



Suggestive Characters: Hypnotism and Subjectivity in Blanca de los Ríos's *Las hijas de Don Juan* (1907)

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In July of 1906, *Blanco y negro* published a brief story by Blanca de los Ríos entitled “Metempsychosis: De las ‘memorias’ del doctor Hipnos,” which dramatizes the ominous dangers of hypnotism.¹ In the story, a medical student, driven by his obsession for Susana, pays a traveling hypnotizer to “infundir mi alma en [el] cuerpo [de Alberto de San Andrés],” Susana’s husband (“Metempsychosis” 51). His subsequent confession to Susana about his actions precipitates her death, which in turn causes the student to go insane. In the final lines of the story, Hipnos reflects on the tragic outcome and the perils of hypnotism: “¿Infundieron en Alberto otra alma, ó [...] le *sugestionaron* con la idea de habérsela infundido? ¡Qué importa! ¡Mataron en él el albedrío, la fe en el propio *yo* [...] ¿Será esa fe la chispa animadora, el *quid divinum*, la esencia de Dios que prende en la célula psíquica [...]?” (author’s emphasis). For Hipnos, the consequences of either metempsychosis or hypnotic suggestion for Alberto are more significant than the issue of which of the two pseudo-sciences actually led to his demise. Whatever the medical student’s method, he had robbed Alberto of both his will (“albedrío”) and his sense of self (“la fe en el propio *yo*”). In short he destroyed Alberto’s subjectivity, Alberto’s body being but the physical shell of an identity that no longer existed.

What is so intriguing about de los Ríos’s story is that it demonstrates a striking degree of familiarity with the major issues surrounding hypnosis-related phenomena in *fin de siglo* Spain; namely, subjectivity and the respective status of free will and the soul. It is therefore significant that in her most critically acclaimed work of fiction, *Las hijas de Don Juan*, published a year after “Metempsychosis,” de los Ríos links the deleterious effects of hypnosis to those of *donjuanism*. De los Ríos seemed to recognize in both *donjuanism* and hypnotic phenomena a common threat and her short novel can thus be read as a cautionary tale for women in Restoration Spain.² Although scholars have rightly focused on the text’s critique of *donjuanism*—few periods have evinced the same degree of cultural fervor surrounding the Don Juan figure in *fin de siglo* Spain—the role of hypnotism has been completely ignored.³ In the present essay, I will show how understanding the role of hypnotism in the text not only enhances our understanding of de los Ríos’s thinking on *donjuanismo*, but also how it reveals an innovative feature of her defense of women. Specifically, in *Las hijas* she establishes an analogy between the act of reading and hypnosis, on the one hand, and writing and subjectivity, on the other, in order to draw

attention to the need to educate women. Since so few Spanish texts deal with hypnotism, de los Ríos's willingness to do so provides yet another reason to include this "lost gem of Spanish modernist writing" in the male-dominated canon (Herrmann 426). Before turning to the text, however, some contextualizing remarks about hypnotism are in order.

Evolving out of animal magnetism's "consideration of the physical effect of the magnetic fluid" to a concern with "the psychological study of influence and imagination," hypnotism became, by the late nineteenth century, thoroughly mainstream throughout Europe (González de Pablo 290).⁴ As Antonio Diéguez Gómez has noted, "De la casi absoluta omisión o indiferencia hacia estos temas por parte de la medicina española en la década anterior [i.e., 1870s], se pasa no solo a la acogida más o menos feliz y masiva sino que se produce, además, un intento de monopolización de la práctica de la hipnoterapia" ("Hipnotismo y medicina" 220). The reason hypnotic phenomena moved from the fringe of scientific study to its focal point has to do with the influence of Jean-Martin Charcot and the Salpêtrière School that would form around him. Although others had already introduced hypnotism into France, it was only after 1878, when Charcot began to show an interest in it, that it entered its "etapa de esplendor" (Diéguez Gómez and Diéguez Gómez 109).

