en la tradición filosófica judía a raíz de su identificación maimonidiana en *MN* III, 1-7 como una alegoría de la metafísica. Estos pasajes bíblicos describen con lujo de detalle una compleja visión del trono divino. El trono “como de piedra de zafiro” con una figura de apariencia humana yace sobre una bóveda de cristal encaramada en un carruaje celeste. El carruaje contiene cuatro seres alados meticulosamente descritos y una rueda (“como el destello de crisólito”) afianzada sobre la tierra que parece consistir de cuatro ruedas concéntricas, llenas de ojos e inmersas en una densa atmósfera de llamas, centellas y los fulgores iridiscentes del misterioso “hashmal.”

No podemos abordar aquí la compleja historia exegética de esta visión. Cabe destacar, sin embargo, dos aspectos de su exégesis maimonidiana a la luz de sus comentaristas medievales. En primer lugar, los capítulos pertinentes del *Mostrador* (III, 1-7) sugieren, según los comentaristas (e.g. Shem Tov), una interpretación cosmológica de esta visión donde la rueda corresponde al mundo sublunar, sus cuatro subdivisiones a los cuatro elementos, los cuatro seres vivientes a las esferas celestes y el trono a la convexidad de la novena esfera (es decir, a la gloria divina, no Su esencia): este esquema se prestó a una lectura astrológica en la tradición hispanojudía en la que enmarcábamos a la *Visión* cuyas repercusiones literarias veremos más adelante. En segundo lugar no debemos olvidar el debate intrajudaico sobre la posibilidad del conocimiento metafísico que encuadra a su exégesis. Maimónides considera tanto a Dios como al mundo supralunar los objetos inaprensibles de la metafísica a los que esta visión apuntala. Dios en esencia trasciende el alcance del intelecto humano por lo que sólo puede ser aprehendido negativamente (*MN* I: 52-53, 58-59). El mundo supralunar difiere del sublunar por no ceñirse a las leyes de la física aristotélica (*MN* II: 17-22). La visión profética sólo ofrece analogías imperfectas de una esfera inaccesible a la razón demostrativa que requieren ser descifradas.

Con esto en mente y sin reducir la concepción literaria de estos poemas a una sola fuente, podemos destacar algunos paralelos de los mismos con la visión de Ezequiel. La Fortuna de Mena en el *Laberinto*, al igual que la semblanza humana en el trono de Ezequiel, es una delegada divina que rige sobre el mundo sublunar desde un palacio cosmológico. La casa de la Fortuna y el carruaje celeste constituyen otros tantos mapas alegóricos del cosmos que también albergan una serie de ruedas concéntricas (tres en el caso de Mena, cuatro en la visión) con múltiples atributos y subdivisiones vinculados a los siete planetas (notemos que aunque la rueda de la Fortuna es un lugar común del Medioevo, el detalle de las tres ruedas concéntricas en Mena—según lo advirtiese Lida—carece de

antecedentes en la tradición literaria de la fortuna cristiana).¹⁶ El pasaje de Ezequiel según esta interpretación hispanojudía contiene precisamente una visión de ruedas concéntricas afianzadas sobre la tierra y asociadas al orden de las esferas celestes que gobiernan sobre el mundo sublunar. La asociación de las ruedas con el conocimiento del pasado, el presente y el futuro también resuena con la interpretación astrológica de esta visión: el conocimiento de las esferas supralunares simbolizadas por el carruaje es la base del saber predictivo de la astrología y corresponde en alcance a la profecía natural. Aun el ascenso del poeta a la casa de la Fortuna en un carruaje celeste podría ser tomado como otro detalle alusorio al texto de Ezequiel. Notemos finalmente el encuadre exegético de la visión de Mena. La Providencia se ofrece a dilucidar el misterio de la Fortuna en la medida en que pueda “ser apalpada de humano intelecto” con un lenguaje cifrado que exige esa mayor atención al “seso” que al “vocablo” propia de los “entendidos” (copla 33): una inmersión de su alegoría en un ambiente de alusiones esotéricas que resuenan con el problema del conocimiento metafísico y la concepción maimonidiana del mundo supralunar como objeto de una visión profética inaccesible a la física aristotélica.

Claro que en el caso de Mena, nuestras comparaciones de sus ideas astrológicas con la tradición hispanojudía son tal vez especulativas, basadas en un intento parcial por dilucidar posibles alusiones filosóficas cifradas en su poesía. La poesía de Santillana, a quien Mena pudo deber su eventual conocimiento de las fuentes hebraicas que nos interesan, entronca más claramente con esta tradición literaria de la fortuna astrológizada y el *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, recogiendo algunos ecos palmarios de su reelaboración en la filosofía hispanojudía. En un poema tan temprano como el *Triunfete de Amor* (I, 165-173), nos topamos ya con la Fortuna en un carro triunfal de oro con “dos señores arreantes y quatro coseres amblantes” (copla 15), quizás una vaga reminiscencia del carruaje de Ezequiel. En el *Sueño* (I, 173-202), Santillana le atribuye a la fortuna un poder absoluto sobre la pasión amorosa y hace de los *fados* árbitros insobornables de sus terribles decretos, sumergiendo el poema en una atmósfera de presagios astrológicos que evoca la imagen de la fortuna para cifrar estéticamente su fatalismo inexcusado.¹⁷ En la *Comedieta de Ponza* (I, 237-304), un poema consolatorio sobre la derrota y prisión de Alfonso V de Aragón por los genoveses, Santillana conjura una densa visión alegórica de la fortuna como avatar de los fados astrales que resuena con varios temas de la tradición filosófica: la más exquisita poetización de la fortuna astrológizada en la literatura española del siglo XV. El poeta ya nos da una clave explícita de su sentido esotérico en el cuadro elogioso

que nos pinta la reina Leonor de su primogénito. En la copla 26 afirma que Alfonso V “sintió las visiones de Ezechiel / con toda la ley de sacra doctrina” (es decir, que era precisamente un conocedor de los secretos del *Ma’aseh merkavah* que antes vinculamos con el saber metafísico y la astrología). El encomio de la copla siguiente, como hiciera Mena con Villena en el círculo de Febo, confirma esta idealización de Alfonso V como filósofo y astrólogo: “ni fizo Atalante en Astrología; / oyó los secretos de filosofía / Y los fuertes passos de naturaleza; / obtuuo el intento de la su pureza / Y profundamente vyo la pohesía.”

Tras morir de pesadumbre la reina de Aragón, la Fortuna tantas veces aludida aparece en “femenil forma” ataviada de cuerpos celestes y configuraciones astrales para consolar al grupo de lamentadoras. Su evocación poética (coplas 85-93) es un derroche de imaginaria astrológica entreverado de referencias precisas al mundo supralunar. Viste “una tocha de damasco viz / de muy fina seda y de ricas lauores / De color de neta gema de Tarsiz / Sembrada d’estrellas de muchos colores” (copla 87). La gema de Tarsiz, según veremos más abajo, es una referencia muy precisa al *Ma’aseh merkavah*. Lleva además las constelaciones zodiacales ceñidas a la cintura y una guirnalda de piedras preciosas al cuello con “siete firmalles, que de las planetas / mostrauan sus fuerças y ciertas sinyales”—esta última imagen inspirada, sin duda, por los talismanes astrológicos de la lapidaria medieval en los que se esculpían las figuras de los planetas para atraer sus respectivos influjos.

El discurso consolatorio de la Fortuna (coplas 108-118) refuerza el cúmulo de alusiones evocadas por su descripción: en lenguaje de cierta precisión filosófica, la Fortuna describe su rol mediador como delegada “de Dios Uno Eterno” a cargo del mundo sublunar. Al igual que la inteligencia primera de la cosmología aviceniana, la Fortuna astrológizada de la *Comedieta de Ponza* revuelve “las ruedas del gran firmamento,” las esferas celestes de las cuales depende el mantenimiento del orden natural en la esfera de lo engendrado o corruptible (“De lo que s’engendra yo soy causadora / Y quien lo corrompe, no es sino yo...”). A través de su “fatal mouimiento,” las esferas rigen las condiciones climáticas del mundo sublunar según descritas minuciosamente en la meteorología aristotélica: las bases supralunares de nuestra complejidad temperamental. Al revolver las esferas, la Fortuna también rige el destino humano “segund la razón / De sus nacimientos y costellación / Y todos estados me son obedientes.” Por ende goza con la capacidad de predecir el futuro (según lo revela su nota profética sobre el glorioso destino de Alfonso V al concluir el poema).

Santillana, al igual que Mena, conjura la fortuna astrologizada como rúbrica para esa urdimbre de causas naturales que gobiernan el orden sublunar de acuerdo con la cosmología filosófica articulada en obras como la *Visión Delectable*. La tradición filosófica que descubre en sus fuentes hispanojudías se convierte aquí en la materia prima de una delicada reflexión poética.

Cabe aducir, finalmente, un poema tardío carente de alusiones astrológicas explícitas pero que confirma mejor que ningún otro el posible interés de Santillana en el *Ma'aseh Merkavah*: la *Canonización de los Bienaventurados Sanctos, Maestre Viçente Ferrer, Predicador e Maestre Pedro de Villacreçes, Frayre Menor* (II, 189-199). En este poema menor, escrito antes de 1455 e inspirado obviamente en el *Paradiso* de Dante, Santillana conjura una visión extática de la gloria divina y las huestes celestes que han de atestiguar la canonización de ambos frailes. Las dos estrofas que nos interesan (12-13) preceden la visión luminosa del rostro divino:

XII

*Non bastava humanidat
á que mas alto subiesse
mi vista, ni resistiesse
la divina claridat;
pero ví en cantidat
fermosos quatro animales,
difformes en las señales,
mas unos en la entidat*

XIV

*Qual inçendio del asmal
transpareçe por veril
ví mas en forma viril
el sancto quarto animal
á la diestra paternal”
é sus vultos elejí
ser como claro rubí,
á quien çircunda cristal.*

Corominas traduce *asmal* como esmalte, sugiriendo que “del francés antiguo *esmal* o *esmail* (hoy *émail*) puede salir la forma *asmal* empleada por Santillana.”¹⁸ El contexto inmediato de este “inçendio” nos sugiere, sin embargo, otra alternativa más plausible: una posible referen-

cia al fulgor del electro (*hashmal* [חשמל] en hebreo, *electrum* en la Vulgata) en la visión de Ezequiel. El trono divino en Ez 1 se hallaba rodeado precisamente por el fulgor del *hashmal* también incendiado.¹⁹ En la traducción del *Mostrador* que tenía Santillana, Pedro de Toledo usa el vocablo *hasmal* para designarlo.²⁰ Lo mismo acontece con algunas de las Biblias españolas traducidas por judíos.²¹ Si éste fuera el caso, nuestra interpretación encuadraría muy bien con otras dos posibles alusiones al trono celeste en estas estrofas: la referencia a los “cuatro animales difformes en las señales más unos en la entidad” que evoca a los cuatro seres alados del carruaje celestial (Ez 1: 5-14) y la descripción de los rostros divinos como un rubí luminoso “a quien çircunda cristal” (quizás una compleja alusión trinitaria en la que el “sancto quarto animal”—Cristo—yace “à la diestra paternal” y ambos están rodeados de cristal—el “yelo terrible” bajo el trono de Ezequiel²² pero también una referencia al cuarzo, símbolo del Espíritu en la lapidaria medieval). Recordemos además que la visión cristológica del “quarto animal” como “forma viril” resuena con la “figura de apariencia humana” (דמות במראה אדם) sentada en el trono de Ezequiel (Ez 1: 26). Aun cabría especular si el *veril* aquí mencionado, identificado por un editor de Santillana como parte de la custodia,²³ se refiere más bien al crisólito de la rueda celeste en Ez 1: 16 y 10: 9—*beril* en español medieval (del latín *beryllus* < del griego βηρυλλος, una palabra de origen índico relacionada al sánscrito *vaidurya* que significa ojo de gato). El *beril* (*chrysolithos* en la Vulgata)²⁴ es precisamente la gema de Tarsiz (אבן תרשיש) cuyo color luce la Fortuna astrológica de la *Comedieta de Ponza* en su “tocha de damasco...sembrada d'estrellas.”²⁵

En resumen, si estamos en lo correcto, la “hebraización” de este poema devocional de inspiración cristológica refuerza nuestra tesis: que un “mudejarismo” literario subyace en el manejo selectivo de fuentes hispanojudías en la poética de Santillana.

Otro problema quintaesencial de la filosofía medieval es el debate sobre la creación *ex-nihilo* versus la eternidad del mundo. ¿Es el mundo creado de la nada absoluta por la voluntad de un Creador según lo afirman las tradiciones reveladas? ¿O es el mundo eterno, increado y Dios tan sólo su Primer Motor según lo afirma Aristóteles? ¿Hay quizás alguna posición intermedia entre éstas—por ejemplo que el mundo es creado por Dios de una materia prima preexistente según la opinión de Platón?

No podemos abordar aquí las ramificaciones de esta polémica compleja medieval ni reproducir el debate intenso de la crítica maimonidiana sobre el verdadero significado de la postura creacionista en el

Mostrador.²⁶ Sólo cabe hacer dos breves observaciones como trasfondo para los versos de Santillana que nos interesan:

1) La filosofía escolástica del siglo XV español era esencialmente tomista y su postura hacia el debate cosmogónico era la creación *ex-nihilo* (los debates filosóficos intracristianos de la tradición escotista-nominalista quedan al margen de la escolástica española académica hasta los albores del Siglo de Oro). En cambio, el debate intrajudaico sobre la cosmogonía maimonidiana recoge toda una amplia gama de posibilidades desde la eternidad del mundo (Narboni, Caspi) y la compatibilidad de la postura platónica con la Tora (Ibn Ezra) hasta la defensa incondicional de la creación *ex-nihilo*. No nos sorprende hallar filósofos judíos disertando sobre la cosmogonía con aristócratas cristianos (el caso del tudelano Abraham Bibago a quien Juan II de Aragón invita a su corte para aclarar ciertas dudas sobre este problema).²⁷ Santillana conocía el análisis maimonidiano de la cosmogonía ya que tenía a la mano el *Mostrador* en castellano: pudo muy bien conocer las ramificaciones post-maimonidianas del debate de boca de los judíos y “conversos” que le facilitarían acceso a estas fuentes filosóficas.

2) La *Visión Deleytable* (I, 27) afirma inequívocamente que Dios crea una materia prima de la nada absoluta, usándola como base para el diseño del mundo: esta postura combina elementos de la posición platónica con una clara defensa de la creación *ex-nihilo*. Sin embargo, Alfonso de la Torre parece contradecirse cuando afirma igualmente, en la única variante a su regurgitación del listado de premisas aristotélicas de *MN* II, 1 (*VD* I, 19), que los cielos ni son engendrables ni incorruptibles, es decir que son eternos.

Ambas posturas tienen resonancias explícitas en los poemas de Santillana.

Entre sus obras tempranas, se conservan un par de preguntas y respuestas compuestas a guisa de pasatiempo en las que un poeta propone un acertijo en verso de tema ligero e ingenioso y otro responde debidamente usando la misma versificación. Nos ha llegado, sin embargo, una pregunta sin respuesta a nombre del Marqués (quizás, como tantas, dirigida a Mena) que aborda la segunda problemática antes mencionada.

