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"Bella y Varonil": Looking Back at Mauricia in Benito Pérez Galdós's *Fortunata y Jacinta*

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In the late nineteenth century, transgressing gender norms was cause for medical concern and legal action. As Judith Butler succinctly states, "Discrete genders are part of what 'humanizes' individuals" (178). The figure of the *mujer varonil* (masculine woman) is a striking example of a subject who long defied the socially sanctified strictures of femininity. Yet at diverse historical junctures she has elicited radically different responses. In Golden Age theater, for example, *la mujer varonil* is "a term of praise, not of abuse" (McKendrick x).[1] In the modern period, however, gender transgressions have come to be seen as signs of freakishness (Bogdan 31). Thus, unlike her early modern counterpart, the masculine woman of the nineteenth-century figures as a freak. Such improperly gendered individuals were subjected to social stigma, medico-legal scrutiny, and, in some cases, exploitation in the market of commercial spectacle.[2] This radical change in perspective exemplifies what Rosemarie Garland-Thomson has identified as the transformation of freak discourse under modernity—that is, "a movement from a narrative of the marvelous to a narrative of the deviant" (3).

Much like in earlier historical periods, female masculinity in the modern era is a broad category that encompasses not only masculine appearance in women but also so-called manly behavior including smoking, drinking, and sexual promiscuity.[3] Thus, there are echoes here of the prostitute, the drunk, *el marimacho* (the tomboy), *la mujer hombruna* (the mannish woman), *la literata* (the woman of letters), *la mujer barbuda* (the bearded lady), and, of course, the decadent New Woman.[4] All are examples of women who donned masculine qualities and impinged on the autonomy of male subjectivity.

The late nineteenth century saw the proliferation of such rebellious female figures who exacerbated a crisis of (male) masculinity and virility. This

issue was not only a social concern but also a national one. Richard Cleminson and Francisco Váquez García observe,

> Anxieties over the lack of virility which had allowed Spain's last colonies to disappear, as the country lunged into a deep crisis around and after 1898, the growing contestation of women's movements, an alleged crisis in the birth rate, the acknowledgement of the "social question" and power destabilizing working-class movements, all placed emphasis on the need to seek out pathological and dissident strains in the national body. (18)

In this light, female masculinity was anathema to the heterosexist ideal of the nation that reserved masculinity and virility for its male subject-citizens.

That women could inhabit masculine bodies, behaviors, and attitudes threatened the autonomy of the nation's citizenry. Indeed, the presence of masculine women proved to be such an impending threat to the "natural" order of things that pedagogical refrains listed under the entry "mujer" (woman) in the 1869 edition of the *Diccionario de la lengua castellana* warned men of the dangers of getting involved with women who displayed masculine qualities:

> Á la mujer barbuda, de léjo la saluda. ref. que aconseja se huya de las mujeres que tiene barbas, por ser regularmente de mala condición. / Ni por casa ni por viña no tomes mujer jimia. ref. que amonesta que por razón de intereses no hay que casarse nunca con la mujer casquivana ó lasciva.
>
> (The bearded lady, greet her from afar. A refrain that advises one to flee from women who have facial hair for they are typically in ill condition. / Do not take to a simian woman. A refrain that warns, that for reasons of self-interest, one need not marry a loose or lascivious woman).[5]

By invading the already vulnerable territory of Spanish manhood, *la mujer varonil* illuminates and transgresses "the corporeal limits of [female] subjectivity" (Grosz 55).

In the Spanish realist novel, *la mujer varonil* makes rare but significant appearances that merit further scholarly attention, particularly in light of the widespread medical interest in sexual deviance that proliferated in tandem

with the genre.[6] Mauricia la Dura, the unruly, Napoleonic *mujer varonil* of Benito Pérez Galdós's novel *Fortunata y Jacinta: Historia de dos casadas* is one of the most striking secondary characters to appear in this 1500-page tome. Given the extensive web of social networks in this novel, *Fortunata y Jacinta* is largely a work of social entanglements, in which the truth of social identity and origin is viewed with heightened scrutiny. If the signs of class identity are to be treated with suspicion, so too are the signs of sex and gender. Along these lines, I argue that the novel enacts a pedagogic function that teaches the reader to be wary of the apparent signs of sexed identity.

Nearly coinciding with the rise of the realist novel, modern medicine gained institutional power on a national scale during the second half of the nineteenth century.[7] As such, medical doctors became regulatory agents, tasked with maintaining the social order of largely urban populations. According to Ricardo Campos Marín, José Martínez Pérez, and Rafael Huertas, those groups that suffered from social, political, and economic inequality, including prostitutes, criminal delinquents, and alcoholics, were deemed "'ilegales de la naturaleza' y, consecuentemente, de la sociedad" (x) ("illegals of nature" and, consequently, of society). In a similar vein, Cleminson and Vázquez García note that "[t]he hermaphrodite, like the alcoholic, the homosexual and the criminal, posed a threat to this emerging liberal order, a threat that had to be contained and managed" (18). Indeed, this period witnessed the beginnings of a biopolitical state that buttressed a hierarchical and binary social system. This system was intolerant of gender ambiguity, not only because it defied the categories of man and woman, the pillars of bourgeois society, but also because doctors feared the grave social and biological consequences of gender impersonation, including unintentional homosexual marriage and the admittance of nonmales into the military (18–19). The latter was a particularly urgent matter, as the military routinely drafted able-bodied males (pending the medical verification of sex) to fight the many battles and wars that plagued nineteenth-century Spain.