For the purposes of the present essay, Charcot's most significant hypothesis held hypnosis to be a "morbid state, closely linked to hysteria" (Gauld 311). Or, in Diéguez Gómez and Diéguez Gómez's words: "En la Salpêtrière pensaron en el hipnotismo como una 'neurosis provocada' que podía servir como modelo para estudiar experimentalmente las neurosis 'espontáneas' y ante todo la histeria" (109). The basic tenets of the Salpêtrière regarding hypnosis would hold sway in Spain until 1883, the year Hyppolite Bernheim began to publish his contrasting views on the matter (Diéguez Gómez and Diéguez Gómez 109). A leading figure of the Nancy School—the historical antagonist of the Salpêtrière School—Bernheim would diverge from Charcot's thinking in two important ways. Firstly, he rejected Charcot's association of hypnosis with hysteria. Rather than view hypnosis as a function of pathology, he argued it could affect normal, healthy people. Secondly, for Bernheim (and for Ambroise-Auguste Liébeault, the founder of Nancy School, before him), "la sugestión gana mucho más protagonismo que el fenómeno del hipnotismo" (Diéguez Gómez and Diéguez Gómez 109). The shift in emphasis from hypnotism to *sugestión* signals the expanding sphere in which scientists and intellectuals were considering the psychological power of ideas.⁵

Spain's foremost exponent of hypnotism, Abdón Sánchez Herrero, shared Bernheim's belief that people are universally susceptible to hypnosis and Pere Mata i Fontanet's belief that suggestive ideas are potentially dangerous. In 1887, while Chair of Pathology and Clinical Medicine at the University of Valladolid, he published his magnum opus, *El hipnotismo y la sugestión*. The text went through at least three editions, the third one appearing in 1905, just a year prior to de los Ríos's "Metempsychosis." Diéguez Gómez and Diéguez Gómez have described the massive tome (extending over 800 pages) as "la obra [sobre hipnotismo] más solvente, desde un punto de vista científico" (116). Similarly, Eduardo Bertrán Rubio, whose importance to Spanish hypnotism is second only to that of Sánchez Herrero, referred to his fellow countryman as Spain's "verdadera autoridad

en la materia” (156). *El hipnotismo y la sugestión* thus reflects the definitive scientific view on hypnotism in *fin de siglo* Spain.

In his study, Sánchez Herrero defines hypnotism as “en ultimo análisis, la pérdida ó disminución de las facultades de discernimiento y determinativas” (93). In this sense, the critical faculty of discernment and the ability to make decisions are, at least implicitly, constitutive of subjectivity. Without them, a person is merely a hypnotic. He further develops his notion of subjectivity in his description of the somnambulist state of hypnosis: “[E]n su grado más perfecto, desaparece todo lo que es determinativo y espontáneo [...] y no solamente desaparece eso, sino los *motivos* de las determinaciones y los actos del ser normal [...] reinando como Señores absolutos en el hipnotizado, los reflejos orgánicos” (95-96, emphasis in the original). For Sánchez, somnambulists are governed solely by their organic reflexes while normal subjects govern themselves through determinative, spontaneous, and motivated actions. This tendency of hypnotics to be acted upon, rather than to act for themselves, carries with it a specific danger. Quoting Henri-Étienne Beaunis, Sánchez explains: “[E]l solo peligro [...]del hipnotismo [...] es el avasallamiento del sujeto al experimentador de manera que, una vez establecido, el hipnotizado se encuentra bajo la dependencia absoluta del hipnotizador” (100). Santiago Ramón y Cajal puts it more forcefully when he writes of the ability of hypnotism to bring about “[la] abolición total del libre albedrío” (qtd. in González Ordi et al. 209-10).⁶

For Sánchez Herrero, a person’s susceptibility to suggestion was linked to his or her level of education, which invariably depended on issues like age and gender: “la sugestibilidad [...] existe [...] en razón inversa de la instrucción de cada sujeto. De aquí que sean más sugestibles el niño, la mujer, el campesino y el artesano, que el adulto de inteligencia cultivada” (467). In other words, the more educated a person, the less susceptible he or she was to suggestion, and vice-versa. And since women were less educated than men, they were, for Sánchez, naturally more susceptible to suggestion. By juxtaposing the less educated women (and children and laborers) with the “adulto de inteligencia cultivada,” Sánchez rhetorically excludes them from the categories of *adult* and *intelligent*. And since the adjective “cultivada” connotes both a formally educated “inteligencia” and an active subject who takes a vested interest in this education, the implication is that not only do those excluded from the category of *intelligent* (e.g., women) lack a formal education, but that they also bear moral responsibility for their inferior position.