Citamos por extenso (I, 118):

*Gran rretorico eloquente
a quien la rrazon florida
con rreuerençia deuida
se vos inclina vmilmente*

*transcendente
en las artes liberales
por metros filosofales
vos quiero fazer pregunta
et veremos quien apunta
por sus puntos logicales
o rreplicato e rresunta*

*Non fallo nin he fallado
rrespuesta que me contente
nin solo por espediente
me rrelierre de cuydado
maguer aya preguntado
a mis grandes theologales
si los cuerpos celestiales
an tiempo et limitacion
o si son sin condicion
para sienpre perpetuales
pues non an alteracion.*

*Por tanto yo vos suplico
buen señor que sin rrespuesta
non dejades mi rrequesta
avn que bien no metrifico
[y veredes sy replico]
rretoricos o especiales
bien guardada poetria
maguer que en teologia
non deuen materiales
disçerner con osadia.*

FIN

*Por la metropologia
segunt la graciosa via
flor et luz de naturales*

El estilo y contenido de este decir lo sitúa en el ámbito de los poetas filosofantes—mayormente conversos—del *Cancionero de Baena*. La pregunta está dirigida a un “retórico eloquente” de “razón florida” versado en materia filosófica y trata precisamente sobre la putativa incor-

ruptibilidad de los cuerpos celestes. El Marqués inquiere si estos cuerpos “an tiempo y limitación” o “si son sin condición para sienpre perpetuales pues non an alteración.” En el lenguaje aristotélico medieval, quiere saber en esencia si son “engendrables y corruptibles,” o sea si el mundo supralunar se rige o no a las leyes de la física aristotélica que gobiernan sobre el orden de la naturaleza. Añade que no ha hallado quien le responda a su satisfacción a pesar de haber consultado “grandes theologales.” Esta perplejidad que confiesa revela una posible apreciación de lo que está aquí en juego: la viabilidad filosófica de la creación *ex-nihilo*. Si Santillana hubiese leído con atención los pasajes pertinentes de la *Visión Deleytable*, podríamos interpretar su pregunta como un intento por subrayar el problema que supone la eternidad de los cielos en *VD I*, 19 a la postura creacionista en *VD I*, 27 que él mismo ha de reiterar en su *Bías contra Fortuna*. Notemos además su críptica alusión a la “Metropología” (quizás un fragmento de la respuesta perdida). Este texto aristotélico, un sumario de ciencias naturales, es de suma importancia en esta polémica medieval en el ámbito hispanojudío: la *Meteorología* es la primera obra científica no-judía traducida al hebreo y fue concebida por varios pensadores hispanojudaicos como clave para desentrañar el sentido esotérico de la cosmogonía maimonidiana.²⁸ Santillana pudo derivar de sus fuentes hispanohebraicas esta asociación de la meteorología aristotélica con el problema cosmogónico y los secretos de las “naturas” (por eso no nos sorprende que el mismo Juan de Mena identifique a Aristóteles en la *Coronación* como “aquel por cuyo seso, / los Metauros florecieron”).

En el *Bias contra Fortuna* (II, 79-154), su apreciación básica de esta polémica es aún más palmaria. El Marqués pone en labios de su héroe Bías una exposición detallada sobre el origen del mundo y el mantenimiento del orden sublunar (coplas 101-111) que concuerda con la cosmogonía semi-maimonidiana de la *Visión Deleytable*. Su lección filosófica comienza así:

CI
Donde se falla el processo
de la materia primera
é como é por cuál manera
por orden é mando expresso
aquel globo de natura
ó caos
fué dividido por Dios
con tan diligente cura.

CII

*Ca antes que se apartassen
las tierras del Oçeano
ayre, é fuego soberano
é con forma se formassen,
un bulo é ayuntamiento
era todo,
é congregación sin modo,
sin ordenança nin cuento.*

CIII

*E juntos e discordantes
todos los quatro elementos
en uno, mas descontentos
de sus obras non obrantes
eran, e sin arte alguna
nin un solo
rayo demostrava Apolo
nin su claridad la luna.*

CIV

*Mas natura naturante
sin rumor é sin rebate
desolvió tan grand debate
é mandó, como imperante
que los çielos sus lumbreras
demostrassen,
é por cursos s'ordenassen
las otras baxas esferas.*

CV

*E que la rueda del fuego
la del ayre resceptasse
la qual el agua abraçasse
aquella la tierra luego
O muy util conjunçion
é concordança
donde resultó folgança
é mundana perfection!*

Tenemos aquí una destilación poética muy precisa de los orígenes de la Creación según descritos en la *Visión Deleytable*. El mundo es esculpido por su Creador del *hyle* aristotélico, la materia prima (nótese que no queda claro si esta materia es eternamente preexistente o también creada—quizás una concesión a la duda que expresaba en el decir narrativo anterior). Dios le impone orden al caos primordial de la materia prima al separar los cuatro elementos y darle forma a las esferas celestes que rigen la configuración del orden sublunar. A través de la “natura naturante,” el principio dinámico del mundo físico que sirve de mediatriz ineluctable entre Dios y sus criaturas, Dios procede sistemáticamente con la creación de los animales (copla 106) y la liberación de los cuatro vientos operantes en la esfera meteorológica. Esta faena cosmogónica culmina con la creación de “el onbre racional, / á los celestes equal, / al qual fiço, é puso nonbre” (copla 109).

Nótese el contexto inmediato de esta disertación filosófica. Bías, un modelo de estoicismo pagano y resignación filosófica a los embates de la adversidad, debate los méritos de su vida “contemplativa” con una fortuna muy distinta de sus encarnaciones previas en la poesía del Marqués. La fortuna cruel e inhumana de este poema está desentendida completamente de la Providencia divina: sus invectivas contra Bías expresan una visión filosófica de un mundo indiferente a la condición humana en el que reinan los caprichos de la contingencia y los decretos de un orden natural insobornable (esa “verticalidad de la historia” en el mundo sublunar asociada por Stephen Gilman con la transfiguración literaria de la Fortuna como cifra del predicamento converso en la España inquisitorial).²⁹

En las coplas que anteceden al discurso cosmogónico de Bías, la Fortuna, por ejemplo, le advierte a guisa de amenaza que “de sus bienes é males ... dubdo que los fallemos / en el pesso ser eguales / Ca las cosas son judgadas / por mas e mayores partes / Asy lo quieren las artes / e las sciencias provadas.” En esos versos tenemos una clara alusión a la teodicea racionalista formulada en el *Mostrador* (III, 8, 12 y 15) y reiterada en *VD* (I, 23, 25): en resumen, que los bienes de la Creación superan a los males inevitables que puedan sobrevenirles a los habitantes del mundo sublunar—el mal es inherente a la materia prima de la Creación ya que el universo no es por diseño antropocéntrico. La fortuna se atribuye a sí misma el origen de estos males inevitables según los explica Maimónides, conjurando esta teodicea en su intento por subyugar la férrea voluntad de su oponente. Así espera derrotarlo con su propia arma: el ejercicio activo de la razón demostrativa.

Pero el Bías filosofante de Santillana, portavoz de una *consolatio maimonidiae* moderada, encara las asechanzas de la Fortuna con un

desapego estoico revestido de “virtud racional” (copla 34) y confianza boeciana en la fortaleza moral que confiere la contemplación filosófica. Bías estaba educado en el currículo filosófico que preconiza la *Visión* (“Yo fuy bien prinçiapdo / en las liberales artes / e sentí todas sus partes / e después de grado en grado / oy de philosophia natural / e la ethica moral / ques duquesa que nos guía”—copla 126). Consumado filósofo que es, no repudia por ende los argumentos maimonidianos de la Fortuna ni le aturden sus amenazas: por el contrario, en el discurso susodicho reafirma la inmunidad intelectual a los embates de la Fortuna que su saber—quizás maimonidiano—le confiere. Su peroración cosmogónica viene a confirmar su reconciliación con el orden creado según concebido en esta cosmología filosófica. Bías encarna la perfección moral del filósofo a través del saber especulativo: un avatar poético del Marqués filosofante aunque aficionado que busca solaz intelectual hacia el final de su vida.³⁰

En estas páginas, hemos explorado algunas posibles reverberaciones de la tradición filosófica hispanojudía en dos figuras señeras de la poesía española del siglo XV. Esperamos que futuras investigaciones nos permitan dilucidar con una base más amplia el alcance de la deuda literaria española a la cultura hebraica antes que la Expulsión truncara en seco el ímpetu creador de las aljamas medievales.

Notes

¹ A favor del extracto converso de Mena, véanse: María Rosa Lida, “Notas para la biografía de Juan de Mena,” *Revista de Filología Hispánica* 3 (1941): 150-154; Lida, *Juan de Mena: poeta del prerrenacimiento español* 2da edición (México, 1984) 93, n. 6; y Américo Castro, *La realidad histórica de España*, (México: Porrúa, 1973) 82. En contra de esta tesis, véanse: Florence Street, “La vida de Juan de Mena,” *Bulletin Hispanique* 55 (1953): 149-173; y Eugenio Asensio, “La peculiaridad literaria de los conversos,” *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 4 (1957): 327-351.

² Esta traducción castellana se conserva en el manuscrito 17812 de la Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid.

³ Para una edición crítica moderna de esta traducción castellana del *Moreh Nebuchim*, la primera traducción conocida de esta obra a un vernáculo europeo, véase Moses Ibn Maimon, *Mostrador e Enseñador de los Turbados*, ed. Moshe Lazar (California: Labyrinthos, 1989). Sobre Pedro de Toledo, véanse: Mario Schiff, “Una traducción española del

More Nebuchim,” *Revista Crítica de Historia y Literatura Española, Portuguesa e Hispanoamericana*, 269 (1897): 160-176; Itzhak Bar-Lewaw, “Pedro de Toledo, El primer traductor español de *More Nebujim*,” *Homenaje a Antonio Rodríguez-Moñino*, (Madrid: Castalia, 1966) 1, 57-64; y Deborah Rosenblatt, “*Mostrador e enseñador de los turbados*: The First Spanish Translation of Maimonides’s *Guide of the Perplexed*,” *Studies in Honor of M.J. Benardete*, eds. Izaak A. Lagnas y Barton Sholod (New York: Las Americas Publishing Company, 1965) 47-82.

⁴ Esperamos abordar los orígenes, contenido y fortuna de esta importante obra en nuestra tesis doctoral para el “Committee for the Study of Religion” en la Universidad de Harvard (“Philosophical rationalism and the religious imagination in 15th century Christian Spain: Alfonso de la Torre’s *Visión Deleytable*”). Para una edición crítica moderna, véase *Visión Deleytable* ed. Jorge García López, 2 vols. (Salamanca, 1991).

⁵ Sobre la relación de estos pensadores judíos al ámbito de las cortes castellanas, véanse las secciones pertinentes de Yitzhaq Baer, *Historia de los judíos en la España cristiana*, trad. José Luis Lacave (Madrid: Altalena, 1981).

⁶ Citaremos la obra de Juan de Mena según la edición de Miguel Ángel Pérez Priego (*Obras completas* [Barcelona: Planeta, 1989]) y la del Marqués de Santillana según la edición de Manuel Durán (*Poesías completas* 2 vols. [Madrid: Castalia, 1975]): las citas parentéticas de Santillana incluirán el volumen y la página. Las referencias al *Moreh Nebuchim* de Maimónides (*MN*) y a la edición susodicha de la *Visión Deleytable* (*VD*) aparecerán entre paréntesis, el número de la parte seguido del número del capítulo.

⁷ Para ser más precisos: la concurrencia accidental de dos causas en la producción de un efecto que de suyo no están ordenadas a producir. Según lo explica Boecio: “Licet igitur definire casum esse inopinatum ex confluentibus causis in his, quae ob aliquid geruntur, eventum. Concurrere vero atque confluere causas facit ordo ille inevitabili conexione procedens, qui de providentiae fonte descendens cuncta suis locis temporibusque disponit” (Boethius, *Philosophiae consolationis* V, prosa 1—citamos según la edición de Karl Büchner [Heidelberg: Carlwinter Universitätsverlag, 1977]). Esta noción, retomada por Santo Tomás de Aquino, se origina en los capítulos 4-6 del segundo libro de la *Física* de Aristóteles.

⁸ Cf. Charles Fraker Jr, *Studies on the 'Cancionero de Baena,'* Studies in the Romance languages and literatures. no. 61. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966).

⁹ Cf. Fraker, *Studies* 91-116, esp. 99-103.

¹⁰ Diferimos aquí con la lectura de Juan de Dios Mendoza Negrillo (*Fortuna y providencia en la literatura castellana del siglo XV* [Madrid: Boletín de la Real Academia Española, 1973] 82-88).

¹¹ Para una reseña bibliográfica de la extensa literatura crítica (hasta 1981) sobre las fuentes de Mena remitimos a Ralph DiFranco *A Review of Concepts and Methodologies in Scholarship on Juan de Mena* (Illinois: Applied Literature Press, 1981) 50-100. Destacamos sobre todo el estudio seminal de María Rosa Lida antes citado, *Juan de Mena: poeta del pre-renacimiento español*. Véase también: Florence Street "The Allegory of Fortune and the Imitation of Dante in the *Laberinto* and *Coronación* of Juan de Mena" *Hispanic Review* 23 (1955): 1-11.

¹² Sobre las fuentes hispanohebraicas para el análisis de la Providencia en la *Visión Deleytable* véase Luis M. Girón Negrón "Astrology and magic in Alfonso de la Torre's *Visión Deleytable*" (este artículo será publicado por la Universidad de Tel Aviv en las actas del Howard Gilman International Colloquium—"The Spanish-Jewish Cultural Interaction").

¹³ Sobre el repudio maimonidiano de la astrología, véanse Ralph Lerner, "Maimonides' Letter on Astrology," *History of Religions* 8 (1968): 143-158; y Y. Tzvi Langermann, "Maimonides' Repudiation of Astrology," *Maimonidean Studies* 2 (1991): 123-158.

¹⁴ Cf. Girón Negrón "Astrology and magic"

¹⁵ Cf. Copla 126 del *Laberinto*: "Aquel que tú ves estar contemplando / el movimiento de tantas estrellas, / la obra, la fuerza, la orden de aquellas, / que mide los cursos de cómo y de cuándo / y hobo noticia filosofando / del movedor y de los conmovidos / de lumbres y rayos y son de tronidos / y supo las cabsas del mundo velando" (*Obras completas* 248-9).

¹⁶ Lida, *Juan de Mena* 16.

¹⁷ Concordamos aquí con la lectura de Rafael Lapesa en *La obra literaria del Marqués de Santillana* (Madrid: Insula, 1957) 120-121.

¹⁸ *Diccionario Crítico-Etimológico* II, 378.

¹⁹ El final de Ez 1: 4 reza en hebreo: **בְּעֵין הַחֶשְׁמֶל מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ וּמִתּוֹכָהּ**. Así lo traduce la Vulgata: "et de medio eius quasi species electri id est de medio ignis." Hay otras dos menciones bíblicas de *hasmal*: Ez 1: 27 y Ez 8: 2.

²⁰ En *MN* III, 5 y 7, dos de los capítulos del *Mostrador* sobre el sentido esotérico de esta visión, Pedro de Toledo traduce *hashmal* como “hasmal.” III, 7 es de interés particular ya que ahí Maimónides aborda sugerentemente las interpretaciones rabínicas de *hashmal*.

²¹ En el Ms. 87 de la Real Academia de la Historia—una Biblia romanceada del siglo XV publicada recientemente (*Biblia Romanceada* ed. Moshe Lazar, Francisco J. Pueyo Mena and Andrés Enrique-Arias [Madison, 1994])—leemos: “e de dentro de ella color de hasmal de dentro del fuego.” La Biblia de Alba de R. Moshe Arragel (1422-1433) pasa por alto lo del “color de hasmal.” El manuscrito I.j.3 del Escorial lee “color del angel” en línea con los comentarios de Rashi y Kimhi que consideran a *hashmal* “un ángel por ese nombre.” El manuscrito I.j.4 del Escorial reza “color de diamante.” La Biblia de Ferrara (1553) sí lo traduce como “color de Hazmal”: en *Prophets and Hagiographa* (Salonica, 1568-72), también leemos “el color de el hasmal.”