Hence the emergence of a subfield known as *medicina legal* (legal medicine) that was invested exclusively in the correct determination of sex and what we might view as a misalignment of sex and gender.[8] This medico-legal endeavor confirms Garland-Thomson's claim that "[a]s scientific explanation eclipsed religious mystery to become the authoritative cultural narrative of modernity, the exceptional body began increasingly to be represented in clinical terms as pathology, and the monstrous body moved from the freak show stage into the medical theater" (2). Historians have recently brought to light the ways in which these medical doctors intervened in matters of ambiguously sexed bodies and, in particular, in alleged cases of hermaphroditism—a highly contested category in the European medical community.[9] Their work entailed deciphering the so-called truth of bodies, when so many bodies failed to speak

for themselves. Yet, as Michel Foucault has famously argued, "Sex was not something one simply judged; it was a thing one administered" (*History of Sexuality* 24). This process denied individuals agency—medical experts were to decide "which sex nature had chosen for him and to which society must consequently ask him to adhere" (Foucault, *Herculine Barbin* ix). Medical doctors such as Pedro Mata i Fontanet spent their careers examining, cataloguing, and "administering" the sex of persons, who may have erroneously or intentionally lived their lives as a gender to which their body did not legally pertain.[10] Whereas in the earlier historical periods ambiguously gendered individuals may have been revered, in the nineteenth century "wonder becomes error" (Garland-Thomson 3).

In exploring the freakishness of masculine women, I am less interested in commercial spectacles such as the freak show and the circus and instead seek to examine the ways in which the nineteenth century in Spain witnessed a "dispersal of freak show discourse into an array of other representational modes"—namely, medical literature and the realist novel (Garland-Thomson 13).

In the pages that follow, I demonstrate how *Fortunata y Jacinta* reproduces the spectacle of freakery in such a way that it trains the reader to sense gender deviancy with the eyes and ears of the medical practitioner. Garland-Thomson argues that "[a] freak show's cultural work is to make the physical particularity of the freak into a hypervisible text against which the viewer's indistinguishable body fades into a seemingly neutral, tractable, and invulnerable instrument of the autonomous will, suitable to the uniform abstract citizenry democracy institutes" (10). I propose that *Fortunata y Jacinta* reveals the failures of freak discourse that constructs the normalized, invulnerable viewer/citizen even as it simultaneously produces the figure of the freak.

To this end, I examine less obvious, scarcely perceivable forms of power that exist on the side of the observed, constituted by the very moment of objectification. Such traces of subversive power, however limited, can be found even when an object of study is made into spectacle. Even in cases of supposedly detached medical observation, visual objectification may serve as a conduit for unruly erotic desire. Pressing on this notion further, I am interested in how the object of the gaze elicits the pleasures of the voyeur—be it the medical doctor, the narrator, the reader—in a way that undermines the power of his gaze. Put differently, how does desire dismantle the presumed stability of the medical doctor? Similarly, in the case of the novel, how might the urge "to see" the freakish woman undermine the sovereign male "I"/eye behind a seemingly indomitable "realist vision"?[11] In the pages that follow, I discuss those moments in which, borrowing the words of Anne Cheng, "[w]e do not master by seeing; [but rather] we are ourselves altered when we look" (21).

The Empire of Beauty

When measured against the idealized gendered attributes proscribed to the female sex—feminine beauty, chastity, docility, and desexualized maternal love—Mauricia falls squarely in the realm of nineteenth-century "freakdom." Here, I draw from Elizabeth Grosz's conceptualization of the freak as "an *ambiguous* being whose existence imperils categories and opposition dominant in social life" (57; emphasis in original). "Freaks are those human beings," she adds, "who exist outside and in defiance of the structure of binary oppositions that govern our basic concepts and modes of self-definition" (57).[12] As a *mujer varonil*, prostitute, alcoholic, and unwed mother, Mauricia occupies the liminal social terrain of the freak, an abjected figure who must be repeatedly repudiated so that the subject, as Judith Butler argues, may "circumscribe its own claim to autonomy and life" (3). Thus, Mauricia, much like another social deviant, her trusted friend and confidant Fortunata, pertains to a necessary "zone of uninhabitability" (3). Their lives are inherently more fragile than those of bourgeois women, and it therefore comes as no surprise that both die prematurely, leaving their children to the care of the childless Jacinta. The loss of their lives is Jacinta's gain, as it provides a much sought-after solution for her presumed infertility.

