

Teresa M. Vilarós. *Galdós: invención de la mujer y poética de la sexualidad. Lectura parcial de Fortunata y Jacinta*. México/Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1995. 174 pp.

Works of literary criticism intended to offer a *lectura parcial* founded on a rigorously limited albeit highly informed critical perspective inevitably beg the following question: which of its two clients does the study serve best, the field of critical theory or the work of literature itself?

Such is the case with *Galdós: invención de la mujer y poética de la sexualidad*, a study whose partiality corresponds to Vilarós's painstakingly limited critical approach and its application to but one of Galdós's novels, *Fortunata y Jacinta*. Despite her insightful attention to the specific details of the novel, *theoretical paradigms* are privileged in this study, a fact that is initially signaled by the author's stipulated aim of bringing Galdosean studies up to methodological date through a timely reading—post-modern, post-Freudian, deconstructionist, and, above all, feminist—of this work. Lyotard, Freud and Lacan, Derrida, and especially Irigaray (*Speculum*) are among the models she uses for decoding the ideological underpinnings of Galdós's work inasmuch as they pertain to the engendered invention, "desde lo masculino," of *Fortunata*. Although Vilarós makes little if any mention of the novel's context—other novels by Galdós; the field of writing during his time; the literary tradition that feeds into this work—readers will be able to see where the conclusions apply within the scope of the novelist's fictional universe, and where they do not. And although some readers will no doubt lament the fact that Vilarós's focus is narrow relative to the scope of the novel's vast and complex fictional universe, the critic does provide a rationale for these limitations. In opposition to the principle of totality (prologue, ix) to which critics have traditionally subscribed in studying Galdós, she asserts as a methodological point of departure that reading is undeniably subjective: "Leer, para mí, es leer desde la diferencia sexual" or "desde la mujer," "recordando, o intentando recordar, mi diferencia" (163). Timely, that is, post-modern and metacritical: all I can know is all I know, conditioned, as I am, by my (in this case feminine) circumstances.

What Vilarós does tell us about the novel's context concerns its author's highly touted love for women which, by a Freudian sleight of hand, becomes a mask for his unspoken misogyny. This fact is fundamental, for Vilarós centers her analysis at the juncture where Galdós's love/hatred for the *other sex* intersects with his equally well-known representational practice that she defines, using a term borrowed from Julián Ríos, as "escrivividura." Her contribution to the ongoing dialogue between *Galdosistas* rests on her claim that studying *Fortunata y Jacinta* as a textualized ("escrivivido") example of the author's ambivalent "gustar de las mujeres" obviates the need to "pensar *por separado*—as others before her have been inclined to do—la cuestión artística de la cuestión social" (3). To paraphrase in language unencumbered by neologisms: life and literature (art) are inherently and inextricably interconnected; it is our duty as

critics to treat them as such; a prime locus of that interconnection is the author's psychology.

In short, Vilarós's main objective is to guide us on a hermeneutic voyage toward the elusive portrait of that psychology, the masculine lens through which the story is filtered and which is manifest in the process that she posits as pivotal in this novel: the paradoxical and highly ideologized invention of woman (Fortunata) "desde lo masculino." The voyage constitutes a noble attempt with uneven results at portraying the act of seeing rather than the profile of what is seen. At each stage, the critic reshuffles and blends the various critical perspectives mentioned above, always with the purpose of restating, sometimes in excess, the central "desde-lo-masculino" theme.

These aims are immediately apparent in "Maternidad, economía y poder" (Chapter 1), where Vilarós invokes materialist notions of family and marriage along with Freud to show that Fortunata's worth is predicated upon her contribution to familial stability in the form of a child (her "product" in this system), a fact that, in turn, signals just how much the order that prevails in this novel is male-dominated and materialistic. The lack of reference to the historical framework of the family as a social institution suggests that, for the critic, the *phallogractic* order that this and so many of her examples are intended to elucidate exists on a timeless plane. However, her affirmation regarding Galdós's "gran descentramiento"—he *decenters* the social order by substituting the passively productive woman/wife/mother for a sterile wife and fertile lover—counters this impression to the extent that this "descentramiento," one intuits, signals a conscious effort on the novelist's part to contest social norms in the 1880s. In short, the idea is suggestive, but further commentary on the broader implications of this decentering would no doubt enrich the argument considerably.