In principle, the ability of hypnotists to subjugate (*avasallar*) people served a therapeutic purpose, allowing, for instance, physicians to suggest healthy behaviors to their patients. However, it also raised serious questions about who should be allowed to hypnotize. Continuing with his quotation of Beaunis, Sánchez declared that little could be done to prevent “individuo[s] mal intencionado[s]” from abusing hypnotism, especially given its popularity at the time (100). However, he also echoed Beaunis’s advocacy for moral responsibility in the matter: “será permitido exigir que el que quiera hipnotizar, sea digno de ello por su inteligencia, su saber y su carácter. Es preciso que sea guiado [...] por el amor á sus semejantes” (101).⁷ *Fin de siglo* scientists were acutely sensitive to their potential association with charlatans and were thus vocal about their *scientific* engagement

with hypnotism. Although they could not stop charlatans from perverting hypnotic practice, they could exemplify the morally superior character that defined them as scientists.

In addition to concerns about professional repudiation, Spanish hypnotizers also feared their activities would prompt criticism from the Catholic Church. Not surprisingly, hypnotism was often lumped together with a number of other heterodox-esoteric practices.⁸ Thus, Juan J. Franco, in addition to writing about *espiritismo*, premonition, and telepathy, also published *El hipnotismo puesto en moda*, one of the most combative and disseminated religious critiques of hypnotism of the late nineteenth century (Diéguez Gómez and Diéguez Gómez 117). Perhaps not surprisingly, after discussing and dismissing the various scientific explanations of hypnotic phenomena—the subtitle to his text was, after all, *Historia y disquisición científica*—he attributed its perceived impact to diabolical forces: “Luego la intervención diabólica es la verdadera hipótesis (qtd. in Diéguez Gómez and Diéguez Gómez 117). In light of such criticisms, Spanish scientists who engaged in hypnotism often would include exculpatory caveats in their publications. Thus, for example, after some 500 pages of text, Sánchez Herrero writes: “No quiero cuestiones con la Santa Madre Iglesia católica apostólica romana, en la que milito, y el lector habrá podido notar con qué esmero he eliminado de este libro [...] los hechos y la explicación humana de los [...] fenómenos] recibidos por mi Iglesia como Milagros ó como posesiones demoníacas” (507).⁹

The Catholic Church’s interest in hypnotism can hardly be surprising given the nature of the latter to encroach upon the sacrosanct territory of the soul. However, it is important to bear in mind that both religious and scientific engagement with hypnotic phenomena are bound up in a much broader cultural dynamic revolving around the issue of human identity/subjectivity and its concomitant, human agency. By this I mean that Sánchez’s interest in the critical faculties of discernment and decision-making, as well as motivated actions on the part of a self-aware person, must be considered in the context of European modernity and the post-1898 trope of Spain’s pathological will. For it is within this context of modernity that de los Ríos in *Las hijas de Don Juan* grapples with some of the same issues as Sánchez Herrero.

In her novelette, de los Ríos traces the dissolution of the last Don Juan’s family. As Vázquez Recio has noted, she seems specifically concerned to point out “las consecuencias extremas a las que llega la mujer por falta de educación” (397). This is particularly evident in the educational shortcomings of the family’s two daughters, Dora and Lita, which have as much to do both with an improper upbringing as they do with their lack of formal training. Indeed, the girls’ downward spiral and ultimate ruin is linked to the twofold failure to make either appropriate aesthetic or moral judgments. In this sense, Reyes Lázaro has argued that “*Hijas* denuncia la imposibilidad de la mujer de educar su gusto literario” (475). Similarly, Kathleen M. Glenn’s description of “creatures [i.e., characters] who are lacking in moral judgment, aesthetic refinement, and social distinction” is especially apt (229). Thus, although Dora’s decision to model her life after Saint Teresa of Avila’s *Las moradas* would seem morally superior to Lita’s, whose actions are clearly informed by her penchant for pornographic literature, the dénouement demonstrates how each sister suffers as a result of her choice. Both girls lack critical

faculties sufficiently developed to allow them to safely navigate their reading experience. The dynamics involved with the girls' choice of a literary model recall Bourdieu's argument about taste: "Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make"(6).¹⁰ Choosing to read either Santa Teresa or pornographic literature confers upon the girls a specific social subjectivity that is decidedly negative and ultimately leaves them vulnerable to harmful influences and people.