While Mauricia on the one hand appears to form part of this "constitutive outside" that quite literally gives life to the subject, she and others like her possess the potential to wield disruptive power (Butler 3). Tsuchiya affirms this idea, claiming that "[Mauricia's] body transgresses gender boundaries, undermining the bourgeois norms of femininity" (63). But how is it that an abjected figure like Mauricia, who seemingly gives meaning to regulatory ideals, also destabilizes the force of normativity? I propose that her power lies less in her self-conscious acts of rebellion (for she no doubt actively defies rules), and more in the transgressive potentiality of her beauty. That is, Mauricia's beauty may compel others to break with the strictures of normative desire by eliciting the attraction of her onlookers.

Tsuchiya notes a similar ambivalence in what she calls "the construction of the prostitute subject" (166). The prostitute, she argues, "acquires significance only in relation to the masculine desiring subject: because she represents a potential site of both pleasure and of disease for the men who desire her, she becomes the problem" (173). The oscillation between desire and disgust reflects the impossibility of remaining completely oppositional to the prostitute subject. That sexual desire and fear of venereal disease are tethered together reveals a less frequently articulated concern: that the male client will be likened to the figure of the prostitute. He, too, may become an agent of contamination. This same ambivalence that takes shape through the

volatility of male desire, I argue, also structures the subjectivity of the masculine woman. In desiring the *mujer varonil*, the male subject risks becoming a sexual deviant himself.

From the outset, the narrator describes Mauricia as an extraordinary sight, not only because of her uncanny resemblance to a young Napoleon Bonaparte (a point to which I will return in a later section) but also because of her unusual beauty: "Aquella mujer singularísima, bella y varonil tenía el pelo corto y lo llevaba siempre mal peinado y peor sujeto. Cuando se agitaba mucho trabajando, las melenas le soltaban, llegándole hasta los hombros y entonces la semejanza con el precoz caudillo de Italia y Egipto era perfecta" (Galdós 1: 748) (That singular, beautiful, and masculine woman had short hair and she always wore it badly combed and even worse tied back. When she moved about a lot while working, locks of hair would come loose, brushing her shoulders, and then the resemblance to the precocious commander of Italy and Egypt was perfect). Here, the surprising combination of beauty and female masculinity ("bella y varonil") appears to go against the laws of nature. For beauty is not a neutral category, and the designation of beauty always carries with it moral implications. Susan Sontag speaks to the overlooked linkages between the beautiful and the moral arguing that "[i]t's usually assumed that beauty is, almost tautologically, an 'aesthetic' category, which puts it, according to many, on a collision course with the ethical. But beauty, even beauty in the amoral mode, is never naked. And the ascription of beauty is never unmixed with moral values" (212).

Realist novelists typically reserved beauty as a category for their conventionally *feminine-looking* female heroines and construe female beauty as an attribute that elicits the sympathy and desire of male characters.[13] Beauty, in some cases, was also treated as an outward sign of chastity—in descriptions of beautiful heroines, the words "bella" (beautiful) and "casta" (chaste) are frequently paired. Antonio Claret, confessor to Isabel II, in his writings on women's education posited a causal relationship between chastity and beauty: "Se les enseñará que la castidad las hará semejantes a los ángeles, pero que la impureza las hará feas y dañinas como los demonios, e instrumentos y esclavas del demonio" (205) (They will be taught that chastity will make them like angels, but that impurity will make them ugly and harmful like demons, and instruments and slaves of the devil). The beauty-chastity nexus is always inflected by gender. It is part of the gendered mechanism that humanizes women. In Spanish, the idea of beauty is inherent to the normative understanding of the female sex: She is *el bello sexo* (the beautiful sex).

Fortunata y Jacinta's narrator espouses a markedly ambivalent attitude toward Mauricia's masculine beauty—shifting between desire and disgust—which compels us to further probe the function Mauricia serves as a secondary character who takes up a great deal of narrative space. As Harriet Turner has noted, she

occupies the literal center of the novel (85). The narrator, for example, describes with seemingly endless detail the visual qualities of Mauricia at various stages of the novel. These passages exceed those that describe the eponymous Fortunata, whose physical appearance is somewhat mundane and elusive.[14] This imbalance alone points to an overt invested interest in Mauricia's beautiful masculinity and freakish nature. The conjoining of beauty and female masculinity enables a subversion of gender normativity whereby Mauricia encroaches on the sacred inner circle to which a feminine, well-to-do woman like Jacinta pertains.