²² El trono divino está afianzado sobre un firmamento en forma de bóveda como de cristal o hielo (cf. en Ez 1: 22: רַהִיעַ בַּעֵין הַקֶּרֶת). *Qerah*, un vocablo hebraico para hielo o escarcha (e.g. Job 38, 29 y Gen 31, 40), puede significar también cristal. En la Biblia Romanceada antes citada, aparece “cristal” escrito encima de la traducción “color de terrible yelo,” sugiriéndolo como alternativa. En la Biblia de Alba, leemos “color de maravilloso cristal.” El manuscrito I.j.4 del Escorial lee “color de yelo paresçiente.”

²³ En la edición de Durán que manejamos, véase I, 194, n. 106.

²⁴ En Ez 10: 9, leemos “species autem erat rotarum quasi visio lapidis chrysoliti.” Ez 1: 16 traduce crisólito de forma distinta (“...quasi visio maris”).

²⁵ Cabe preguntarse de donde proviene esta identificación del *beril* con el *crisólito*. A pesar de una sofisticada lapidaria, son muchas las gemas cuyos nombres dan pie a identificaciones erróneas en el Medioevo. En el *Cancionero de Baena*, leemos “Çafir gentil, / claro beril, / es la su lynda feçura, / una de mill, / muy doñequil / excelente criatura” (II, 185a en la edición de 1860—referencia obtenida del *Diccionario Medieval Español* de Martín Alonso [Salamanca, 1986] bajo *beril*). El trono de Dios en Ez 1 parece “de piedra ssaphir,” lo que pudo prestarse a una asociación como ésta del berilo con el záfiro: algo semejante debió acontecer con el berilo y el crisólito. En las Biblias españolas, la piedra de “tharssis” también es identificada con el mármol (Ms I.j.3 del Escorial) y el jaspe (Ms I.j.4 del Escorial). En su comentario al *Cantar de los Cantares* 5-14 (otra refer-

encia a Tarsiz), fray Luis de León hace una interesante observación: “La piedra *tarsis*, que se llama así de la provincia adonde se halla, es un poco entre rosa y blanca, según la pinta un hebreo antiguo llamado Abenezra.” El comentario susodicho de Ibn Ezra a este versículo reza: “Una piedra preciosa como es la *tarsis* es un ónix y un jaspe; y hay los que dicen que es el color (apariencia) del cielo” (cf. Alexander Habib Arkin *La influencia de la exégesis hebrea en los comentarios bíblicos de fray Luis de León* [Madrid, 1966] 52-53). Vemos aquí la posible proveniencia de la asociación del crisólito con el jaspe. Nótese además su crítica alusión al Tarsiz como el color del cielo (“hay los que dicen...”). Esta sugerencia, evidente aún en el pasaje de Ezequiel, explica el que Santillana describa la “tocha” celestial de la Fortuna estrellada en la *Comedieta de Ponza* con este mismo color: otro dato que confirma su proximidad a unas fuentes hispanojudías.

²⁶ La literatura crítica sobre este tema es inmensa. Remitimos, sin embargo, a un estudio reciente que reseña las interpretaciones modernas más importantes de la cosmogonía maimonidiana: Marvin Fox, “Creation or Eternity: God Relation to the World,” *Interpreting Maimonides: Studies in Methodology, Metaphysics and Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) 251-296.

²⁷ Bibago alude a este incidente en su obra filosófica principal *Derekh Emunah* (III-5, 99a-b), un dato confirmado indirectamente por Shlomo Ibn Verga en su *Shebet Yehudah*.

²⁸ Cf. Aviezer Ravitzky “The Maimonidean Exegeses on the Account of Creation and Aristotle’s *Metereology*,” *Shlomo Pines Memorial Volume (Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought)* (Jerusalem, 1990) y Sara Klein-Braslavy, *Perush ha-Rambam le-Sippur Ber’at ha-’Olam* (Jerusalem, 1978).

²⁹ Stephen Gilman, “The ‘conversos’ and the Fall of Fortune” *Collected Studies in honour of Américo Castro’s 80th year* (Oxford: Lincoln Lodge Research Library, 1965) 127-136.

³⁰ Esta invocación boeciana a la tradición filosófica refuerza el espíritu consolatorio de un poema dedicado, después de todo, a un primo encarcelado por su némesis política—don Alvaro de Luna. Bías se hace eco de un sentimiento quizás compartido por el poeta defraudado con la vida política que rara vez encuentra momentos de solaz para consagrarse a sus lecturas filosóficas o a su labor literaria. Como el héroe de su poema, Santillana ha de buscar amparo en “la bibliotheca mia” donde le “consolara la moral philosophia” después de abandonar la vida política durante su última década.



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It is but opening the eye, and the scene enters. The colours paint themselves on the fancy, with very little attention of thought or application of mind in the beholder.

JOSEPH ADDISON, *The Spectator* 411 (1713): 1

Es sorprendente que todavía no se encuentre ningún estudio serio sobre el significado histórico o la representación de las experiencias inmediatas en las *Cartas marruecas* (1774) de José de Cadalso y Vázquez (1741-82). La recreación de la experiencia inmediata por el autor gaditano —siguiendo una técnica empleada también en las mejores novelas de Espronceda, Larra, Gil y Carrasco, Avellaneda, Navarro Villoslada y en las de Alarcón, “Clarín,” Galdós, Pardo Bazán, Palacio Valdés y Pereda— se caracteriza por el reflejo de la sensación directamente vivida. En una palabra, la novelística cadalsiana quiere aminorar la retorización del lenguaje e intenta copiar sin decoración subjetiva la experiencia humana. Por consiguiente, Cadalso se anticipa a la nueva sensibilidad, que suele asociarse con las épocas del segundo romanticismo (c. 1830-60) y el realismo español de finales del siglo XIX (c. 1868-98). Esta preocupación del novelista gaditano —muy moderna para su época— está a la base de la sencillez periodística de su estilo. La auténtica hazaña de Cadalso es el haber escrito —junto con Torres Villarroel e Isla— una de las primeras obras novelísticas españolas en las que se busca el “acceso directo” a la experiencia humana.

El intento teórico de este artículo es por ende, doble. Primero, quiero sugerir e ilustrar, con ejemplos del texto de las *Cartas marruecas*, cierta clase de acercamiento novelístico que sirve para simular las “experiencias inmediatas,” es decir unas técnicas modernas que utilizan un nuevo léxico caracterizado por su sencillez y franqueza. Segundo, quiero señalar la importancia de la novelística cervantina para la génesis de las *Cartas*, y con esto ilustraré que Cadalso marca un hito decisivo en la trayectoria de la novela española, desde el *Quijote* hacia las novelas de

Galdós, “Clarín,” Palacio Valdés y Pardo Bazán.¹ La identificación de estas “experiencias inmediatas” en las *Cartas* demostrará que “Dalmiro” —uno de los seudónimos de Cadalso— sí contribuyó un matiz trascendente al arte de novelar en el setecientos español, un acercamiento utilizado cincuenta años más tarde —durante el segundo romanticismo— en las obras narrativas de López Soler (*Los bandos de Castilla*), Espronceda (*Sancho Saldaña*), Larra (*Artículos de costumbres* y *El doncel de don Enrique el Doliente*) y Gil y Carrasco (*El señor de Bembibre*).

Las *Cartas marruecas* son y no son una novela. John B. Hughes afirma, en su libro *José de Cadalso y las “Cartas marruecas”* (1969), que “por un momento nos creemos que estamos leyendo una novela en virtud de la unidad artística del fragmento debida a la conjunción de personajes, ambiente y diálogo” (68). En fecha más reciente, Mariano Baquero Goyanes bosquejó muy brevemente en 1981 los elementos novelísticos en la prosa de Cadalso en su Introducción a las *Cartas marruecas* y afirmó que es lícito asociar las *Cartas* con el género de la novela. Aseguró que “aunque la obra de Cadalso no pertenece a tal especie literaria [la novela], sí se relaciona con ella de algún modo” (xlv). (No nos olvidemos de que Cadalso había escrito una novela —titulada *Observaciones de un oficial holandés en el nuevamente descubierto reino de Felizta*— antes de sus *Cartas*, aunque está perdida.) En mi opinión, las *Cartas marruecas* son una obra epistolar que se caracteriza por varias características novelísticas, bien de una novela que se caracteriza por una estructura fundamentalmente epistolar. Las referencias a Cervantes y a los términos *novela* y *costumbre* en el primer párrafo de la obra, por ejemplo, son decisivas pues nos señalan el interés cadalsiano en la crítica literaria y en otras obras novelísticas como el *Quijote*. La parcela crítica de la obra es didáctica y muy semejante a la del *Quijote*, y su formato estructural es muy novelesco.

Pero es preciso definir el término *novelesco* antes de analizar los elementos novelescos en las *Cartas marruecas*. La segunda acepción en el *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española* (1992) acerca de la voz *novelesco* se lee: “Tómase generalmente por fingido o de pura invención, como historia novelesca; por singular e interesante, como lance novelesco, o por exaltado, sentimental, soñador, dado a lo ideal o fantástico.” La primera acepción bajo el término *novela* es la siguiente: “Obra literaria en prosa en la que se narra una acción fingida en todo o en parte, y cuyo fin es causar placer estético a los lectores con la descripción o pintura de sucesos o lances interesantes, de caracteres, de pasiones y de costumbres.” En varios momentos en este trabajo me fijaré en las descripciones pin-

torescas, los simulacros novelísticos, los lances de novela (término usado por el propio Cadalso) y, sobre todo, el costumbrismo presente en las noventa epístolas de las *Cartas*.

Mientras que su antecesor más influyente, Cervantes —el escritor que compuso la “inmortal novela,” según la primera frase de las *Cartas marruecas*—, tiende a contar la “realidad” con cierta “distancia interpretativa,” Cadalso pretende pintar esta misma “realidad” en todo su aspecto “realista,” pintada de una manera más “cercana” a la experiencia inmediata, es decir de un modo “más imparcial” (Cadalso 77). Lo que logra hacer Cadalso unos 169 años después de la salida de la primera parte del *Quijote* (1605) es notable cuando estudiamos la trayectoria histórica de las obras narrativas de España. En una palabra, su novelística pretende copiar la imagen directa de la realidad —tal como hacen los susodichos novelistas realistas, pero sin el empleo de la ironía—, mientras que el acercamiento cervantino se caracteriza por una interpretación más “filtrada” o “interpretativa” de la experiencia humana, es decir, por una “traducción” más subjetiva del mundo. El léxico cadalsiano pretende reducir la subjetividad del autor, aminora la capa retórica y —por consiguiente— incorpora un estilo menos florido, más “inmediato.”

Es preciso profundizar en la relación entre la novelística de Cervantes y la de Cadalso si queremos desarrollar el significado literario e histórico de las *Cartas marruecas*. Se puede decir, por ejemplo, que ambos novelistas son escritores realistas —y no me refiero a una escuela literaria ni artística cuando empleo el término *realista*—, pero la diferencia entre los acercamientos de los dos es que Cervantes cuenta desde un cierto nivel de “distancia interpretativa” mientras que Cadalso intenta pintar *exactamente* lo que ve, suprimiendo todo lo posible el elemento interpretativo. Me explico: Cervantes interpreta la realidad mientras que Cadalso intenta copiarla. Ambos escritores se refieren a la misma realidad, y ambos utilizan el mismo tipo de lienzo narrativo, pero aquél nos pinta la realidad con más “filtro” que éste. Desde otro punto de vista, sin embargo, podríamos plantear la siguiente pregunta: ¿no son estas sugerencias más ya otras interpretaciones de otra realidad? La respuesta es una resonante sí, pues siempre habrá distintas interpretaciones de una misma realidad, algunas más, otras menos creíbles. Umberto Eco afirma con mucha razón, en su nuevo libro *Textos, contextos y pretextos* (1995), que siempre quedan varias posibilidades de interpretación y protesta contra la apropiación perversa de la idea de una “interpretación limitada.” Mi teoría sobre las interpretaciones de la realidad en los textos de Cervantes y Cadalso es que son distintas interpretaciones del mismo referente, y creo que mi hipótesis resultará admisible, pues mostraré con

abundantes ejemplos que los dos autores interpretan la realidad en dos formas muy distintas, una distinción que arrojará luz sobre la auténtica hazaña novelesca del escritor gaditano.

En la primera epístola de las *Cartas* Gazel Ben-Aly nos ofrece unos datos fundamentales que ilustran los métodos novelescos de “Dalmiro” (Cadalso 83-84).² Gazel —el doble del verdadero embajador marroquí Sidi Hamel Al Ghazzali, quien viajó por España en 1766— nos bosqueja su propio “acercamiento perceptivo” en la primera de las sesenta y seis misivas que envía a su mentor Ben-Beley, el sabio árabe en quien brillan la autoridad serena y el pensamiento reflexivo. He aquí un trozo revelador de esta epístola que nos explica la sensibilidad y el sensismo dieciochesco de Gazel:

Observaré las costumbres de este pueblo [España], notando las que le son comunes con las de otros países de Europa, y las que le son peculiares. Procuraré despojarme de muchas preocupaciones que tenemos los moros contra los cristianos, y particularmente contra los españoles. Notaré todo lo que me sorprenda, para tratar de ello con Nuño y después participártelo con el juicio que sobre ello haya formado. (Bastardillas mías; 83-84)

Lo importante aquí es que Cadalso —en boca de Gazel— ilustra su propio modo de representar el mundo literario en que viven sus personajes. La voz narrativa gazeliana no intenta elaborar mucho sobre la experiencia humana, ni retratar la realidad de una manera subjetiva ni tampoco traducir al lector lo que ha aprendido por la experiencia. Su empleo de las palabras perceptivas —“observaré,” “notando,” “notaré,” etc.— ilustra su método de traducir bien la realidad, es decir el acercamiento dieciochesco que hace hincapié en el proceso inductivo, tal como lo expone John Locke en su *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), o bien Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, en su *Traité des sensations* (1754). Por tanto, el narrador principal de las *Cartas* —Gazel— se nos presenta en una postura muy moderna porque narra y describe desde un punto de vista que no le lleva a manipular la realidad. Lo moderno de Gazel y sus métodos de contar es que pone las cartas boca arriba y expone al lector todos sus dilemas al interpretar sus propias experiencias. Como afirma Francisco Sánchez Blanco, en su libro *La prosa del siglo XVIII* (1992), “la óptica del ingenuo extranjero [Gazel], que se asombra y sorprende, representa el ejercicio crítico de la razón, aplicado a las realidades sociales” (161).