In "La fragmentación del cuerpo materno: Fortuna, Fortunata y la administración" (Chapter 2), Vilarós transcends the meaning critics have traditionally ascribed to the mythical/symbolic patterns of Galdós's narrative as she explores their psychoanalytic implications and, in so doing, clarifies further the portrait of the authorial imagination in which these schemes reside. The etymological linkage, via the goddess Fortuna, to Nemesis, the primordial, "life-in-death" earth mother, constitutes a fruitful point of departure for redefining Juanito Santa Cruz's experience as a circular return to the womb, viewed "desde lo masculino" as both alluring and perilous. (Vilarós reminds us that Freud is a prime spokesperson for the male order.) "El nene's" rejection of the egg Fortunata offers him in their celebrated first encounter stands for the modern-day Œdipus's rejection of "lo amniótico femenino" just as the locus of their encounter, the Cava de San Miguel, conforms to a vertical conception of space with socio-political overtones, a pattern that in fact applies to other novels by Galdós although the critic does not acknowledge it. The subterranean "morada de la tibia [repugnant] Nemesis," habitat of the silent, passive Fortunata, is opposed to the active, above-surface arena of masculine authority to which Juanito ascends by way of the symbolic staircase. Within the parameters of Vilarós's critical paradigm, these readings are all logical and coherent, as is the notion that the spoken and written language denied to Fortunata constitutes a prime instrument of male authority in the

phallocratic order. Less convincing is the link Vilarós draws between the language denied to Fortunata and the language used to *invent* her. This is apparently intended to transfer the Oedipal meaning from the male protagonist to Galdós's sphere of *author*-ity, suggesting a correlation between Galdós's double-edged "gustar de las mujeres" and Juanito Santa Cruz's attraction and repugnance for the Cava/Fortunata/the egg/the womb/woman. Before accepting such transfers, readers will no doubt expect further discussion of the obstacles encountered in attempting to establish analogies between the realities authors represent and their personal beliefs regarding those realities.

Irigaray's feminist reflections on Plato's feminine matter/male form analogy guide Vilarós, in the third chapter ("La concepción y nutrición del hijo: madre, materia y *pharmakon*"), in showing how Fortunata is portrayed as being like a matter waiting to be informed by penis and pen, the instruments, once again, of male hegemony. The critic relates Fortunata's "invention" (fabrication) to her cycle of giving birth, nourishing the child, and dying, and she uses this to discover and, presumably, to denounce the insatiable male appetite that consumes and eventually expels (in the next chapter, "defecates") her from the text. In a section that is more self-conscious than metacritical, the critic-turned Cicerone points out the associations that might support such an interpretation when, for example, Segismundo Ballester, during Fortunata's funeral, fixates on the two black flies that light on the milky whiteness of the dead woman's skin. One association—Fortunata (milk) is the *pharmakon* that can nourish or be noxious—leads by a characteristically Derridian pattern in logic to another, that of Ballester as the *pharmakeus*, associated, by means of the black flies (=ink) and white milk (=paper), with the art of writing and, by extension, with mystification. Vilarós thereby sees Fortunata as projected on the black and white screen of masculine writing, yet another scheme for defining how the female character is being fabricated before our eyes for male consumption. As before, Vilarós's discussion of the writerly element appears aimed at drawing a parallel between the protagonist's (Santa Cruz) and author's appetite for Fortunata, an implication that deserves further development.

Vilarós turns to the gifts that Fortunata offers to Juanito (the egg he refuses) and to Jacinta (her child), relying on Lewis Hyde (*The Gift*) and Arnold Van Gennep for comparing them, in "Alimento, sexualidad y descendencia" (chapter 4), to the funerary gifts that mark the threshold of profound, death-like "individual transformation." The idea that Fortunata's death paves the way for Jacinta's rebirth is useful in that it allows the critic to show how the women are united on an archetypal plane, a unity that Vilarós treats elsewhere in terms of the common attraction and mutual aversion that intertwine the two and that, along with other essential paradoxes, contributes to the study's deconstructive overtone. In one of the more successful uses of etymology, Vilarós links Fortunata's gift giving to Derrida's *pharmakeus* via the Greek word *dosis* ('gift'), indicative of that which is either nourishing or noxious. This linkage allows her to conclude that, in this generalized feast of men consuming women—Jacinta is included in this meal—only Juan Santa Cruz survives intact. The

interpretative process is logical and coherent, once again, but such rhetorical flights as calling the survivor a “falo que contempla, paradójicamente, la vida desde fuera” (115) seems unnecessarily idiosyncratic and even harmful to the critic’s best intentions. Moreover, Vilarós’s attention to the paradoxical nature of Santa Cruz’s outcome, a fundamental aspect of the novel, deserves further development, something that would have uncertain consequences for the critic’s general argument. Indeed, Galdós’s final portrayal of the empty and lonely Don Juan is, as Vilarós notes, ironic. One wonders if this patina of mockery, which covers this and other novels by the same author, does not relativize the “falocracia” that, according to Vilarós, governs the textualized (“escrivido”) version (*Fortunata y Jacinta*) of the novelist’s “gustar de las mujeres.” Galdós’s intentionality (irony, parody) clearly needs to be reconciled with the involuntary instincts (misogyny) that Vilarós claims to decipher.