French medical hygienist Auguste Debay (whose work was widely translated in Spain in the nineteenth century) commented extensively on the power of beauty using such expressions as "el imperio de las mujeres sobre los hombres" (the empire of women over men) and "las armas de [la] hermosura" (the weapons of beauty) (92). He writes that "la belleza natural, engalanada con su inocencia y su candor, *ignora el poder que tiene*, y, sin saberlo atráese homenajes, amor y *respeto*" (92; emphasis added) (natural beauty, adorned with its innocence and candor, *does not know the power it holds*, and, unknowingly, it attracts homages, love, and *respect*). The moral ambivalence on the part of the narrator suggests that Mauricia's unconventionally beautiful form challenges the conventional view of beauty and its gendered inflection in a way that further lures the reader in. Mauricia's spectacular female masculinity gives her an enigmatic "poder fascinador" (Galdós 2: 388) (power to fascinate). In this scenario, the power dynamic between the observer and the observed is turned upside down. Mauricia's female masculinity transcends the gendered norms of beauty, but instead of becoming a victim of spectacle, she commands a certain form of *respect*—that is, respect originating from the Latin *respectāre*, literally signifying "to look again." In the section that follows, we will examine how the desire to look again impresses upon what I have called the male sovereign "I"/eye.

Gender Hieroglyphics

At first glance Mauricia la Dura captivates the male gaze: "el que la viera una vez, no la olvidaba y sentía el deseo de volverla a mirar" (Galdós 1: 607) (anyone who saw her once did not forget her and felt the desire to look at her again). Mauricia seizes the attention of her voyeur, who, possessed by her image, feels the urge to see her again. Her allure is irresistible:

> [E]jercían indecible fascinación sobre el observador aquellas cejas rectas y prominentes, los ojos grandes y febriles, escondidos como en acecho bajo la concavidad frontal, la pupila inquieta y ávida, mucho hueso en los pómulos, poca carne en las mejillas, la quijada robusta, la nariz romana,

> la boca acentuada terminando en flexiones enérgicas, y la expresión, en fin, soñadora y melancólica (1: 748).
>
> (Those straight and prominent brows, her large and feverish eyes, hidden under the frontal concavity as if stalking the restless and eager pupil, boney fleshless cheeks, her robust jaw, Roman nose, accentuated mouth ending in energetic flexion, and her expression, in brief, dreamy and melancholic, exercised an ineffable fascination over her observer).

In this detailed passage, the narrator ropes in the presumed male reader who might imagine himself as the hunted prey of Mauricia's feverish eyes. At the outset, he deploys a performative gesture. With the utterance "ejercía indecible fascinación sobre el observador" (exercised an ineffable fascination over the observer), he "hails" the reader who then becomes the captivated voyeur *before* he begins his verbal portrait. In this way, the reader of *Fortunata y Jacinta* is *always already* seduced.

Yet this narrative seduction is abruptly undercut by the following statement: "Pero en cuanto Mauricia hablaba, adiós ilusión. Su voz era bronca, más de hombre que de mujer, y su lenguaje vulgarísimo, revelando una naturaleza desordenada" (607–8) (But as soon as Mauricia spoke, farewell, illusion. Her voice was hoarse, like that of a man rather than a woman, and her language was most vulgar, revealing a disorderly nature). As a freak, Mauricia is "a being who is considered simultaneously and compulsively fascinating and repulsive, enticing and sickening" (Grosz 56). The sound of her masculine voice quickly renders the allure of her beauty a source of revulsion. This moment inverts the classic Althusserian scene of interpellation in which the policeman calls to the individual with the utterance "Hey, you there!" and the hailed individual turns around (118). "By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion," Althusser explains, "he becomes a subject" (118). In the novel, the visual image captures the individual's attention first and then provokes the urge to look back. The use of the phrase *volverla a mirar* (to look at her again)—literally, "to return to look at her"—latently evokes a sense of turning back. Voice comes subsequently as the sound of a gendered "truth"—Mauricia's "disorderly nature"—that demystifies the illusion of her powerful allure. The momentary "respect" constituted by the desire to look again is now subject to the narrator's moral scrutiny.

The reader learns in this pedagogical moment that Mauricia's image is a dangerous one. Her masculine voice brings the subject's crescendo of desire to a screeching halt. In this way, Galdós appears to espouse the precepts of

the doctors of legal medicine, which, in determining the "real" sex of ambiguously sexed adults, examined not only the body (including the genitalia) of the subject but also their tastes, their sexual activities, and the timbre of their voice (Cleminson and Medina Doménech 63). Thus, from a medical standpoint, sounding like a man was a potential indicator of maleness. While Mauricia commits multiple moral transgressions and crimes against nature, it is her freakish nature ("una naturaleza desordenada") more broadly that the reader must learn how to read. The message here comes through loud and clear: *Don't be seduced!* Abril Trigo explains that pleasure plays a central role in the process of becoming the subject: "Es en *el goce* que produce la identificación con lo simbólico (ideología, imaginario, Estado o religión) donde el individuo interpelado se realiza como sujeto" (39; emphasis added) (It is in the *pleasure* that identification with the symbolic (ideology, imaginary, State, or religion) produces, that the interpellated individual is realized as a subject). In this vein, desire for the sexual deviant (e.g., the masculine woman) produces an equally deviant kind of male subjectivity through the derailment of heterosexuality.