Gazel —autor de sesenta y nueve de las noventa *Cartas marruecas*— quiere observar, copiar y contar sin adornos sus experiencias inmediatas para el lector ficticio, sea éste, Ben-Beley o Nuño Núñez. El tono de su escritura se caracteriza por una conmovedora y aguda sencillez. He aquí tres ejemplos de esta inmediatez descriptiva:

Llevaba [un caballere de veintidós años] un arrogante caballo, sus dos pistolas primorosas, calzón y ajustador de ante con muchas docenas de botones de plata, el pelo dentro de una redecilla blanca, capa de verano caída sobre el anca del caballo, sombrero blanco finísimo y pañuelo de seda morado al cuello. (101)

Si la rapidez de estilo [de un joven de veinte años], volubilidad de la lengua, torrente de voces, movimiento continuo de un cuerpo airoso y gestos majestuosos formasen un orador perfecto, ninguno puede serlo tanto. (119)

Son muchos millares de hombres los que se levantan muy tarde, toman chocolate muy caliente, agua muy fría, se visten, salen a la plaza, ajustan un par de pollos, oyen misa, vuelvan a la plaza, dan cuatro paseos, se informan en qué estado se hallan los chismes y hablillas del lugar, vuelven a casa, comen muy despacio, duermen la siesta, se levantan, dan un paseo al campo, vuelven a casa, se refrescan, van a la tertulia, juegan a la malilla [juego de naipes], vuelta a casa, rezan el rosario, cenan y se meten en la cama. (290)

Lo notable es la franqueza del estilo. Cadalso evita emplear un lenguaje de relumbrón y rehuye de todo tipo de embellecimiento. El traslado cadalsiano de la experiencia inmediata —y esto es lo que da valor auténtico a las *Cartas marruecas*— se caracteriza por una serie de imágenes bien marcadas y nítidas. El crítico Sánchez Blanco, en su libro ya mencionado, se equivoca cuando afirma que tenemos en las *Cartas marruecas* “un observador [Gazel], pero, a diferencia del costumbrista del siglo XIX, ciego para imágenes exóticas, nostalgias y curiosidades locales” (161). La citada enumeración de Gazel de objetos pintorescos (las pistolas, los calzones, los ajustadores, los botones de plata, el sombrero, el pañuelo, etc.), ademanes personales (la rapidez de estilo, la volubilidad de la lengua, el movimiento continuo, los gestos majestuosos, etc.) y decadentes costumbres de los señoritos del siglo XVIII madrileño (toman chocolate, salen, ajustan pollos, se informan, duermen la siesta, se refrescan, etc.) nos elabora de una manera fotográfica y convincente

un cuadro muy vivo de la cultura dieciochesca. Es más, “Dalmiro” logra pintar un espacio “entre bastidores” que se distingue de representaciones afectadas, artificiales y sugestivas de la realidad, como las de las primeras novelas canónicas en la Península: el *Lazarillo* (1554), *La Diana* (1559), el *Guzmán* (1599), el *Quijote* (1605 y 1615) y el *Buscón* (1626). El mundo novelístico de Cadalso, por otro lado, se define por una reducción de lo rebuscado y lo artificial. La utilización de voces sencillas y un estilo directo capacita a Cadalso para producir una traducción viva, pintoresca y detallada, algo muy moderno y “realista” para su época. Como lo afirmó Russell P. Sebold, en su artículo “Comedia clásica y novela moderna en las *Escenas matritenses* de Mesonero Romanos” (1981), “fue en el Siglo de las Luces en el que de hecho nació la minuciosa técnica realista moderna” (346).

Así volvamos a tres trozos de la primera epístola. Gazel escribe, “Me hallo vestido como estos cristianos”; “Observaré las costumbres de este pueblo”; y “Notaré todo lo que me sorprenda” (Cadalso 83-84). De esto se entiende que el narrador está interesado en el empleo de los cinco sentidos, especialmente la vista. Cadalso —por la boca de Gazel— nos indica ya en la primera misiva de las *Cartas marruecas* que sus métodos se caracterizan por el arte de copiar con un mínimo de interpretación e invención. Bruce W. Wardropper, por ejemplo, dice en su artículo, “Cadalso’s *Noches lúgubres* and Literary Tradition” (1952): “For Cadalso the real life is here on earth —life directed by reason and undisturbed by intimations of mortality” (624). En una palabra, el referente que Cadalso quiere captar con esta técnica innovadora es el detalle de la realidad de la tierra, la que podemos percibir con los ojos. Como había escrito el ensayista inglés Joseph Addison (1672-1719) en su revista *The Spectator* (1712), la traducción más fiel de la realidad se basa en lo que perciben los ojos; los colores pintan ellos mismos, sin la aplicación de esfuerzos intelectuales (1). El matiz artístico de “Dalmiro” —el empleo del lenguaje directo sin adorno— pretende ser esto: el simple espejo de la experiencia inmediata.

Ahora bien, si comparamos este método directo con el del gran novelista y predecesor de Cadalso —Cervantes— nos daremos cuenta de la auténtica unicidad artística de las *Cartas marruecas*. El autor del *Quijote* nos representa la experiencia inmediata con un léxico que mantiene cierta distancia entre el sujeto y el lector —una distancia que se caracteriza por cierto filtro descriptivo e interpretación subjetiva—, mientras que Cadalso intenta minorizar esta distancia narrativa entre el mundo novelesco y el lector. “Dalmiro” prefiere copiar las cosas tal como son. Me explico: Cervantes nos *interpreta* la experiencia novelística mientras que Cadalso nos *muestra* esta misma experiencia. El escritor gaditano

quiere eliminar la interpretación subjetiva e intenta situar al lector al lado del personaje mismo —o en el caso de las *Cartas marruecas*— al lado del destinatario de las epístolas.

La descripción del detalle en el *Quijote* se caracteriza por cierta distancia retórica y, por consiguiente, se lo comunica al lector por un filtro ajeno e interpretativo. He aquí un ejemplo de esta distancia subjetiva en el capítulo XIV de la primera parte del *Quijote*; nótese la subjetividad del narrador en la descripción de la belleza de la pastora Marcela:

Y queriendo leer otro papel de los que había reservado del fuego, lo estorbó una maravillosa visión (que tal parecía ella) que improvisamente se les ofreció a los ojos; y fue que por cima de la peña donde se cavaba la sepultura pareció la pastora Marcela, tan hermosa, que pasaba a su fama su hermosura. Los que hasta entonces no la habían visto la miraban con admiración y silencio; y los que ya estaban acostumbrados a verla no quedaron menos suspensos que los que nunca la habían visto. (Cervantes 195)

El narrador cervantino juzga y embellece la realidad. Es más, Cervantes no incluye al lector en el mundo ficticio de sus personajes, sino que presenta este mundo al lector desde cierta distancia. La diferencia principal entre los dos autores es que en Cadalso nosotros los lectores nos sentimos ser personajes del mismo cosmos ficticio, no espectadores. Nótese la inclusión del lector en el texto cadalsiano:

¿Hasta cuándo has de abusar de nuestra [del narrador-editor y del lector] benignidad? Ni tu edad, que aún es tierna, ni la del mundo, que nunca ha sido más niño, te pueden apartar de tan pesado trabajo. Pesado para ti, que has de concluirlo, para nosotros, que lo hemos de leer, y para la prensa, que ahora habrá de gemir. [...] El estilo en ti es artificio; tu naturaleza es tétrica y adusta. Conocemos tu verdadero rostro y te arrancaremos la máscara con que has querido ocultarla. No falta entre nosotros quien te conozca. (Bastardillas mías; 303-4)

Queda claro que el lector cervantino se aparta mucho del espacio inventado por el autor y, por consiguiente, el lector tiene un papel mínimo en los varios periplos del *Quijote*. La voz narrativa cervantina interpreta la realidad, y así el lector se convierte en espectador, sin la oportunidad de interpretar la experiencia inmediata para sí mismo. Esto no quiere decir que el arte cervantino sea inferior al otro —pertenece sin lugar a dudas al nivel más alto de la literatura— pero, en comparación con las *Cartas*

marruecas, su acercamiento novelístico no logra presentar la experiencia humana de una manera tan directa e inmediata.

Gazel mismo escribe en la Carta LXI sobre esta relación entre la “realidad” y el traslado de ella —o sea la distancia entre la realidad y la experiencia interpretada— y el valor del *Quijote*. He aquí la primera mitad de dicha misiva a Ben-Beley; nótese las varias referencias a la idea del doble sentido y lo didáctico en la novela cervantina:

En esta nación hay un libro [el Quijote] muy aplaudido por todas las demás. Lo he leído, y me ha gustado sin duda; pero no deja de mortificarme la sospecha de que el sentido literal es uno, y el verdadero es otro muy diferente. Ninguna obra necesita más que ésta el diccionario de Nuño. Lo que se lee es una serie de extravagancias de un loco, que cree que hay gigantes, encantadores, etcétera; algunas sentencias en boca de un necio, y muchas escenas de la vida bien criticada; pero lo que hay debajo de esta apariencia es, en mi concepto, un conjunto de materias profundas e importantes. (224)

Hasta Gazel entiende que el *Quijote* se caracteriza por una construcción de doble filo —y hasta cierto nivel también lo son las *Cartas* cadalsianas. John B. Hughes, por ejemplo, escribe, en su artículo “Dimensiones estéticas de las *Cartas marruecas*” (1956), que las *Cartas* son “una obra predominantemente didáctica” (194). Pero creo que Álvaro V. González lo dijo mejor cuando nos afirmó lo siguiente en su tesis doctoral, *Narrative Technique in José Cadalso’s “Cartas marruecas”* (1978): “Cadalso lets didactic purpose yeild to creative expression, [...] fusing usefulness with creation” (94). En un sentido, la novela aventurera se basa en típicos libros de caballería y las novelas pastoriles y moriscas, mientras que se burla de ellos al mismo tiempo. Así tiene razón Gazel al notar en el *Quijote* “el sentido literal y el verdadero, que es otro muy diferente” (224).

A continuación reproduzco dos otros ejemplos del intento de Cadalso de retratar la experiencia inmediata tal como es. Son descripciones que no sorprendería hallar en una novela de 1880, con excepción hecha de alguna moda pasajera:

Un individuo de este cuerpo [las guardias de infantería española] está en la misma posada que yo desde antes de la noche en que llegué; ha congeniado sumamente conmigo por su franqueza, cortesanía y persona; es muy joven, su

vestido es el mismo que el de los soldados rasos, pero sus modales le distinguen fácilmente del vulgo soldadesco. Extrañé esta contradicción; ayer en la mesa que en estas posadas llaman redonda, porque no tienen asiento preferente, viéndole tan familiar y tan bien recibido con los oficiales más viejos del cuerpo, que son muy respetables, no pudo aguantar un minuto más mi curiosidad acerca de su clase, y así le pregunté quién era. —Soy —me dijo— cadete de este cuerpo, y de la compañía de aquel caballero —señalando a un anciano venerable, con la cabeza cargada de canas, el cuerpo lleno de heridas y el aspecto guerrero—. (Carta XLV, Gazel a Ben-Beley; 194)

Los días de correo de ocupación suelo pasar después de comer a una casa inmediata a la mía, donde se juntan bastantes gentes que forman una graciosa tertulia. Siempre he hallado en su conversación cosa que me quite la melancolía y distraiga de cosas serias y pesadas; pero la ocurrencia de hoy me ha hecho mucha gracia. Entré cuando acababan de tomar café y empezaban a conversar. Una señora se iba a poner al clave [clavicordio]; dos señoritos de poca edad leían con mucho misterio un papel en el balcón; otra dama estaba haciendo una escarapela; un oficial joven estaba vuelto de espaldas a la chimenea; uno viejo empezaba a roncar sentado en un sillón a la lumbre; un abate miraba al jardín, y al mismo tiempo leía algo en un libro negro y dorado; y otras gentes hablaban. Saludáronme al entrar todos, menos unas tres señoras y otros tantos jóvenes que estaban embebidos en una conversación al parecer la más seria. (Carta LVI, Gazel a Ben-Beley; 211)

El intento artístico de Cadalso —como lo hemos visto en las epístolas que acabamos de citar— es minorizar el uso de descripciones subjetivas y destruir toda huella de distancia retórica e interpretativa entre las experiencias copiadas por el narrador. Es decir, que el acercamiento descriptivo de “Dalmiro” busca toda la imparcialidad posible en la representación de su mundo novelístico. Cuando Nuño Núñez dice, en la Carta XI, “todas las cosas son buenas por un lado y malas por otro, como las medallas que tienen derecho y revés,” Cadalso nos está sugiriendo que el autor de la presente obra es consciente de los problemas inherentes a la elaboración de una interpretación fiel de la realidad (125). Eugenio

Matus, por ejemplo, declara, en su artículo “Una interpretación de las *Cartas marruecas* de Cadalso” (1967), que en la obra cadalsiana se trata de “una realidad compleja, y para comprenderla hay que ser objetivo y realizar estudios responsables” (68). A la vez, Edith F. Helman nos ofrece, en su excelente artículo “*Caprichos and Monstruos of Cadalso and Goya*” (1958), la observación siguiente sobre la incertidumbre en el siglo XVIII español: “The impression that both works [those of Cadalso and Goya] leave of the Spain of their day is of a topsy-turvy world, in which everything is confused, truth and falsehood, good and evil, the sacred and the profane, the necessary and the superfluous, a world in which people try to go forward and backward at the same time” (209). Cadalso, en resumen, observa este mundo “contradictorio,” toma apuntes copiosos y objetivos sobre él y practica en sus *Cartas marruecas* un nuevo y aparentemente sencillo método de copiar la “realidad” para el lector. El resultado es —como afirma Baquero Goyanes— una de las visiones “más justas, flexibles, equilibradas y modernas que cabe encontrar en la literatura española del XVIII” (Baquero Goyanes xxi).

Pero, ¿qué quiere decir el término *inmediatez narrativa*? ¿Existe tal cosa? ¿Se puede producir un “cuadro directo”? ¿Hay mucha diferencia entre una representación “directa” de la realidad y una interpretación más “subjetiva” como en Cervantes? Y finalmente, ¿no son todas las literaturas gérmenes de la misma idea, es decir, diferentes interpretaciones del mismo referente? Son todas preguntas muy discutibles —especialmente para esa crítica inspirada por Derrida y la célebre “deconstrucción”— y no pienso unirme a la polémica en estas páginas. Lo que me interesa aquí es definir el término *inmediatez narrativa* e ilustrar que tal cosa sí existe dentro de las cubiertas de las *Cartas marruecas*. La única acepción en el *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española* (1992) acerca de la voz *inmediatez* se lee: “Cualidad de inmediato”; y la primera entrada sobre el término *inmediato* es: “Contiguo o muy cercano a otra cosa.” La voz *narrativa* se define de las tres maneras siguientes: “Acción y efecto de narrar”; “Género literario constituido por la novela, la novela corta y el cuento”; y “Habilidad o destreza en narrar o en contar las cosas.” Por tanto, podríamos concluir que la *inmediatez narrativa* es, para nosotros, la habilidad de narrar las cosas como si nos afectaran de cerca.

En las *Cartas marruecas*, por ejemplo, descubrimos que los tres narradores —especialmente Gazel— utilizan un estilo con el que se describe simplemente lo que perciben sus cinco sentidos. En la Carta XLI Gazel escribe a Ben-Beley, “Éste es el cuadro del antiguo lujo. ¿Cómo *retrataremos* el moderno? *Copiemos* los objetos que nos ofrecen a la *vista*, sin lisonjearlos ni ofenderlos” (bastardillas mías; 185). Y en la Carta XXXI Ben-Beley apunta lo siguiente:

La naturaleza les impone [a los españoles] leyes como a todos los hombres; la religión les añade otras; la patria, otras; las carreras, otras; y como si no bastasen todas estas cadenas para esclavizarlos, se imponen a sí mismos otros muchos preceptos espontáneamente en el trato civil y diario, en el modo de vestirse, en la hora de comer, en la especie de diversión, en la calidad del pasatiempo, en el amor y en la amistad. Pero ¡Qué exactitud en observarlos! ¡Cuánto mayor que en la observancia de los otros!
(*Bastardillas mías*; 162-63)

Por tanto, se ve que aun los tres narradores cadalsianos afirman que el objeto de sus periplos es observar desde una perspectiva imparcial con sus propios ojos y pintar el mundo objetivamente. Las *Cartas marruecas* son, en mi opinión, un ejemplo máximo de la inmediatez descriptiva, principalmente porque los tres corresponsales confían en sus cinco sentidos.