The problematic ridiculing of Juanito Santa Cruz continues to occupy the author in “Usura y avaricia: la apropiación del cuerpo femenino” (chapter 5), where Vilarós links Juanito’s desire for sex to both his monetary greed and his voracious appetite for food. The psychoanalytic implications of this connection are self-evident: Jacinto is a sexually immature male, fixed at the oral stage of infantile eroticism. The fact that such a psychoanalytic debunking of the Don Juan myth foreshadows the efforts of others (such as Unamuno, Valle-Inclán, Grau, Pérez de Ayala, and, most significantly, Marañón) who systematically sought to do the same falls apparently beyond the scope of this study. The parallels drawn between Juanito, Maxi Rubín (Fortunata’s husband), and Doña Lupe (the latter’s aunt), are germane and instructive for what they show us about the tightly-woven network of interests that materialize and subjugate Fortunata, although, as before, the argument is unnecessarily grounded in metaphors and concepts that tend to overshadow the novel. To liken the “castrated” (mastectomized) Doña Lupe to the masculine Amazons who removed a breast in order to wield their bow and arrow better helps to clarify the psycho-mythical patterns of the narrative. Using this character to illustrate Luce Irigaray’s metaphoric description of male discourse as an ice that renders women passive and sterile (that invents “mères de glace”) tells us more about Irigaray than it does about Galdós. The same may be said of the conclusion that the money-driven Doña Lupe’s “pasividad femenina” is transformed according to the dictates of this discourse into an “actividad fálica y, por tanto, administrativa.”

Vilarós pilots the feminist/psychoanalytic voyage through Fortunata’s story to its logical conclusions in the final chapter, “Fortunata, por dentro,” where she treats Fortunata’s transgression, which results in her “institutionalization” in the Micaelas convent, as an attempt at affirming her own ego and, at once, a form of resistance to the masculine (discursive) powers that enslave her. Deprived of a father or last name and associated with the quintessential egg, a “cuerpo sin órganos” according to Vilarós, Fortunata is literally and figuratively a Lacanian *femme barrée*. Vilarós takes her to exemplify Irigaray’s notion that women, constructed “desde lo masculino,” are relegated to the role of characters on the stage where conflicts that sustain the male order and its institutions are enacted. Fortunata’s resistance to these

forces is played out through the "pícaro idea" (adultery and childbirth) and by the profoundly enigmatic intuition that other critics have noted and that Vilarós associates with a female protagonist unable to narrate "lo que sale de *entre mí*" (142). The child that literally "sale de [*entre sí*]" thus represents, on the figurative plane, her futile attempt at autonomy or self-realization. Her death must be viewed as preordained, as confirming the futility of such an endeavor if we are to accept the basic tenets of this study: that Fortunata is confined by a discourse that castrates, freezes and hardens, silences and disarms, ingests and expels, or else transforms its women into clones of masculine authority (Doña Lupe, Guillermina in the *Micaelas*). Otherwise, the logic fails.

To sum up, the work at hand amounts to an exercise in drawing precise correlations between parallel systems of meaning, one literary and the other critical. For those familiar with Galdós, his novel, and the traditions that lie behind it, the points where these systems intersect should be interesting for what they reveal about the critical methodology that Vilarós has mastered. It bears stating that the partiality of Vilarós's reading presupposes an *a priori* acceptance of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theories as they have been appropriated by Luce Irigaray. Simply put, those who do not subscribe to this approach will object to the rigidity and limited scope of the interpretation. They might prefer a more transparent critical language that teaches reading as an exercise in learning how to *transcend* our own previously defined psychological, social, historical, and ideological fields of awareness. Others will no doubt appreciate the critic's remarkable effort at opening the door for original approaches to the so-called canonical works of Spanish literature.

Bernardo Antonio González
Wesleyan University

Vicky Unruh. *Latin American Vanguardists: The Art of Contentious Encounters*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994. 315 pages.

For those trying to rethink twentieth century Latin American cultural history, it is encouraging to find such fine studies as the one that Vicky Unruh presents in her book about the Latin American vanguards. Her project is an ambitious one, since she covers different (and problematic) literary genres and does not limit her focus to a particular region of Spanish-speaking America, but makes sure the Brazilian vanguards