Mistrust regarding the immediacy of gender, race, and class visibility abound in the novel. Set during the tumultuous period from Revolution to Restoration (1869–76), *Fortunata y Jacinta*'s bourgeois male narrator traces the shifting ideologies and economic conditions that engendered a more capitalist, modern Madrid. As a result of this new socioeconomic terrain, accessible modes of consumption threatened the economy of visibility on which social hierarchies depended. As Ann Stoler has observed in the context of nineteenth-century Europe more broadly, sexuality, race, gender, and class all "hinge on visual markers of distinction that profess to—but poorly index—the internal traits, psychological dispositions, and moral essence on which these theories of difference and social membership are based" (133–34). Thus, over the course of the novel, two primary modes of identification come into conflict: the preservation of social exclusivity based on notable lineage contrasted with new, malleable modes of self-fashioning. The former is grounded in a perceived moral essence, whereas the latter hinges on the mutability of appearances. As the protagonist Juan warns his wife, Jacinta, "Hay dos mundos, el que se ve y el que no se ve" (Galdós 1: 342) (There are two worlds, the one you see, and the one you do not see). This a lesson that of course Jacinta fails to learn as she adopts an impostor child—he is compared to counterfeit money—whom she believes to be Juan's biological son (1: 517). Moreover, the first time the fraudulent child appears, he is drenched in black ink (a product of play), which Jacinta reads as a literal sign of her husband's sins: "la mancha del pecado era tal, que aun a la misma inocencia extendía su sombra" (1: 444) (the stain of his sin was such that its shadow extended over innocence itself). Throughout the novel,

surface and depth—or exteriority and interiority—become associated with authenticity and superficiality, respectively.

Jacinta is not the only character who misreads. One striking example occurs when Juan's longtime family friend Villalonga mistakes the working-class Fortunata, Juan's lover, for a lady. After Fortunata and Juan's first affair, she reappears in Madrid elegantly dressed, donning a hat and even a corset. Villalonga recounts to Juanito that he watched her in the street but did not recognize her at first. Flustered by his initial deception, having been taken momentarily with her beauty and elegance, he suspects that the only plausible explanation for her transformation is that she has been to Paris, the center of fashion: "Está de rechupete. De fijo que ha estado en París, porque sin pasar por allí no se hacen ciertas transformaciones" (1: 556) (She looked scrumptious. Certainly, she has been to Paris because without going there, such transformations are impossible). Fortunata's attempt to pass for a bourgeois lady, however, is undermined by signs of her true class origins. Just as in the case of Mauricia, her voice is what gives her away: "Púseme todo lo cerca posible, esperando oírla hablar. '¿Cómo hablará?', me decía yo. Porque el talle y el corsé, cuando hay dentro calidad, los arreglan los modistos fácilmente; pero lo que es el lenguaje. . ." (1: 556–57) (I got as close as I could, hoping to hear her speak. "How might she talk?" I asked myself. Because when what is inside the waistband and the corset is of good quality, the seamstress can spruce them up easily, but when it comes to language . . .). In both cases, voice and language function as indexes of an inner truth, one that has the power to lay bare the falsifiable nature of the visible.

It is fitting, then, that the narrator intermittently speaks in a medical register. For example, when we first meet Señor Torquemada the narrator remarks: "La fisionomía de aquel hombre era difícil de entender" (1: 655) (The physiognomy of that man was difficult to understand). Here the narrator recognizes the limitations of his interpretive abilities, thereby making the narration not just a matter of relating observations and detailing minutia but itself a subjective *reading*, which in turn must be read. The reader of the novel is called on to interpret rather than merely "look." Indeed, the narrator's verbal portraiture renders the body and, more specifically, the face as a kind of medical text subject to "infinite examination" and "compulsory objectification" (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 189). Doña Lupe, for one, has the ability to read Torquemada's semblance, as she is the only one who "sabía encontrar jeroglíficos en aquella cara ordinaria y enjuta" (Galdós 1: 655) (knew how to find hieroglyphics in that uncouth, bony face). The use of the word *hieroglyphics* here likens the face to a kind of pictorial text that is not self-evident in meaning, but instead must be deciphered by an expert eye.

Physiognomy—comprised of the Greek words *physis*, meaning "nature," and *gnomos*, meaning "judge"—thus informs the process of reading.[15] The re-

alist gaze aligns itself with the inquiring scientific eye, and therefore the medical often mediates the intimacy with which we come to know these characters. But while scientific discourse might appear to create a sense of distance and disinterestedness, it is important to recover the moments in which the narrator's gaze is clearly emblazoned with desire. As Peter Brooks explains, "[t]he desire to know is constructed from sexual desire and curiosity. . . . [T]hose stories we tell about the body in the effort to know and to have it, which result in making the body a site of signification—the place for the inscription of stories—and itself a signifier, a prime agent in narrative plot and meaning" (4–5). To repurpose the words of the novel, the doctor, subjected to the power of his own desires, always risks becoming "el doctor amante" (Galdós 1: 611) (the doctor lover).