Fijémos en otro ejemplo del acercamiento directo en las *Cartas marruecas*. A continuación reproduzco el retrato que pinta Nuño de un “verdadero sabio escolástico”:

*Pues mira, hazte cuenta que vas a oírle hablar. Figúrate antes que ves un hombre muy seco, muy alto, muy lleno de tabaco, muy cargado de anteojos, muy incapaz de bajar la cabeza ni saludar a alma viviente, y muy adornado de otros requisitos semejantes. Ésta es la pintura que Nuño me hizo de ellos, y que yo verifiqué ser muy conforme al original cuando anduve por sus universidades. (Carta LXXVIII, *Gazel a Ben-Beley*, página 271)*

Aquí descubrimos un diálogo epistolar y novelístico —entre Gazel y Ben-Beley— muy semejante a nuestro diálogo en el presente estudio. Stephen Gilman afirma, en su libro *Galdós y el arte de la novela europea: 1867-1887* (1985), que “el diálogo internovelístico es en cierto sentido más ‘vital’ que intelectual” y que “es un medio de concepción, de gestación, de parto y de crecimiento no sólo en la página impresa, sino también en el lector de la misma” (181). Gazel, entonces, está hablando a Ben-Beley del problema de copiar *fielmente* la realidad. Dice, “Ésta es la pintura que Nuño me hizo de ellos, y que yo verifiqué ser muy conforme al original” —y se nota que él también se preocupa por la complejidad técnica de “la pintura del original,” es decir la captación de la misma realidad (271). Gazel, en otro momento, habla a Ben-Beley sobre una polémica semejante, en la misiva cincuenta; dice, “De aquí [de la lengua, la materia y las costumbres] nace la imposibilidad positiva de tra-

ducirse algunas obras” (203). Y en la Carta XXIX, al escribir Gazel a Ben-Beley sobre la importancia de la imparcialidad, recuerda “Estábamos [Nuño y Gazel] el otro día en una casa de concurrencia pública, donde se vende café y chocolate, con un joven francés de los que acabo de *pintar*, y que por cierto en nada desmentía el *retrato*” (bastardillas mías; 160). Los tres narradores cadalsianos se convierten en perspicaces observadores de la realidad y en serios críticos sociales del mundo en que viven.

Se encuentran cuatro tipos de experiencias inmediatas en las *Cartas*: la experiencia inmediata personal, recreada en estilo directo; la experiencia inmediata personal, contada en estilo indirecto; la experiencia inmediata ajena, recreada en estilo directo; y la experiencia inmediata ajena, contada en estilo indirecto. El vaivén narrativo —el repetido cambio de las varias perspectivas en la narración— entre estos cuatro acercamientos narrativos amplía enormemente el mundo creativo cadalsiano. El uso de diálogos inmediatos y parafraseados entre los personajes, las numerosas descripciones recreadas y contadas por los corresponsales, los monólogos interiores, el papel del intermediario narrativo (el autor, o bien el autor implícito), y la recreación de las experiencias de otros personajes son todas técnicas muy novelísticas. Me interesa destacar unos breves comentarios textuales sobre dos epístolas que contienen experiencias inmediatas personales, recreadas en estilo directo:

En la Carta XXVII (Gazel a Ben-Beley) —escrita en primera, segunda y tercera persona— se encuentra un buen ejemplo de la innovadora novelística de Cadalso. Gazel nos habla de cierta experiencia que tuvo con Nuño: “Toda la noche pasada estuvo hablando mi amigo Nuño de una cosa que llaman fama póstuma” (153). Casi toda la epístola es una paráfrasis detallada y directa de varias experiencias inmediatas que tuvo Gazel con Nuño. El tono es a veces serio y observador, otras veces conversacional y ameno.

En la Carta LV (Gazel a Ben-Beley) Gazel incluye quizás la más notable experiencia inmediata. Nos cuenta con muchos detalles lo que decía Nuño a sí mismo y a un hombre que “sólo pensaba en hacer fortuna” (208). La carta se vierte en un tono reflexivo —pues sigue a la epístola anterior en la que se trata de las voces *fortuna* y *hacer fortuna*— y lo más llamativo aquí es el uso contemporáneo del monólogo interior (208-9). Nuño habla de su deseo de hacer bien a los otros y el tono de su voz— que es sobre todo reflexivo, pensativo y analítico— nos recuerda a Pedro en *Tiempo de silencio* (1961) de Martín-Santos y la narración solemne de *El cuarto de atrás* (1978) de Martín Gaité. El tono de su monólogo es meditabundo:

En el estado de medianía en que me hallo, vivo con tranquilidad y sin cuidado, sin que mis operaciones sean objeto de la crítica ajena, ni motivo para remordimientos de mi propio corazón. Colocado en la altura que tú apeteces, no comeré más, ni dormiré mejor, ni tendré más amigos, ni he de libertarme de las enfermedades comunes a todos los hombres; por consiguiente, no tendría entonces más gustosa vida que tengo ahora. Sólo una reflexión me hizo en otros tiempos pensar alguna vez en declararme cortesano de la fortuna y solicitar sus favores. ¡Cuán gustoso me sería, decíame yo a mí mismo, el tener en mi mano los medios de hacer bien a mis amigos! Y luego llamaba mi memoria los nombres y prendas de mis más queridos, y los empleos que les daría cuando yo fuese primer ministro; pues nada menos apetecía, porque con nada menos se contentaba mi oficiosa ambición. Éste es mozo de excelentes costumbres, selecta erudición y genio afable: quiero darle un obispado. (Bastardillas mías; 208-9)

A continuación reproduzco comentarios sobre dos misivas caracterizadas por otras experiencias inmediatas personales, contadas con la misma técnica indicada arriba, el estilo indirecto. En la Carta XVI (Gazel a Ben-Beley), por ejemplo, se da un ejemplo revelador de las técnicas novelísticas y las experiencias inmediatas. En el primer párrafo —uno de los más conmovedores en toda la obra— se lee: “Entre los manuscritos de mi amigo Nuño he hallado uno, cuyo título es: *Historia heroica de España*. Preguntándole qué significaba, me dijo que prosiguiese leyendo, y el prólogo me gustó tanto, que lo copio y te lo remito” (131). En sólo dos frases tenemos ejemplos del uso de la primera persona (“he hallado”), el diálogo ameno (“me dijo que prosiguiese leyendo”), el tono conversacional (“me gustó tanto, que lo copio y te lo remito”), la diversidad de voces narrativas (el empleo del “yo” y el “tú”) y la interacción entre las psicologías de Gazel, Ben-Beley y Nuño (131). Casi toda la carta es un extracto del Prólogo de la *Historia heroica de España* —escrita por Nuño— cuyo argumento es el siguiente: “Las naciones modernas [especialmente España] no tienen bastantes monumentos levantados a los nombres de sus varones ilustres” (131) y “¡Cuán glorioso proyecto sería el de levantar estatuas, monumentos y columnas en los parajes más públicos!” (133).

La Carta XLIII (Gazel a Nuño) se inicia con una referencia a una muy creíble experiencia inmediata: “La ciudad en que ahora me

hallo. . .” (188). La frase siguiente —“cuya descripción me has hecho muchas veces”— nos habla de las referencias a las costumbres descritas en cartas anteriores, y es otro ejemplo del uso de la meta-ficción en las *Cartas marruecas*. Aquí Gazel nos habla —muy detalladamente— del “color de los vestidos,” “las mujeres recogidas,” “los hombres celosos,” “los viejos sumamente graves,” “los mozos pendencieros” y, más importante, “la división de los dos sexos, *fielmente observada*” (bastardillas mías; 188).

Miremos ahora alguna reflexión sobre dos epístolas caracterizadas por las experiencias inmediatas ajenas, recreadas en estilo directo. En la Carta III (Gazel a Ben-Beley), por ejemplo, Gazel cita a Nuño y su versión de la historia de España. Son las primeras palabras de Nuño citadas en la obra, y nos ofrecen un claro ejemplo del estilo novelístico, aquí reforzado con la indumentaria de varios lugares, culturas y figuras de la historia: “El grande Escipión [—decía Nuño—] fue testigo de la ruina de Numancia, pues no puede llamarse propiamente conquistador de esta ciudad; siendo de notar que Lúculo, encargado de levantar un ejército para aquella expedición, no halló en la juventud romana recluta que llevar, hasta que el mismo Escipión se alistó para animarla. Si los romanos conocieron el valor de los españoles como enemigos. . .” (87). La extensa historia de Nuño —un microcuento dentro de esta epístola— termina como una tragedia con su referencia a la muerte de Carlos II, en la época en que “no era España sino el esqueleto de un gigante” (89).

En la Carta LXXXII (Gazel a Ben-Beley) tenemos una epístola sobre otra polémica del XVIII español; se trata de las extravagancias humanas. El estilo imita una experiencia personal interpretada por Gazel —una experiencia que tuvo con Nuño— y Gazel cita una conversación que tuvo con su querido compañero. El acercamiento aquí es muy peculiar, una nueva estructura casi “teatral” que utiliza “Dalmiro” para ampliar aún más el dinamismo novelístico de sus *Cartas*:

P[regunta]. ¿Tenéis por cierto que se pueda ser un pasmoso sabio sin haber leído dos minutos al día, sin tener un libro, sin haber tenido maestros, sin ser bastante humilde para preguntar, y sin tener más talento que para bailar un minuet?

R[espuesta]. Tengo.

P[regunta]. ¿Tenéis por cierto que para ser buen patriota baste hablar mal de la patria, hacer burla de nuestros abuelos, y escuchar con resignación a nuestros peluqueros, maestros de baile, operistas, cocineros, y sátiras desprecia-

bles contra la nación; hacer como que habéis olvidado vuestra lengua paterna, hablar ridículamente mal varios trozos de las extranjeras, y hacer ascos de todo lo que pasa y ha pasado desde los principios por acá?

R[espuesta]. Sí tengo.

P[regunta]. ¿Tenéis por cierto que para juzgar de un libro no se necesita verlo, y basta verlo por el forro u algo del índice y prólogo?

R[espuesta]. Sí tengo. (282-83)

Es una especie de diálogo extenso, una estructura que examina —muy detalladamente— la forma novelística y todas sus posibilidades estructurales.

Echemos un vistazo a un ejemplo de las experiencias inmediatas ajenas, contadas en estilo indirecto. La Carta XXXIII (Gazel a Ben-Beley) —que es en su mayor parte una extensa cita de Nuño— tiene dos objetivos: mostrarnos una interacción descriptiva entre dos voces distintas (las de Gazel y Nuño) e ilustrar un nuevo estilo indirecto. Nuño, que ha “vivido con hombres de todas clases” (164), utiliza un acercamiento interrogativo —hace cinco preguntas en sólo veintitrés renglones— para conmover al lector acercándose a él. Quiero decir que la narración de Nuño no parece remota, ni abstracta, sino más “cercana” y “tangible.” Las preguntas que hace Nuño son las que hacemos en una conversación amena: “¿a qué fin?” (164), “¿Habrà cosa más fastidiosa. . .?” (165) y “¿Habrà cosa más cansada. . .?” (165). Para Nuño, el acercamiento ameno es el único vehículo con que se puede describir bien la realidad y esto “sólo se halla entre los hombres que se miran sin competencia” (165).

Queda claro que Cadalso quiere utilizar la experiencia inmediata para romper con el acercamiento descriptivo que se preocupa de emplear imitaciones superficiales en sus traducciones de la “realidad.” Cadalso salpica sus *Cartas* de experiencias inmediatas —las mismísimas que se encuentran en las mejores obras en prosa del siglo XIX español— y, por consiguiente, lanza una innovadora novelística en el XVIII. Como afirma Helman, en su ya mencionado artículo, Cadalso “is a kind of bridge between the Baroque and the Romantic writers” (216).

En los *Artículos de costumbres* (1823) de Mariano José de Larra, por ejemplo, uno podría encontrar miles de ejemplos de experiencias inmediatas que bien podrían ser de las *Cartas* cadalsianas. He aquí dos trozos ejemplares de los *Artículos* larrianos; el primero pertenece a la pintoresca viñeta “El café,” el segundo al cuadro de “El castellano viejo”:

Yo, pues, que no pertenecía a ninguno de estos partidos, me senté a la sombra de un sombrero hecho a manera de tejado que llevaba sobre sí, con no poco trabajo para mantener el equilibrio, otro loco cuya manía es pasar en Madrid por extranjero; seguro ya de que nadie podría echar de ver mi figura, que por fortuna no es de las más abultadas, pedí un vaso de naranja, aunque veía a todos tomar ponch o café, y dijera lo que dijera el mozo, de cuya opinión se me da dos bledos, traté de dar a mi paladar lo que me pedía, subí mi capa hasta los ojos, bajé el ala de mi sombrero, y en esta conformidad me puse en estado de atrapar al vuelo cuanta necesidad iba a salir de aquel bullicioso concurso. (Larra 56)

Hubimos de sentarnos de medio lado como quien va a arrimar el hombro a la comida, y entablaron los codos de los convidados íntimas relaciones entre sí con la más fraternal inteligencia del mundo. Colocáronme, por mucha distinción, entre un niño de cinco años, encaramado en unas almohadas que era preciso enderezar a cada momento porque las ladeaba la natural turbulencia de mi joven adlátere, y entre uno de esos hombres que ocupan en el mundo el espacio y sitio de tres, cuya corpulencia por todos lados se salía de madre de la única silla en que se hallaba sentado, digámoslo así, como en la punta de una aguja. Desdobláronse silenciosamente las servilletas, nuevas a la verdad, porque tampoco eran muebles en uso para todos los días, y fueron izadas por todos aquellos buenos señores a los ojales de sus fraques como cuerpos intermedios entre las salsas y las solapas. (Larra 127)

Como Galdós más tarde, Larra se convierte en un observador completamente embebido en sus pensamientos cuando anda por las calles madrileñas buscando materiales para sus artículos (Larra 121). Pero lo importante no es que nos hable de sus paseos por el Retiro o por la Castellana, sino que nos *copie* estas mismas experiencias en una forma inmediata y directa. Como decía Fernán Caballero, “la novela no se inventa; *se observa*.” Arriba, cuando la voz narrativa nos dice, “me senté a la sombra de un sombrero [...] pedí un vaso de naranja [...] subí mi capa hasta los ojos, bajé el ala de mi sombrero” y, en el segundo trozo, “Colocáronme, por mucha distinción, entre un niño de cinco años,” el

lector se siente *participante* de la acción, pues el método descriptivo que utiliza Larra —como Cadalso anteriormente— intenta destruir toda huella de separación entre la efigie de la experiencia inmediata y el lector.

Es preciso añadir que esta “participación del lector” en los textos de Larra y Cadalso es un elemento novelístico. Como dice Stephen Gilman en su ya mencionada obra, *Galdós y el arte de la novela europea: 1867-1887* (1985), “El autor-narrador de un libro de caballerías habla solo, pero el novelista nos enseña a *participar*, a no dejarnos engañar por las pistas falsas que ofrece, a *estar con él* cuando se contempla a sí mismo, como si fuese un dios en miniatura, en el acto de crear un mundo” (bastardillas mías; 180). Gilman nos asegura que el novelista crea un narrador asequible e inmediato que nos lleva consigo mismo durante sus andanzas narrativas. Es decir, que el novelista —a diferencia de los autores de los libros de caballerías— quiere que nosotros los lectores estemos a su lado. Ahora bien, ningún novelista puede borrar la separación inherente entre la experiencia (el referente) y el medio artístico (la palabra escrita), pero lo que realiza Larra en 1823 es algo muy notable, y lo era aun más en 1774, pues Cadalso ya había logrado lo mismo cinco decenios antes.