The formation of the girls' subjectivity through reading—i.e., the patterning of their lives on the models they find in the literature they read—begins when they stumble upon some love letters between their father and one of his previous lovers. Their experience of reading the letters precipitates their sexual maturation from children to women: "El mal hallazgo de las cartas operó en la vida de las niñas cambio visible; fue comienzo de otra edad, iniciación amarga en la vida, pérdida de la gracia genesiaca. Desde aquel día vióse en ambas hermanas adelgazarse la envoltura infantil, transparentando bajo ella a la mujer futura" (88). The language of the text emphasizes the adverse nature of the girls' change. The "mal hallazgo" of the letters results in an experience that is foreign ("otra edad"), bitter ("iniciación amarga"), and marked by loss ("pérdida de la gracia genesiaca"). Woefully unprepared for this rude awakening, Dora turns to Saint Teresa's *Las Moradas* in a somewhat desperate act of sexual sublimation. She seeks refuge from the domestic disaster that is her home life in the "morada pulcra" of an upstairs neighbor Salesia, who introduces her to Saint Teresa (93). For her part, Lita embraces her newfound (sexual) identity, which develops within the context of the social parties thrown by the Corderos, a *nouveaux riche* couple who live below the family. It is at these parties where she meets Paco Garba, the third-rate literary hack of pornographic literature. Despite what Glenn calls the "moral significance" of the location of Salesia's and the Cordero's apartments in relation to that of Don Juan's family, neither role model proves beneficial for the girls. Dora and Lita both suffer dearly as a result of their inability to read their father's letters critically.

To highlight the girls' vulnerability to the dangers of the love letters, de los Ríos adopts language specifically associated with hypnotism. She describes Dora's inability to resist the temptation to read her father's love letters in this way: "Dora intentaba siempre resistir a la pícaro tentación insidiosa, y solía conseguirlo; pero aquel día la *sugestión* era verdadero maleficio. Culebreaba por los nervios, bullía en la sangre, empujaba la voluntad, tiraba de la mano, sorbíase las miradas" (83, my emphasis). The association between suggestionism and diabolical or occult forces ("verdadero maleficio") recalls the crux of the Catholic Church's criticism of hypnotic phenomena, which fits with the religious profile of Dora. Moreover, the term "maleficio" can mean both a spell and the damage caused by a spell. Thus the text implies not only that Dora is under the control of the suggestive powers of the letters, but also that her subjugation to these powers has concrete consequences for her subjectivity. As the grammatical structure of the passage emphasizes, "la sugestión" replaces Dora as the subject of the first sentence. In the second sentence, she has been completely relegated to a direct object. She is the owner of "los nervios," "la sangre," "la voluntad," "la mano," and "las miradas," although the definite articles refer to her only implicitly (83, my emphasis). Furthermore, the repetitive structure of the second sentence—verb plus complement—serves to contrast the

dynamism of “la sugestión” with the comparative passivity of Dora. In this sense, Dora embodies Sánchez Herrero’s hypnotic subject since she is acted upon by “la sugestión,” rather than acting for herself like a normal subject.

Whereas in the case of Dora de los Ríos likens the suggestive force of Don Juan’s love letters to a spell, in the case of Lita, she portrays it as pathological. To do so, she adopts the metaphor of contagion: “Lita, con las mejillas encendidas y los ojos chispeantes, empuñaba un fajo de papeles abigarrados, que exhalaban una bufarada violenta, acre, nauseabunda, de promiscuos perfumes escandalosos, *infames*, que difundían por la atmósfera contagio *sugestivo*, perturbador, como de voluptuosidad respirable” (83, my emphasis of “*sugestivo*”). Lita’s encounter with her father’s letters abounds in sensual, physical terms befitting her sexualized character—“ojos chispeantes,” “bufarada,” “promiscuos perfumes escandalosos,” “voluptuosidad respirable.”¹¹ However, her physiological reaction to reading the letters (“las mejillas encendidas y los ojos chispeantes”) combined with the negative connotation of various adjectives (“acre,” “nauseabunda,” “*infames*”) signals de los Ríos’s revulsion at Lita’s sexual awakening. It is not surprising, therefore, that the sexual charge of the letters is described as infecting Lita like a disease (“contagio”).