While we might consider Fortunata's momentary passing to be relatively benign, the social repercussions for Mauricia's ambiguous identity would have been cause for medical concern. Pedro Mata i Fontanet, the first *cátedra* (chair) of legal medicine in Madrid, writes of such cases in his famous work *Tratado de Medicina y Cirugía Legal*. In a section titled "¿Ha habido en alguno de los cónyuges error de persona en cuanto al sexo?" (Has there been among spouses an error of person in terms of sex?), he concludes that in fact, yes: "Un hombre puede casarse con un sujeto á quien cree mujer y no lo es" (359, qtd. in Cleminson and Medina Doménech 79) (A man can marry a subject whom he believes is a woman and is not). In view of this medico-legal concern, the novel enacts a pedagogical function: it warns of the social dangers of equating visibility with truth and shows the difficulty in interpreting the hieroglyphics of gender. In a period in which men's masculinity and virility imperiled the fate of the modern nation, the anxiety around knowing the truth of bodies could not have been more profound.

Mauricia Bonaparte: Sexual Autonomy and the Specter of the Sovereign

As Karl Marx famously suggested in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, Napoleon appears first as tragedy and then as farce. As if Mauricia's masculine qualities were not enough of a threat to the autonomy of male subjectivity, this *mujer varonil* bears an uncanny resemblance to a young, effeminate Napoleon Bonaparte: "su rostro era conocido de todo el que entendiese algo de iconografía histórica, pues era el mismo, exactamente el mismo de Napoleón Bonaparte antes de ser Primer Cónsul" (Galdós 1: 748) (her face was recognizable to all that knew something of historical iconography, for she looked exactly the same, exactly the same as Napoleon Bonaparte before he became First Consul). While Geoffrey Ribbans has argued that this is a mere "fleeting un-

elaborated association," upon further consideration the resemblance between Mauricia and Napoleon proves to be far more complex than previously considered by scholars (252).

Mauricia's uncanny Napoleonic features produce an aura of both curiosity and unease, an unease that is symptomatic of broader anxiety around the intertwined notions of masculinity and Spanish national/cultural sovereignty. The fact that propagandistic paintings of Napoleon adorn the walls of private homes in the novel evidences the persistence and omnipresence of French imperial power and cultural influence decades after the Napoleonic invasion. "¿Quién no ha visto el *Napoleón en Eylau*, y *en Jena*, el *Bonaparte en Arcola*, la *apoteosis de Austerlitz y* la *Despedida de Fontainebleau*?" (Galdós 2: 382) (Who has not seen *Napoleon in Eylau*, and *Napoleon in Jena*, *Bonaparte in Arcole, The Apotheosis of Austerlitz*, and *Farewell at Fontainebleau*?), asks the narrator (see Figure 1).

Fig. 1. General Bonaparte (1769-1921) on the Bridge at Arcole

In the context of Restoration Spain, which saw the simultaneous birth of the so-called national novel and literary criticism, itself a nationalistic project, the twin desires for national sovereignty and cultural sovereignty vis-à-vis France loom large in the political imaginary of educated Spaniards. It is in this context that Spanish novelists and literary critics alike took on the urgent task of drawing and policing the symbolic contours of the Spanish nation, a process that required the repudiation of all that appeared to be French. Alda Blanco explains that, "[h]aunted by the not-so-distant Napoleonic incursion as well as the memory of the 'Frenchification' of Spain beginning in the eighteenth-cen-

tury, the copious amounts of translated literature, and the growing presence of foreign capital and culture, Spain was imagined as a boundaryless nation subject to invasion and subjugation" (123).

Blanco paints an image of Spain as a *feminized* nation, vulnerable to the foreign penetration of both military and cultural forces. *Fortunata y Jacinta* registers a marked anxiety regarding the easy corruptibility of the Spanish nation by the French. In one illustrative example, the narrator recounts the loss of national identity through a description of the rapidly changing fashion trends: Spain is forced to abandon its national garb for French and other northern European clothing (1: 150–51). In another instance Barbarita dreads Juan's impending trip to Paris, fearing that he will be corrupted by licentious French women (1: 116). Juan allegorizes a "boundaryless" and sexually vulnerable Spain, bringing to mind Sara Ahmed's discussion of the soft nation, in which she explains that "the soft national body is a feminized body, which is 'penetrated' or 'invaded' by others" (2). Moreover, "[t]he implicit demand is for a nation that is less emotional, less open, less easily moved, one that is 'hard' or 'tough'" (2). Hardness is clearly associated with strength and therefore maleness: He is *el sexo fuerte* (the strong sex). And yet hardness is one of Mauricia's salient qualities, earning her the title *la Dura* (the tough/hard one). Far more than just historical shorthand, then, Napoleon's iconic image carries a symbolic currency that takes on significantly gendered and sexual valences when linked with the masculine woman. The Napoleonic woman threatens the (sexual) sovereignty of Spain, rendering it an easily penetrable nation.