La técnica descriptiva de Ramón de Mesonero Romanos —un perspicaz observador de la sociedad— es semejante por lo que se refiere a su moderna tendencia novelística. El profesor Sebold declara en su ya citado artículo que el “Curioso Parlante” juega el “importantísimo papel de suplir el indispensable lazo entre el siglo en que nació el realismo moderno [el XVIII] y el pleno desarrollo de esta técnica durante la segunda mitad del ochocientos” (347). Fijémosnos en la descripción del médico con su birlocho (un carruaje ligero) en la pintoresca viñeta “Junta de médicos” en las *Escenas matritenses* (1842); nótese la insistencia en los detalles:

Del primero (en el orden de antigüedad) de aquellos cuatro equipajes, descendió con harta pena un vetusto y cuadrilátero doctor, hombre de peso en la facultad, y aun fuera de ella; rostro fresco y sonrosado, a despecho de los años y del estudio; barriga en prensa y, sin embargo, fiera; traje simbólico y anacronímico, representante fiel de las tradiciones del siglo XVIII; bastón de caña de Indias de tres pisos, con su puño de oro macizo y refulgente, y gorro, en fin, de doble seda de Toledo, que apenas dejaba divisar las puntas del atusado y grasiento peluquín. (Mesonero Romanos 146)

Estos mismos métodos descriptivos de Cadalso, Larra y Mesonero Romanos también se encuentran en todas las novelas realistas de finales del XIX español. Son abundantes, por ejemplo, en una de las últimas —y mejores— novelas de Galdós, *Misericordia* (1897). He aquí un pintoresco cuadro de un grupo de mendigos a la entrada de una iglesia madrileña:

Más adentro, como a la mitad del pasadizo, a la izquierda, había otro grupo, compuesto de un ciego, sentado; una mujer, también sentada, con dos niñas pequeñuelas, y junto a ella, en pie, silenciosa y rígida, una vieja con traje y manto negros. Algunos pasos más allá, a corta distancia de la iglesia, se apoyaba en la pared, cargando el cuerpo sobre las muletas, el cojo y manco Eliseo Martínez, que gozaba el privilegio de vender en aquel sitio La Semana Católica. Era, después de Casiana, la persona de más autoridad y mangoneo en la cuadrilla, y como su lugarteniente o mayor general. Total: siete reverendos mendigos, que espero han de quedar bien registrados aquí, con las convenientes distinciones de figura, palabra y carácter. (Misericordia 75)

Queda claro que el acercamiento consistente en la apuntación de los detalles todavía se usaba a finales del siglo decimonoveno. Este cuadro galdosiano de un ciego, una mujer, dos niñas pequeñuelas, una vieja con traje y manto negros, el cojo y el manco podría muy bien ser una escena de Mesonero Romanos o de las *Cartas marruecas*, obra escrita 123 años antes de la publicación de *Misericordia*.

La inmediatez descriptiva en Cadalso supone que la palabra escrita —el símbolo del referente, en este caso la experiencia humana o la “realidad”— se refiere, no a varios significados, sino a uno solo observado. El intento en las *Cartas* es la antítesis de lo que sugiere Carl Jung en su libro *El hombre y sus símbolos* (1961) —obra que en realidad es fruto de una labor de equipo—, donde los símbolos (las palabras) lo significan todo y suponen y son desde su simplicidad muchas cosas. Pero la clave para la comprensión de la “modernidad” —para su época— del método novelístico en Cadalso es entender que su acercamiento se caracteriza por el empleo de un léxico sencillo sin adornos. El referirse a las ambigüedades de la palabra escrita —tal como lo hace De Man, Derrida, Jung, etc.— es privar a la técnica cadalsiana de su importancia histórico-literaria.

Sin embargo, siempre hemos tenido y siempre tendremos que luchar con el problema de la influencia de otras literaturas y otras influencias artísticas y culturales en la representación de la realidad. Quiero decir que Cadalso tiene que luchar —como cualquier escritor— con el medio de la palabra escrita. Marjorie Hope Nicolson, en su libro ya citado, *Newton Demands the Muse* (1946), habla de las dificultades de crear simulacros fieles de la realidad del siglo XVIII europeo:

The world "out there," the mind "in here," remained to many of them [the eighteenth-century writers] separate and distinct; try as they would, they could not bridge the gap. Even "Imagination," of which they made so much, was unable to go far, "cabin'd, cribb'd, confined, bound in" to one part of man's "soul"; passive rather than active, its place was predetermined, its functions limited. (Nicolson 164)

Por tanto, ¿puede decirse que las *Cartas marruecas* son un reflejo *directo* de la vida? ¿Podríamos afirmar que en Cadalso no hay filtro absoluto entre la experiencia verdadera del ser humano y la imitación de ella en las páginas que escribe? Claro que no. Siempre ha habido y siempre habrá una literaturización de la vida en la escritura. De otra forma no sería literatura. Es decir, que toda la literatura canónica se caracteriza por el empleo de medios artificiales y un cierto nivel de subjetivización, sean obras realistas, naturalistas, simbolistas, o lo que fuere. Estos elementos son —y siempre serán— los *grandeurs et misères* de la literatura. Es imposible que no exista cierto nivel de distorsión de la realidad o cierto matiz interpretativo. Es más, cualquier novelista —producto de su propio ambiente y hábil lector de otras literaturas— no puede negar ni extraer de su conciencia la existencia de las obras que ha leído. Como decía Borges, “no he vivido, he leído.”

Pero la aspiración de este trabajo no es un discurso semiológico o deconstruccionista sobre el lenguaje cadalsiano, ni tampoco un estudio sobre la epistemología en las *Cartas marruecas*. Lo que me interesa es un análisis textual de lo que *logra* el genial lenguaje de Cadalso, no lo que no pueda lograr. En realidad, lo que más nos llama la atención en las *Cartas marruecas* es su “proximidad artística”: su novedoso y sencillo léxico, sus métodos descriptivos y narrativos, es decir su fidelidad interpretativa a la “realidad.” (Con el término *proximidad artística* me refiero al acercamiento descriptivo de Cadalso que busca la cercanía imparcial y sencilla en la representación del mundo, no la interpretación subjetiva de él.) Cadalso inventa una manera de narrar que pretende destruir toda

huella del espacio que media entre la “realidad” del modelo —una escena en la calle, un diálogo entre dos personajes o un perro— y la representación de esa “realidad.” La técnica innovadora a la que me refero es el trasunto de la experiencia inmediata, y hemos visto que las *Cartas marruecas* nos brindan un matiz descriptivo muy innovador en la trayectoria de la novela peninsular. Cadalso quiere borrar la omnipotencia del narrador y situarnos —a los lectores atentos— en un ambiente narrativo que rebosa de imparcialidad, en un mundo novelístico que quiere transplantar al lector a la escena del modelo original. El objeto de esta brillante técnica es eliminar el filtro descriptivo en lo posible. Lo más llamativo no es el *qué* sino en el *cómo*.

Notes

1. Aunque las *Cartas marruecas* no son una novela canonizada como el *Quijote*, *Fortunata y Jacinta*, *La Regenta* y *Los pazos de Ulloa*, sí sus técnicas descriptivas relacionan con ella. Los acercamientos novelísticos empleados por Cadalso —por ejemplo— ilustran la trayectoria de la sensibilidad en la novela española del siglo XVIII y la que anticipa a la novelística del XIX.

2. El apellido de Gazel —Ben-Aly— no se encuentra en la edición de Arce. Sin embargo, tal asignación se puede deducir del título original del manuscrito “H” (1783) de la *Hispanic Society of America* en Nueva York: *Cartas Marruecas escritas por un moro llamado Gazel Ben-Aly amigo suyo sobre los usos y costumbres de los Españoles antiguos y modernos, con algunas respuestas de Ben-Beley y otras cartas relativas a éstas*. El texto de la edición de Arce se basa en el manuscrito “F” (por haber pertenecido al académico y catedrático Ángel Ferrari), que hoy se encuentra, por él donado, en la Biblioteca de la Real Academia de la Historia en Madrid. Nunca había sido tenido en cuenta hasta la publicación de la edición de Arce en 1990.

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O ptar por la presentación de una tipología del discurso prologal es una empresa interesante cuando se pretende con ello observar los aspectos que caracterizan el desarrollo o el inicio de toda una corriente o actitud cultural. El espacio cultural que designamos comúnmente en el mundo hispánico como “Ilustración” suele enjuiciarse de manera poco favorable según se le compare con el Siglo de Oro precedente o con el desarrollo literario decimonónico del Romanticismo y el Realismo. Nos interesa destacar, sin embargo, que el “Prólogo al lector” del primer tomo del *Teatro crítico universal* (en adelante *Teatro crítico*) de Benito Jerónimo Feijoo (1726), impone una distancia crítica que ubica su discurso dentro de los parámetros intencionales de la Ilustración europea y desea romper con las actitudes prologales del discurso hispánico precedente. En este sentido, tal conciencia requiere que se le identifique como un punto de partida, como un momento en el que el pasado se cosifica y se corta, o como bien dice Foucault, en el que el tiempo se entiende como “discontinuo” y constituye “a break with tradition, a feeling of novelty, of vertigo in the face of the passing moment” (39).

Para llevar a cabo esta labor, nos fijaremos en algunos precedentes europeos que se encaminan al “nuevo” discurso prologal, como Montaigne, Bacon y Malebranche.¹ También nos acercaremos brevemente a los prólogos de *El Conde Lucanor* de don Juan Manuel, del *Libro de buen amor* del Arcipreste de Hita, y del primer tomo del *Quijote* de Cervantes, los cuales consideramos como momentos claves del discurso prologal hispánico y que nos servirán para contrastar con el sentido y la actitud implícitos en el prólogo del benedictino.²

Entendemos generalmente por “prólogo” cualquier texto preliminar que se produce a propósito de otro texto al cual precede (Genette 150). Se trata, por lo tanto, de un espacio en el que se problematiza ya, desde un principio, la naturaleza de la recepción de una obra. Genette asocia el “prólogo” con una conveniencia circunstancial y protocolaria (150), vinculada específicamente a su apelación principal dirigida al lector (162). Para Genette, este lector no coincide directamente con la

noción de “público” que suele anunciarse en los títulos de algunos prólogos (180). A nuestro entender, su noción de “lector” supondría la búsqueda, por parte del escritor o “presentador” de la obra de un “receptor” privilegiado, que compartiría la develación del engranaje, de la realidad interior de la obra, y que de ningún modo manifiesta la generalización implícita en la noción de “público”. Genette señala que el prólogo impone una lectura al lector (180). Si aceptamos tal cual esta opinión, el discurso prologal estaría compuesto por un eje fijo de intencionalidad, por lo que la búsqueda de un lector quedaría predeterminada por los señalamientos de un primer nivel de significación. Esto vendría a coincidir con la caracterización que hace Borges del prólogo como una “forma subalterna del brindis” (8).

Para los efectos del presente trabajo, proponemos distinguir dos discursos prologales que sirven de polos a una gama que reconocemos como más amplia, pero que de alguna manera oscila entre ambos. En primer lugar destacamos un discurso prologal, que consciente de su retoricidad convencional, presenta una estrategia de lectura crítica, amplia, audaz, y que presagia una polivalencia textual. Este es el tipo de prólogo que según Rodríguez Vecchini, “se construye así, frente a sus congéneres, mediante la desconstrucción de la manera aparatosa en que degeneró la autorización prologal” (366). En segundo lugar, nos referimos al discurso prologal que intenta reformular el espacio de la autorización al autoerigirse como introducción a un discurso novedoso, distinto e imprescindible. Es, en este sentido, el prólogo que se reconoce como tal, como preámbulo, y que manifiesta plena fe en las funciones legitimadoras que indica Genette. Coincide, las más de las veces, con la retórica de la pretensión “moderna”, o la seducción y el impulso que ejerce sobre el escritor el afán instaurador, como lo señala Paul de Man: La atracción de la modernidad persigue a toda la literatura. Esto se manifiesta en un sinnúmero de imágenes y emblemas que aparecen en todos los períodos literarios—en la obsesión con la tábula rasa, con un nuevo principio—y encuentra expresión constantemente en todas las formas de escritura. Ninguna explicación del lenguaje literario puede pasar por alto esa tentación de la literatura de culminar en un solo momento. La tentación de inmediatez forma parte constitutiva de la conciencia literaria y tiene que ser incluida en la definición de la especificidad de la literatura. (170)

En el caso específico de Feijoo, nos enfrentamos a la noción corriente de un marco cultural (el ilustrado) transplantado y extranjero. En opinión de Domínguez Ortiz, el cambio de siglo y la llegada de la nueva casa real de los Borbones no implicó grandes transformaciones en la vida

española, en franco agotamiento institucional, y que apenas mostraba algunos “destellos de sentido crítico” y una “pobre actividad literaria, con géneros enteros, que habían sido punteros, prácticamente muertos” (14). La visión de Domínguez contrasta, sin embargo, con la antes expresada por Richard Herr en el sentido de que la labor de Feijoo marcó el inicio de una nueva era en la vida intelectual española (39), y con la opinión de Eduardo Subirats, para quien la noción de “Ilustración” más bien entraña la conciencia del carácter novedoso y crítico del reciente pensamiento científico, filosófico y político-social, conciencia que no es ajena a la labor divulgadora del benedictino (38-47). Se impone, sin embargo, una visión más moderada ante el estado de desequilibrio en la implantación del nuevo orden estatal y el papel de la Iglesia, lo que ha condicionado precisamente la “lectura” de este momento, y es lo que ha dado a reconocer el carácter ambiguo de la posición intelectual de Feijoo, que en palabras de Stiffoni queda “oscilante entre un cauteloso rechazo de la tradición del barroco español y un reconocimiento a medias de los valores de la moderna cultura europea” (41). En el mismo sentido se había expresado Iris M. Zavala, señalando el papel activo que ejerció el benedictino en el planteamiento de cambios reales aunque siempre haciendo “uso prudente de su pluma” (136). Irrespectivamente del alcance efectivo de la obra del benedictino, de los predecesores que desde finales del siglo anterior se adscribían a las ideas y al método novedoso (Zavala 122-129, Abellán 494), y a pesar del ulterior destino que limitó el espacio de la “Ilustración” en España, pensamos que en el “Prólogo al lector” del primer tomo del *Teatro crítico* se impone una nueva definición discursiva del entorno cultural, una nueva lectura del qué hacer y el cómo rehacer los valores intelectuales de una sociedad.