It is worth noting here that de los Ríos’s terminology in this scene draws attention to the difference in Spanish between *sugestionar/sugestión* on the one hand, and *sugerir/sugerencia*, on the other. The *Diccionario de la Real Academia* relates *sugerir* to a proposition: “proponer o aconsejar algo.” By contrast, *sugestionar* denotes the imposition of one’s will on another: “Dominar la voluntad de alguien, llevándolo a obrar en determinado sentido.” *Sugestionar/sugestión* have a more nuanced meaning than *sugerir/sugerencia*. Thus, although it is impossible to determine how readers would have interpreted de los Ríos’s text, the historico-cultural conditions in which *Las hijas* appears allows us to see her use of the more nuanced terms as more than a coincidence, especially as the references to hypnosis and suggestion in the novelette begin to add up.¹² For instance, early in the text, the narrator describes the atmosphere of *fin de siglo* Madrid as one in which “Flotaban en el espacio todavía muchos *efluvios* donjuanescos” (68, my emphasis). Shortly thereafter, the narrator describes *flamenquismo*, a correlate of *donjuanismo*, as “moda, fiebre, *sugestión* de aquellos días, y venía a ser como el espaldarazo—más propiamente—la *alternativa* en donjuanismo” (71, my emphasis of “*sugestión*”). Just as *sugestión* connotes a technical usage, *efluvio* is one of the specific terms used in referring to Anton Mesmer’s idea of animal magnetism. Through her language, de los Ríos likens the contagious spread of Restoration Spain’s “decadent” version of *donjuanismo* to Mesmer’s magnetic fluid, representing *donjuanismo* as a ubiquitous force exerting a decidedly negative influence on Spanish society, especially since it encourages men to adopt misogynistic attitudes and behaviors at the expense of women’s well being.

The most striking example of misogyny in *Las hijas* involves Paco Garba, who seems to embody everything de los Ríos finds wrong with *donjuanism*. Not coincidentally, he is also the character de los Ríos associates most explicitly (and in a negative light) with hypnotism. Although he and Lita both attend the Corderos’ soirées, he does not take an interest in her until he hatches a plan to exact revenge on Don Juan by taking sexual advantage of her. Although the Corderos celebrate Garba as the foremost luminary at

their parties because of his supposed literary accomplishments, the narrator describes his literature as a mixture of “galicismo[s] y pornografía” and unequivocally decries it as “una hibridación monstruosa” (97). Lita, however, who lacks any sort of aesthetic sophistication, fails to see Garba for the lowbrow hack he is. In fact, in the wake of reading her father’s sexually suggestive love letters, she spends her time perusing erotic novels while hiding in Don Juan’s room. The letters thus shape her reading habits, but they also impair her critical faculties. She believes Garba “era tanto como Cervantes” (99). In other words, because of her limited exposure to the gamut of literature, she cannot distinguish between the quality of Garba’s writing and that of Cervantes. Moreover, since she shares with Garba an interest in pornography, she also shares in the narrator’s moral censure of him. If he is “degenerado por herencia, decadentista por oficio, antipático por derecho propio e insolente por deber profesional,” the implication is that Lita is too (97).¹³ Sadly, her parents’ abandonment of her education hinders her ability to successfully navigate the dangerous waters of both literature and life. She has never been exposed to good literature nor does she have any sense of herself as an autonomous subject capable of resisting injurious suggestions.