It is significant to note that Mauricia is the most sexually autonomous woman in the novel. As an unmarried mother and informal prostitute, she remains relatively independent from male patriarchal figures. Even when sent to a convent for disciplinary reform, her rebellious nature persists and inspires unchaste thoughts and behaviors in those who come into contact with her. Turner describes the ways Mauricia inspires rebellion within the convent. She writes that "her bared breast incites feelings that flicker in the eccentricities of the nuns, strike in Guillermina's flinty tongue, burst as a 'bomb' in doña Lupe, burn as a tiger's eye in Fortunata and smolder viscerally in Jacinta, who takes Mauricia's daughter as her protégée" (88). Turner goes on to say that Mauricia's title, *la Dura,* "denotes the harsh, brassy behavior of one who voices the collective feminist unconscious" (88). That Mauricia emerges as a powerful, agentic masculine woman and the French sovereign's seductive double gives rise not only to fears of imperial invasion and Spanish cultural demise but also to the male terror of an unbridled feminist, queer—in short, freaky—sexual power.

Mauricia displays a self-confident if arrogant sense of sexual autonomy with what Foucault describes as Napoleon's "pomp of sovereignty" (*Discipline and Punish* 217). The anxieties related to national/cultural sovereignty

intertwine with fears of male sexual passivity in which Spain and the Spanish male citizen risk becoming the victims of (French) seduction. This crisis erupts at the intersection of masculinity and beauty. Sontag has argued that the beautiful conjures up the desire to possess the beautiful, yet, in the novel, it is the beautiful that threatens to possess her admirer (25). Furthermore, a chasm opens up in the moral landscape of the bourgeoisie in which the monstrous has somehow become beautiful—a beauty that threatens the already fragile stability of male sexual sovereignty. The only solution to this incursion is to kill the specter of the freak-as-sovereign.

Over the course of the narration, as Mauricia grows ill from her alcoholism, she becomes more masculine and, in turn, more Napoleonic: "más arrogante, varonil, y napoleónica que nunca" (Galdós 1: 798) (more arrogant, masculine, and Napoleonic than ever). Nearing the moment of her death, Mauricia more closely resembles an aged Napoleon: "la Dura completaba la historia aquella expuesta en las paredes: era el *Napoleón en Santa Helena*" (2: 383) (la Dura completed the history that was displayed on the walls: she was the *Napoleon at Saint Helena*). It is then that Fortunata exclaims, "¡Qué voz! Siempre fue muy ronca la voz de Mauricia; pero había bajado ya a lo más grave del diapasón" (2: 383) (What a voice! Mauricia's voice was always hoarse; but it had grown deeper now, as low as the deepest note of a tuning fork). More masculine then ever, Fortunata, too, becomes aware of her dear friend's peculiar condition: "'¡Dios mío!'—se dijo Fortunata, *oyéndola después de mirarla*—'¡sí parece un hombre!'" (II: 383; emphasis added) ('My god!'—said Fortunata, *hearing her after seeing her*—'She does seem like a man!'). Fortunata hears Mauricia's voice and then subsequently confirms the visibility of her manliness. Nearing the moment of death, voice and image correspond and her full Napoleonic transformation is complete. As St. Helena is the island where Napoleon spent his last days in exile, this final association is a harbinger of Mauricia's impending death.

Conclusion

Modernity has long been associated with hypervisibility, without which realism would not have come into being in quite the same way.[16] The realist novel evidences a persistent interest in how, in the modern era, the processes of subjectification became intimately tethered to sight and the relations of power embedded in visibility. Therefore, visibility proves key to the development of a subject's spatial fixity, social identity, subjection, and domination.[17] In this way, the spectacle creates the conditions of possibility for the freak's existence as such. Anonymity is foreclosed to her, for she is relegated to the realm of permanent visibility.

While it has become commonplace to equate vision with domination, the sense of security possessed by he who gazes proves to be vulnerable to the powers of his own desire. For the gaze can function as a double-edged sword: an ambivalent force that enables the power of spectacle and one that always contains the potential to contaminate the desirous "I"/eye. Luce Irigaray argues that woman's "entry into a dominant scopic economy signifies . . . her consignment to passivity; she is to be the beautiful object of contemplation" (26). But the pleasure that undergirds the urge to look can also produce a momentary breach in this "consignment to passivity," for it may be the image of the deviant masculine woman, her feverish stalking eyes, that consigns her (male) onlooker to the entrapment of desire. In this way, sexual deviance and gendered freakery both hinge on the duplicity of ocular power.

As the novel throws into question the truth content of visibility, it maintains an uncritical position vis-à-vis voice as a nonfalsifiable index of essential identity. Yet, even as the novel warns the reader of the dangers of the *mujer varonil*'s beauty and trains the reader to interpret the hieroglyphics of gender, it also admits an expansive moment of ambivalence. That is, at the irresistible site/sight of pleasure and awe, the reader may also momentarily disregard the pathologizing discourse of the freak and enact a form of respect for the rebellious Mauricia la Dura. Thus, even though s/he is called upon to condemn her, the reader may view Mauricia outside of the paradigm of pathology, akin to an early modern admiration for the *mujer varonil*. Like her dear friend Fortunata, who felt a "simpatía inexplicable [para] aquella mujer [que] la había inspirado siempre, a pesar de ser tan loca y tan mala" (Galdós 2: 388) (inexplicable sympathy for that woman who had always inspired her, despite being so insane and so evil), my sense is that we, as contemporary readers, may also find ourselves inspired by the power of this extraordinary *mujer varonil*.