Podemos considerar el “Prólogo al lector” del primer tomo del *Teatro crítico* un prólogo o prefacio “autorial auténtico”, término que emplea Genette para referirse al prólogo que se supone que exprese la voz del autor, entendido éste como el que escribe de hecho la obra (166). Tal prefacio supone que el “destinador autorial” se dedique a la fijación de una “buena” o correcta lectura de la obra (183). Sin embargo, en el prólogo del *Teatro crítico*, lejos de invitarse al lector a la consecución de tal “lectura”, o de presentarse el contenido o las razones que mueven al autor a escribir la obra, se comienza con unas declaraciones que más bien fijan la imposibilidad de establecer un lector adecuado, y establecen la superioridad de la voz autorial:

Lector mío, seas quien fueres, no te espero muy propicio: porque siendo verisimil, que estés preocupado de muchas de las opiniones comunes,

que impugno, y no debiendo yo confiar tanto, ni en mi persuasiva, ni en tu docilidad, que pueda prometerme conquistar luego tu asenso ¿qué sucederá sino que firme en tus antiguos dictámenes condenes como inicuas mis decisiones? (99)³

Se establece un desdén absoluto, que aunque bien puede constituir una particular variación de la “captatio”, impone lo que hemos querido llamar “distancia crítica”, una suerte de separación en el plano contextual inmediato (separación del lector) que implica una mayor ruptura con el plano contextual general (el discurso prosístico anterior, estético y filosófico). La irónica reflexión sobre el valor del texto va dirigida al presunto lector más que a la obra en sí, lo que se infiere y refuerza con la temática del primer discurso de la colección, “La voz del pueblo”, reconocido por el propio Feijoo como “preliminar necesario” (100), y donde se detecta con claridad la ruptura que alimenta la actitud intelectual del benedictino, para el cual el “vulgo” carece de entendimiento o “luz nativa” para discernir lo cierto de lo falso (105), razón por la cual se hace necesaria la intervención de quien posee discernimiento para el adelantamiento del conocimiento y su debida adaptación a las instituciones españolas. Quedamos de esta forma ante la situación en que la voz autorial, para erigirse como absoluta, recurre a la minimización de su posible lector. Este antagonismo con el “lector no propicio”, viene a ser un reto que declara lo que debe ser el hombre “moderno”, el que persigue la verdad distinta que “camina con tan perezosos pasos a la victoria” (99). Feijoo pasa de esta distancia retórica a la distancia epistemológica que fundamenta el discurso moderno. Las nuevas autoridades son aquellos que han desarticulado, por la vía de la experimentación, las nociones preexistentes. De ahí que ejemplifique inmediatamente con Harvey, para elevar el conocimiento científico experimental por sobre los criterios inmóviles de la escolástica (99-100). Esta dependencia académica hispánica del discurso escolástico obliga a Feijoo a dramatizar su ruptura. En el caso del prólogo del *Novum Organum* de Bacon, aunque de manera reservada, se expone que el nuevo conocimiento debe extenderse, de manera gentil ante la consideración de los hombres:

I have on my own part made it my care and study that the things which I shall propound should not only be true, but should also be presented to men's minds, how strangely soever preoccupied and obstructed, in a manner not harsh or unpleasant. (37)

Se manifiesta un poco más de optimismo en el posible lector. A

éste se le reconoce como ser pensante, capaz de analizar y de discernir, y a quien se le considera facultado para diferir de lo expuesto si tal diferencia surge de la reflexión comedida. Otro tanto plantea Malebranche en su *Tratado sobre la naturaleza y la gracia*, que se permite suplicar la venia de un público sensato y ecuánime que reconozca el valor de su intento de probar las verdades de la fe (110). El contraste mayor lo proporciona la “nota” inicial de Montaigne a sus *Ensayos*, en cuyas primeras líneas se desestima cualquier pretensión de que esté su obra dirigida a persuadir una verdad, y que constituye así el mejor sincretismo de la “captatio benevolentiae” y la “excusatio”:

C'est icy un livre de bonne foy, lecteur. Il t'advertit dès l'entrée, que je ne m'y suis proposé aucune fin, que domestique et privée. Je n'y ay eu nulle consideration de ton service, ny de ma gloire. Mes forces ne sont pas capables d'un tel dessein. (3)

Si deseáramos delimitar una jerarquía entre los prologuistas a partir de estos recursos, nuestro modelo presentaría a Montaigne en el primer lugar (humildad total, desprendimiento), a Bacon y a Malebranche en el segundo (persuasión y esperanza de incitar el juicio ecuánime), y a Feijoo en el tercero (abandono de la fe en el lector, reto, ruptura). No extraña que la jerarquía coincida con la cronología. Dentro del contexto hispánico no le sería suficiente a Feijoo presentar humildemente o llamar al juicio sensato ante los temas que expone, por lo que necesita del golpe soberbio.

Otro aspecto en el cual la comparación se hace interesante es en el manejo del concepto de “error”. Tanto Bacon como Malebranche destacan la necesidad de “sacar del error” o de “presentar la verdad”. Para Bacon, la verdad constituye la práctica efectiva del nuevo método científico y la validez de la información que se recoge por los sentidos (34). La tarea de enmendar errores, curiosamente, la asocia al mero ejercicio deductivo de la lógica escolástica (34). Malebranche, por su parte, muestra una estrategia retórica en el prólogo a *The Search after Truth*, de la que luego se valdrá Feijoo, si bien la emplea en contra de una noción de verdad científica:

In this work I combat several errors and especially those most universally received or those that cause a greater disorder of the mind, and I show that these errors are almost all consequences of the mind's union with the body. (xxv)

Así visto, el “error” para Bacon corresponde a un nivel algo inferior al de la realidad y la no realidad en el mundo físico, mientras que para Malebranche es la información falsa que no pasa por mediación div-

ina. La versión feijoniana queda en un espacio epistemológico intermedio, en el que no queda claro el alcance de la cientificidad en relación con el de la subjetividad cuando indica: “error, como aquí le tomo, no significa otra cosa que una opinión que tengo por falsa, prescindiendo de si la juzgo o no probable” (101). Feijoo se centra así en el valor del concepto de “opinión”, lo que mueve el peso de la demostración al ámbito subjetivo. Feijoo continúa hablando sobre los “errores”, esta vez señalando que los mismos no son exclusivos de un grupo en particular (101).⁴ El “error” no es entonces una designación referencial o científica. Parte de una particular situación sociocultural, ante la cual Feijoo precisa diferir, no sólo del “vulgo”, sino también de otros “literatos” que participan de esta opción que él rechaza. El “lector”, por lo tanto, es dual.

Ahora bien, es notable, por su parte, que el discurso prologal hispánico previo se orientaba por otros derroteros, que llegan incluso a cuestionar críticamente el papel de la prologación. Una medida de comparación la ofrece el planteamiento de la intención, esencial al analizar un prólogo, y que en el caso de la tradición hispánica se debate entre la precisión didáctica y el impulso crítico. Ambos aspectos están presentes en el “Prólogo al lector”, y forman la dualidad indispensable de la aspiración ilustrada. La fijeza intencional de Feijoo se ve cuando explica el ordenamiento de sus ensayos que no están “distribuidos por determinadas clases” (100). Este posible reparo lo elimina con la afirmación del párrafo siguiente en el que no desea que queden dudas sobre su propósito: “cada tomo, bien que el designio de impugnar errores comunes uniforme, en cuanto a las materias, parecerá un riguroso misceláneo. El objeto formal será siempre uno” (101).

Ha sido complejo el desarrollo de la declaración de “intención” a lo largo del proceso literario hispánico. En *El Conde Lucanor* de don Juan Manuel (1335), la voz autorial intenta establecer una lectura obligada, aunque recurre reiteradamente a la “excusatio”:

Pero, desque vieren los libros que él fizo, por las menguas que en fallaren, no pongan la culpa a la su entención, mas pónganla a la mengua del su entendimiento. (70)

E lo que y fallaren que non es tan bien dicho, non pongan culpa a la mi entención, mas pónganla a la mengua del mio entendimiento. (73)

Toda su presentación gira en torno a la “buena fe” de la voz autorial en todo momento. Se nota claramente el contraste con la actitud feijoniana, pues no se da un tanteo de fuerzas que intente imponer un criterio. Más bien desea orientar a los miembros de una clase social determinada, para que de esta forma afiancen su posición. Tal

reconocimiento se da en función de una intención didáctica explícita, que supera el autoelogio presente en varias partes del texto. El mismo no llega jamás a la soberbia presente en el *Teatro crítico*.

Ya en el *Libro de buen amor* del Arcipreste de Hita (c. 1343), se asoma una mayor conciencia de la retoricidad del lenguaje prologal. Su estructuración como sermón-prólogo presenta una argumentación lógica basada en definiciones y sentencias, que más bien encubre la doble oferta con la que cierra. La voz autorial utiliza un lenguaje característico del género prologal a partir de una declaración de humildad: “Onde yo, de mi poquilla çiençia e de mucha e grand rrudeza, (...) fiz esta chica escriptura en memoria de bien, e compuse este nuevo libro...” (109). Al calificar como “nuevo” el libro, evidencia su deseo de destacar la diferencia que le caracteriza con respecto al modelo retórico del que se vale. El giro radical de la intención se apodera de la sentencia inicial, del “tema” del supuesto “sermón”:

E ansí mi libro a todo omne o muger, (...) al que escogiere salvaçión e obrare bien, (...) otrosí al que quisiere el amor loco; en la carrera que andudiere, puede cada uno dezir: “Intelectum tibi dabo, e çetera”. (110)

Trasciende cierta ambigüedad por la que podemos decir que el “sermón-prólogo desarticula la imposición de una “buena lectura”, como querría asegurar Genette. Contrasta con la actitud de Feijoo, que insiste vehementemente en declarar su intención:

Tan lejos voy de comunicar especies perniciosas al público, que mi designio en esta obra es desengañarle de muchas, que por estar admitidas como verdaderas, le son perjudiciales; y no sería razón cuando puede ser universal el provecho, que no alcanzase a todos el desengaño. (102)

Si bien la fuerza de Feijoo está en la carga apelativa, no se aleja del esquema funcional convencional de los prólogos. Se erige como principio ordenador, ante su fe en la magnitud de su proyecto sociocultural. Feijoo no duda de sí mismo, ni de la capacidad representativa del lenguaje. Su duda se dirige hacia la recepción que entiende viciada de antemano.

El contraste mayor se da cuando nos fijamos en el “Prólogo” del primer tomo del *Quijote* (1604). Cervantes presenta una reflexión crítica de la confección, no sólo de los prólogos, sino también de la obra literaria misma. La ironía que da comienzo al prólogo no se dirige al “lector” como tal, sino que cuestiona la presunta trascendencia de la literatura:

Desocupado lector: sin juramento me podrás creer que quisiera que este libro, como hijo del entendimiento, fuera el más hermoso, el más gallardo y más discreto que pudiera imaginarse. Pero no he podido yo contravenir al orden de

la naturaleza; que en ella cada cosa engendra su semejante. (50)

El tácito respeto al lector supone la relativización de cualquier valor estricto. La alegada dificultad de la voz autorial para realizar el prólogo ejemplifica el carácter problemático de querer aconsejar o imponer una lectura específica (51). El prólogo cervantino, se nos presenta a su vez como un híbrido proteico, como un texto que precede y presenta una ficción, que a su vez recurre a la narración ficcional para construirse, y que entraña los elementos de una crítica totalizadora. Ante tal extremo crítico, el prólogo feijoniano viene a definir un recomienzo. El poder de su intención dependerá entonces de que se concrete la ruptura que desea devolverle al discurso su primacía por sobre la recepción. La parodia de su propio discurso es imposible. Existe una sola verdad y es la suya.⁵

En el plano tipológico, hemos visto cómo el “Prólogo al lector” del primer tomo del *Teatro crítico* viene a ser el retorno al punto inicial de la circularidad hermenéutica. El “yo” como centro del cual emana la interpretación revive en función del proyecto cultural europeizador, reapropiador de un discurso filosófico que se entiende como necesario y como revitalizador. Hemos visto además cómo no opta por la reflexión crítica de su propio discurso, lo que lo aleja de una tradición crítica que en el discurso prologal hispánico culmina con la “oferta” cervantina.⁶ Intenta, por lo tanto, alejarse de este encerramiento y concretar una ruptura.

En el sentido literario, y por su dramatismo, el “Prólogo al lector” del primer tomo del *Teatro crítico* es un verdadero prólogo de época. Si bien es cierto, como se ha señalado, que la labor de reforma científica y cultural ya había comenzado antes de que el benedictino tomara la pluma, es su gesto prologal el instaurador y el definidor de su momento. No se escapa, sin embargo, de la frustración que toda caracterización optimista entraña como reverso. Ha expresado el filósofo francés Jacques Derrida que todo prólogo vive al margen de su propia cancelación ante la imposibilidad de contener o abarcar la totalidad del texto al cual precede (7-9). Si consideramos la labor cultural de Feijoo en conjunto como un gran texto es justo pensar que no haya sido suficiente para lograr un efecto absoluto en su siglo, y así su prologación, su instante definitorio, quede minimizado ante los resultados concretos de su proyecto. En este particular, Subirats ha insistido en el carácter pujante de la obra de Feijoo entendida como una “reforma de instituciones y costumbres y la imposición de una mentalidad social nueva” (49). Habrá de distinguirse, sin embargo, entre la obra del benedictino y lo que

podríamos llamar “Ilustración” propiamente. No empece la labor de Feijoo, Domínguez Ortiz señala lo tardío del proyecto ilustrado debido al intento continuo durante el siglo por conciliar la “libre especulación” con la tutela de la Iglesia (161). Si bien consideramos fundamental la actitud de Feijoo y la importancia de su trabajo, debemos coincidir con aquellos que ubican la implantación del proyecto propiamente ilustrado más adelante, durante mediados del reinado de Carlos III y parte del de Carlos IV, y en este sentido reconocemos que tal proceso quedó incompleto, agobiado por los intereses de la Iglesia y la desconfianza misma del estado surgida por los acontecimientos revolucionarios en Francia. A la hora de evaluar la obra de Feijoo, sin embargo, identificamos el más favorable resultado, y el más duradero, en la actitud de quien decide recurrir a la actividad literaria, a lo que será reconocido como la base del ensayo moderno hispánico, como medio de reformulación cultural y nacional. Feijoo es, ante todo, el escritor, el que construye, desde el poder de su voluntad y la ductilidad del texto, la nueva autoridad, que, como señala de Man, desea “llegar a un punto de origen que marque un nuevo punto de partida” (165). Por esta razón, este primer gesto prologal feijoniano es lo más cercano a una nueva génesis. Ante el llamado “cansancio literario”, que más bien viene a ser el reducto desorientado que surge luego de un trayecto literario productivo, intenso y extremo, recobra el espacio perdido por el “yo” para reinterpretarlo, y en última (o primera) instancia, rehacerlo.

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⁷ Empleamos los prólogos a los *Essais* de Montaigne, *The New Organon* de Francis Bacon y *The Search for Truth* y el *Treatise on Nature and Grace* de Nicolas Malebranche. No pretendemos decir que Feijoo calcase las actitudes de estos tres intelectuales, sino que adoptará, de uno o de otro, algunos elementos centrales, y tratará de llevar la incitación característica del discurso prologal más allá de lo que ellos lo habían hecho. Téngase en cuenta que el modelo formal del *Teatro crítico* es el seguido por Montaigne, si bien en éste la reflexión va más allá de la divulgación característica del benedictino, más cercana a la intención de la *Enciclopedia*, a la cual precede. La admiración por el trabajo de Bacon justifica la exploración de la presentación de su obra magna y el marco de sus intenciones. Malebranche nos proveerá las claves de la estrategia discursiva de Feijoo, afianzado en el equilibrio entre lo teológico y lo científico.

⁸ De ningún modo agotamos con esta selección la posibilidad de contrastar el prólogo del *Teatro crítico*. Más bien se ha seleccionado los mismos por el modo en que reflejan una problemática en específico, la de su conciencia crítica de la oferta prologal, como veremos adelante.

⁹ Todas las citas al *Teatro crítico* se referirán en adelante a la edición de G. Stiffoni (Madrid, Clásicos Castalia, 1986).

¹⁰ En este sentido, volvemos sobre el concepto de “vulgo” o lector incapaz que es parte del pueblo en general y también de los literatos. I. L. McClelland, en su reciente trabajo sobre la ambivalencia ideológica de comienzos del siglo XVIII, y en el que centra más en la figura de Torres Villarroel, señala sobre este particular que “the vulgo (...) had, for the Enlightened, a meaning socially classless. It denoted the tendency in every age, and in every kind of society, intellectual or non-intellectual, aristocratic, bourgeois or peasant, to think as a society instead of recognizing, as grouped individuals, the individual potentialities of individual ideas, and risking the discomfort of subsequent uncertainties” (2).

¹¹ Tal vez el mejor ejemplo dieciochesco de esta actitud se encuentra en las *Cartas marruecas* de José Cadalso (1789), en cuya prefación se imitan varios elementos del prólogo cervantino, y en el que llega a menospreciarse el valor de todo prólogo (80-81).