Notes

1. Melveena McKendrick has written extensively on this topic in her foundational book *Woman and Society in the Spanish Drama of the Golden Age: A Study of the Mujer Varonil*. According to McKendrick, *la mujer varonil* is considered masculine "not only in her dress but also in her acts, her speech or even her whole attitude of mind" (x).
2. Gender "anomalies" such as the hirsute woman and the hermaphrodite were regular features of nineteenth-century freak shows. Julia Pastrana (1834–60), an indigenous woman from Mexico, was one such "mujer barbuda" (bearded lady) who gained a great deal of fame in freak exhibits throughout Europe. Charles Darwin, in *The Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication,* makes mention of Pastrana as a

"Spanish dancer" (328).

3. Historians Andrés Moreno and Francisco Vázquez García have noted that the Spanish hygienist Pedro Felipe Monlau characterizes the figure of the *marimacho* as one who "fuma y bebe con la mayor resistencia, de voz gutural, cabello corto" (215) (smokes and drinks with great opposition, has a guttural voice and short hair).
4. According to Catherine Jagoe, the New Woman was a "dashing urban gender rebel, who assumed the right to live, dress, and act in defiance of bourgeois norms of feminine behavior." (156). For her part, Lou Charnon-Deustch underscores the fact that in late nineteenth-century Spanish novels, the New Woman "want[s] something more than to be wanted by men" and "insists upon being a working, contributing member of society" (144, 145).
5. Significantly, the latter refrain associates the lascivious woman with the simian, a metaphor that brings to mind the presumed animalistic, "primitive" quality of sexually agentic women and their historical association with black women. It is an image that has profound racist undertones. For further reading on the topic of white female sexuality and race, see Sander L. Gilman.
6. See Akiko Tsuchiya's *Marginal Subjects*, the first book-length study on gender deviance in *fin de siglo* Spanish fiction and medicine.
7. The Real Academia Nacional de Medicina was inaugurated in 1861.
8. Throughout the paper I will use "sex" to refer to medico-legal category for female and male, and "gender"—an anachronistic term here—to designate the diverse range of attributes associated with masculinity and femininity, including, but not limited to, sartorial and corporeal style, attitudes, and behavior.
9. By the early 1800s, doctors began to doubt the existence of "real" hermaphrodites, as they created taxonomies of cases of ambiguous sex. Cleminson and Vazquéz note instead that "[t]hose individuals that displayed a mixture of characteristics of maleness or femaleness would not be labeled real hermaphrodites; classificatory systems allowed for a new category: the *apparent* hermaphrodite" (14).
10. Cleminson and Vázquez García make mention of individuals who both intentionally lived their lives as different sexes, as well as individuals who were unaware of their "real" sex.
11. I am appropriating the phrase *realist vision* from the title of Peter Brooks's monograph on the realist novel. The male sovereign "I"/eye is adapted from the title of Collin McKinney's article "Spectators, Spectacles and the Desiring Eye/I in 'La Regenta.'"
12. I am wary of reproducing a discourse of freaks that serves to alienate those subjects who transgress the limitations of normalcy. Therefore, like Grosz, I want to deploy the term *freaks* as "an act of defiance, a political gesture of self-determination" (56).
13. Galdós's Isidora, Valera's Doña Luz, and Clarín's Ana Ozores are just a few characters that come to mind.
14. Stephen Gilman observes that Fortunata's visual image is mundane and ordinary. Rather than focusing on Fortunata's beauty or physical appearance, the novel is enveloped by her expansive consciousness (342).

15. Collin McKinney argues that while *Fortunata y Jacinta* takes on a "categorizing gaze," it also exhibits skepticism toward the "middle-class dream of physiognomic reliability" (11). For his part, T. E. Bell argues that "Galdós's literary usage of this discipline [physiognomy] should not be taken as a sign of belief or adherence to it. His frequent usage of physiognomy is a simple device where it is to be understood that a character's face is the mirror of their personality" (48). Whether or not Galdós espoused the precepts of physiognomy, we cannot deny that his narrator couches his verbal portraiture in both physiognomic and medical terms.
16. Historian Mark K. Smith writes that "[b]y mid-nineteenth century, many Europeans certainly considered sight the preeminent [a]esthetic sense" (24). Commenting on realist fiction, Peter Brooks has argued that "realism more than almost any other mode of literature makes sight paramount" (3).
17. For detailed analysis of the ways in which class and gender identity was construed through public visibility, see Leigh Mercer, pp. 61–104.

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