¹² Quedaría acaso una aproximación al diálogo velado o expreso de los prólogos contemporáneos, que llevaremos a cabo en otro momento, en el que se evidencia el otro marco en el que se inscribe todo prologuista, la reacción de su contexto, es decir, la interpretación externa e inmediata. En este sentido llama a la atención, por ejemplo, el prólogo

a las *Visiones y visitas de Torres con don Francisco de Quevedo por la corte de Torres Villarroel*, en el que se ensaya más bien un ataque al posible lector, además del menosprecio en partes como “Ten paciencia, o ahórcate; que yo no he de perder mi sueño porque tú murmures los letargos” (10), y en el que subyace una solapada crítica al gesto discursivo feijoniano: “¿Qué cosa más fácil que presentarte el nombre de discreto, porque tú me volvieras el de erudito?” (11).



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La *nave de los locos* se publicó en 1984. Para entonces Cristina Peri Rossi llevaba doce años viviendo fuera del Uruguay, su país de origen. De esa experiencia surge el tema fundamental de *La nave de los locos*, el exilio.¹ En la novela éste se presenta como el desarraigo absoluto. La separación del lugar de origen supone una pérdida de los referentes comunes, de asideros, de todos los elementos que en circunstancias normales permiten afirmar una identidad.

Es posible asumir que la idea de “ser” o de “pertenecer” a determinada nacionalidad se sostiene por medio de hábitos, costumbres, una historia común, y constituye una forma de identificación. Los personajes de *La nave de los locos* se nos presentan desprendidos del lugar de origen, y del pasado les queda apenas la memoria del momento del desarraigo. Ninguno intenta echar nuevas raíces. El exilio significa para ellos estar a la deriva. Son pasajeros de esta nave, en un viaje sin rumbo.

Los referentes literarios y culturales abundan en *La nave de los locos*. El título alude a la supuesta práctica medieval de embarcar a los locos en naves para abandonarlos a la deriva, liberando así a la sociedad de elementos indeseables. Desde la publicación de *Narrenschiff* de Sebastian Brant en 1494 hasta el presente, el tema y el título han inspirado una serie de imitaciones y adaptaciones en la literatura, la pintura y el cine. En la novela de Peri Rossi, el exilio es este viaje sin rumbo de los marginales, los indeseables, los individuos que no se ajustan al modelo general de la sociedad. Los desaparecidos políticos comparten el desarraigo con niños, ancianas, mujeres mutiladas y artistas de cabaret.

La novela consiste en una serie de fragmentos inconexos, episodios con personajes distintos, en lugares distintos, apenas articulados por la presencia de Equis, que parece ser el protagonista del relato, y por las descripciones intercaladas de *El tapiz de la creación* de la Catedral de Gerona.

Las descripciones del tapiz presentan el alto grado de estructuración del universo en la imaginación medieval y contrastan con el carácter episódico de la novela (Arkininstall 152-154, Moraña 164-66,

Olivera-Williams 84-85, Potvin 164-66, y Verani 80-81). El orden del tapiz parece preverlo todo, contemplarlo todo, tener un lugar preciso para cada elemento de la creación. Es una estructura estática que debería abarcar la totalidad. Sin embargo, una nota a pie de página nos advierte que “cualquier armonía supone la destrucción de los elementos reales que se le oponen, por eso es casi siempre simbólica” (*La nave de los locos* 20). Aquello que se resiste a dicha armonía, como los pasajeros de la nave de los locos, es destruido. En esa confrontación entre el orden absoluto y sus grietas, el tapiz y lo que el tapiz ignora o destruye, se organiza la novela.

El texto se compone de fragmentos aparentemente inconexos que narran diversos viajes, alternados con la descripción del tapiz, pero también con la noción de que el protagonista, Equis, oscila entre el viaje sin rumbo y la trayectoria del héroe que se resuelve en un fin específico: Equis se ve enfrentado a enigmas que debe solucionar, como si tuviera que definir su destino. La sucesión de pequeñas narraciones heterogéneas se proyecta sobre una estructura tradicional del relato, la gesta heroica en la que el protagonista debe enfrentarse a una serie de obstáculos para llegar a una meta. En la narrativa del héroe, la identidad de éste se define en la trayectoria misma. Son sus actos y el éxito de su cometido los que afirman su identidad. El carácter fragmentario de los episodios de la novela cuestiona los presupuestos de dicha narrativa. La búsqueda de Equis, el viaje, debería conducir a un puerto de llegada, a una respuesta definitiva, que le otorgara al protagonista la identidad deseada. Pero la incógnita que Equis representa sólo puede ser resuelta en las fisuras de los fragmentos de este viaje sin destino.

De Lauretis afirma que toda narrativa es en el fondo un relato edípico en el que un héroe debe resolver ciertos obstáculos para encontrar su identidad, para descubrir quién es realmente. La semiótica analiza el relato en términos de elementos fundamentales y en este análisis el relato supone un protagonista que ejecuta una acción. En las diversas interpretaciones recogidas por De Lauretis, la gesta del héroe le revela su origen, le otorga identidad. El protagonista del relato es aparentemente universal, pero en realidad está genéricamente marcado: Edipo es hombre, los rasgos que definen la búsqueda son percibidos como masculinos (movimiento, desplazamiento, agudeza), y la búsqueda misma consiste en vencer los obstáculos, concebidos como femeninos (pasividad, estatismo). Según De Lauretis, es el hombre el que busca su identidad en todo relato, relegando a las mujeres a permanecer como elementos pasivos de la historia.

En *La nave de los locos*, Equis parecería ser este Edipo masculino: su propio nombre alude a la identidad que debe ser descifrada, la incógnita del relato. Pero además los acertijos que se le plantean son nuevas versiones del problema de la Esfinge. Las referencias literarias que pueblan la novela refuerzan el papel de Equis como el héroe, aquél que ejecuta, aquél que forja con sus acciones su destino y su identidad: alusiones a la Biblia, a la Iliada y al Ulises, a Don Quijote, a las leyendas de la corte del Rey Arturo, se suceden en el texto. Equis, sin embargo, parece resistirse al rol que le está destinado. La reflexión sobre su nombre evita encasillarse en una definición:

En cuanto a los nombres, Equis piensa que en general son irrelevantes, igual que el sexo, aunque en ambos casos, hay gente que se esfuerza por merecerlos. Una vez, se entretuvo haciendo una lista de nombres posibles para él. Ulises era adecuado para destacar la condición de viajero, pero sus resonancias literarias lo determinaban demasiado. Se hubiera sentido en la obligación de reescribir la Odisea, como peripecia moderna ... Y Horacio era imposible, despues de Rayuela. (25-26)

Equis parece huir de la definición que supondría un nombre. Son otros, no él, quienes pretenden merecer un sexo o un nombre, es decir, quienes asumen que debe existir una correspondencia, una definición en el nombre y en el sexo, que el nombre y el sexo contienen un significado.

Equis sugiere que ambas son categorías vacías, irrelevantes, que es posible llenar libremente, pero él también les atribuye contenidos a los nombres y por eso los evita. Ni Ulises ni Horacio ni Archibaldo ni Iván, Equis mantiene así su identidad sin definición, abierta. Pero la indefinición también sugiere la incógnita que debe ser resuelta y, aunque Equis no quiere sentirse obligado a escribir la Odisea moderna, las revelaciones que se le presentan en sueños lo sitúan en el rol protagónico, el héroe enviado en una travesía que lo define: “En el sueño recibía una orden. ‘La ciudad a la que llegues, descríbela.’ Obediente, pregunté: ‘¿Cómo debo distinguir lo significativo de lo insignificante?’ Luego, me encontraba en un campo, separando el grano de la paja” (9).

Se inicia así el primer capítulo: Equis tiene una tarea que cumplir y esa tarea supone precisamente discernir, discriminar, definir, es decir, delimitar identidades. En una escena estática, la labor es “sencilla aunque trabajosa.” Sin embargo, el orden pierde toda estabilidad cuando aparece “ella,” un personaje femenino indeterminado que confunde todo criterio de distinción:

“tuvo piedad de una hierba y yo, por complacerla, la mezclé con el grano. Luego, hizo lo mismo con una piedra. Más tarde suplicó por un ratón. Cuando se fue, quedé confuso. La paja me parecía más bella y los granos, torvos. La duda me ganó” (9). En este primer viaje Equis fracasa en su tarea por intervención de lo femenino que subvierte la racionalidad que dirigía su labor. Nuestro héroe no se sobrepone al obstáculo, queda vencido y pierde el orden: “Desde entonces, la paja y el grano están mezclados. Bajo el cielo gris el horizonte es una mancha y la voz ya no responde” (9).

El viaje debe tener un sentido, describir la ciudad, pero Equis se pierde, no puede cumplir su cometido. Los episodios que se suceden independientemente en la novela sugieren esa falta de rumbo. Un nuevo sueño insiste en encontrar la respuesta que otorgue sentido al viaje que es el texto:

En el sueño, había una pregunta que flotaba como un enigma, como aquellos acertijos que los reyes, enamorados de sus hijas, proponían a los pretendientes. Príncipes, caballeros degollados en el insensato afán de resolver la oscura adivinanza que conservaba a las hijas para los padres. En el sueño, Equis escuchaba la pregunta: “¿Cuál es el mayor tributo, el homenaje que un hombre puede ofrecer a la mujer que ama?” (183)

Equis sigue siendo el héroe sometido a la prueba, Edipo enfrentado al obstáculo que se interpone en el develamiento de su propia identidad. A lo largo del último capítulo la pregunta se repite como un estribillo y Equis ensaya respuestas sin atreverse a formular una definitiva. Una de las respuestas que se le ocurre es “no dar,” optar por la inacción, sin embargo, presiente que esa no es la respuesta correcta. Equis deambula por la ciudad después de haberse acostado, desnudo, junto a una mujer golpeada, declarándole su impotencia. De este encuentro surge la sensación de que algo se ha aclarado en su mente, pero Equis no intenta definirlo. Su caminata por la ciudad lo conduce a los anuncios de un espectáculo erótico y en las fotos reconoce el rostro de Lucía, una muchacha a la que había conducido, junto con otras, a una clínica de abortos en Londres, en uno de sus trabajos eventuales. Equis había estado tratando de encontrarla sin éxito. Al reconocerla entra al teatro donde:

=alcanzó a ver...a Lucía, vestida de varón, con chistera (sobre sus cortos cabellos rubios), corbata y pantalones muy

anchos, que flotaban, imitando a Charlotte Rampling en Portero de noche, quien imitaba a Helmut Berger en La caída de los Dioses, quien imitaba a Marlene Dietrich en El ángel azul. (191)

Otra persona, vestida como Dolores del Río, participa de la escena erótica en medio de los gritos y chiflidos de un público masculino cuyos integrantes “se sentían dominadores, desinhibidos, irresponsables” (190).

Toda la escena sugiere la performatividad concebida por Judith Butler. Butler cuestiona la idea de una distinción clara entre un sexo biológico y un género sexual culturalmente construido y sostiene el sexo biológico identificado como femenino y masculino es también un producto cultural que ha sido asumido como natural. Así el género sexual es siempre una representación —*performance*— de aquello identificado culturalmente como masculino o femenino. “As the effects of a subtle and politically enforced performativity gender is an ‘act,’ as it were, that is open to splittings, self-parody, self-criticism, and those hyperbolic exhibitions of ‘the natural’ that in their very exaggeration, reveal its fundamentally phantasmatic status” (Butler 146-47).

Así en la escena, Dolores del Río es “un hombre disfrazado de mujer, o una mujer, un travesti, uno que había cambiado sus señas de identidad para asumir la de sus fantasías, alguien que se había decidido a ser quien quería ser y no quien estaba determinado a ser” (*La nave de los locos* 191). Lucía imita a una mujer que imita a un hombre que imita a una mujer que imita a un hombre, y actúa junto a alguien que también actúa la representación de una mujer, mientras los hombres del público representan también su papel, ejerciendo una mirada masculina sobre un objeto feminizado.

Este es, para Equis, el momento de la revelación. Este espectáculo, en que vestir y actuar de determinada manera es adoptar identidades sexuales, cuestiona todo un sistema de identidades y atributos definitorios. Equis encuentra la respuesta al enigma de sus sueños: el mayor homenaje que un hombre puede hacerle a la mujer que ama es su virilidad. El tributo mayor es renunciar a lo que supuestamente define a un hombre como tal. Así, la identidad no puede ser una estructura fija e inamovible, sino más bien cierta posicionalidad que es posible reacomodar. Los conceptos de virilidad y feminidad son estructuras rígidas que dejan al descubierto espacios marginales en los que es posible redefinir identidades y relaciones.

La búsqueda de Equis que debe definirlo como héroe lo conduce a despojarse de la definición. De esta manera toda la estructura de

la gesta edípica, todo un sistema de construcción de la identidad se desarma. El sueño se repite en las últimas páginas de la novela, pero Equis ya tiene la respuesta al enigma: “¡Su virilidad!”, grita Equis, y el rey, súbitamente disminuido, el rey, como un caballito de juguete, el rey, como un muñequito de pasta, el reyecito de chocolate cae de bruces, vencido, el reyecito se hunde en el barro, el reyecito, derrotado, desaparece. Gime antes de morir” (197). La racionalidad que intenta definir a Equis por medio de la respuesta a un enigma queda aniquilada.

Las líneas finales de la novela continúan con la descripción de *El Tapiz de la creación*, aludiendo a una ausencia: “Faltan enero, noviembre, diciembre y, por lo menos, dos ríos del Paraíso” (198). El tapiz, con las ausencias en su estructura totalizante, no puede abarcarlo todo. El esquema narrativo del viaje de Equis también resulta fallido, pues la respuesta que definiría su destino justamente niega la posibilidad de la definición. El héroe, el hombre, sólo puede serlo si se niega a serlo.

La narrativa del héroe, cuestionada por la respuesta que niega el propio enigma, también es cuestionada por toda la estructura de la novela y su carácter episódico, y la inclusión de poemas y pasajes líricos que se apartan de un desarrollo lineal.

El tema del viaje, por otro lado, queda subsumido en el tema del exilio. La travesía de la nave de los locos no conduce a un destino. El viaje perpetuo e involuntario obliga a vivir en los márgenes, siempre a la deriva. Los personajes de la novela no pueden ni retornar al lugar de origen ni encontrar un nuevo hogar, una nueva definición. No hay puertos; así como no existe en realidad una identidad inamovible.

Es necesario tener en cuenta, sin embargo, que esa subsistencia en la periferia constituye otra forma de identificación: los personajes existen fuera del cuerpo social y la propia exclusión les permite encontrarse. En la novela el orden social es rígido y pernicioso. No es posible transformarlo, pero sí encontrar en sus intersticios a otros individuos marginales y establecer lazos con ellos por el mismo hecho de ser marginales, aun cuando las razones de la marginalidad sean diversas.

En la primera novela de Peri Rossi, *El libro de mis primos*, el quiebre de la estructura social y familiar culmina con la entrada triunfante de la guerrilla en la ciudad. La revolución es todavía la toma de un espacio público y el resquebrajamiento de la jerarquía familiar forma parte de ese mismo proceso. La utopía supone una transformación radical de los órdenes públicos y privados, la familia y la nación. Quince años más tarde no existe un lugar para la utopía. No se trata ya de tomar las calles de la ciudad ni de transformar la familia, figura ausente en la novela.

La nave de los locos discurre por el anverso de los recorridos convencionales. En medio del orden rígido del tapiz de la creación, en medio de las grandes metropolis en las que viven como exiliados, en medio de las convenciones de la masculinidad y la feminidad, en el propio papel de héroe, los personajes de *La nave de los locos* subsisten y viven en los márgenes. Desde allí consiguen alterar sus posiciones. La sociedad no puede ser transformada. Apenas aquéllos que han sido excluidos, aquéllos forzados a un viaje perpetuo, son capaces de cuestionar las estructuras básicas del sistema y replantear su identidad.

Notas

¹ El tema del exilio en la novela ha sido desarrollado ampliamente en numerosos artículos. Véanse Arkinstall, Potvin, Moraña, Olivera-Williams, y Verani.

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