If Lita’s vulnerability to *donjuanism* is a function of the suggestive force of Don Juan’s love letters, it is Garba who fully exploits this vulnerability. When Dora’s health takes a turn for the worst, exacerbating the family’s dysfunctionality, Garba seizes the moment to propose that he and Lita run away, promising her marriage, fortune, and glory. The description of his plea contains the key to understanding why he is so dangerous to her: “Larva hablaba con el imperio de *un sugestionador*, afectando sibilíticas actitudes o raptos fascinadores de iluminado o de loco” (106, my emphasis). As noted above, hypnotism was fraught with anxieties about the motives and moral character of those who practiced it. The language used to describe Garba clearly associates him with the charlatans, intruders, imitators, and hacks that so concerned Beaunis, Sánchez Herrero, and Cajal. Not only does Garba lack the intelligence and knowledge that differentiate legitimate hypnotizers from charlatans, but his hatred of Don Juan and his lust for revenge also betray his impure motives. In this sense, he represents the antithesis of the disinterested scientist whose only aim is to aid his fellow beings. By comparing Garba’s speech to that of a “sugestionador,” and by drawing attention to just how different he is from those who were culturally sanctioned in their use of hypnotism/suggestion, de los Ríos marks him as the moral equivalent of those who abused the practice to their own ends.

The use of Garba’s derogatory nickname, “Larva”—especially given the polyvalence of the term—reinforces de los Ríos’s negative characterization of him. Technically larva refers to an immature insect at an intermediate stage of development between egg and pupa. In one sense, then, de los Ríos dehumanizes Garba as the embodiment of *donjuanismo*.¹⁴ He is but an insect. Similarly, she describes him elsewhere as “un remedador simiesco de los más amanerados *profesionales*” (97, 98; author’s emphasis). In both cases, as either insect or ape, Garba is less than human. In a related sense, the narrator’s preference for Garba’s nickname draws attention to his immaturity, in both senses of the term. His actions are emotionally and intellectually appropriate for an adolescent, not an adult; and, as a subject, he has yet to fully form. The narrator’s use of “Larva” thus points to what might be called Garba’s diminished subjectivity. No doubt representing him in this way allows de los Ríos to criticize Restoration Spain’s

permissiveness of men's behavior that proved harmful to women. Her depiction of Garba reveals a Don Juan who is less a sexual icon of mythic proportion who has a way with words than an immature, literary hack who exacts revenge on the unwitting and uncouth daughter of a rival.

Contrasting this representation of Paco Garba with that of two other hypnotizers, also taken from literary works, will help to flesh out de los Ríos's general disparagement of hypnotism and the specific danger it poses to Lita in *Las hijas*. The first example comes from Cajal's short story "El fabricante de su honradez," included in his *Cuentos de vacaciones*. Cajal wrote the stories during the highpoint of scientific interest in hypnotism (1880s), but waited to publish them until 1905, shortly before *Las hijas* appeared in print. In "El fabricante de honradez," Alejandro Mirahonda decides to cure the antisocial ills of the village of Villabronca by concocting an anti-passion serum. The serum is nothing more than a placebo, however, that is part of Mirahonda's experiment in social suggestion. Mirahonda's success is largely a function of his scientific persona. In other words, he embodies the townsfolk's assumptions about what a scientist should be like. Not only had he recently returned from Germany and France where he had studied with Europe's most famous hypnologists, but he also looked the part of a scientist. As the narrator states, "[E]n el doctor Alejandro Mirahonda casaban maravillosamente la figura y la profesión" (64). Cajal then offers a lengthy description of Mirahonda's physical appearance and voice as though these traits described *ipso facto* the quintessential scientist. Although the townsfolk accept Mirahonda's experiment as legitimate because he resembles a scientist, as Laura Otis has noted, Cajal infuses his story with irony in order to caricature their uncritical attitude (75). For Cajal, a person's identity depends on resisting erroneous ideas with a strong will. The moral of the story, according to Otis, is that "[a] resisting will [...can] be maintained only through vigorous mental activity, especially thinking that question[s] authority" (77-78).

De los Ríos shared Cajal's belief that people should think for themselves, though for her this belief extended to include women. What makes Lita such a lamentable character is the fact that she cannot think effectively for herself. For the townsfolk to see through Mirahonda's façade would have required significant insight on their part since he at least looked the part. By contrast, Lita is duped by a complete fake. Only she and the others who attend the Corderos parties fail to see Garba for the imposter he is. Yet it is precisely this failure that de los Ríos decries. A modicum of education at least would have given Lita a chance at success. Instead, de los Ríos laments the "ejemplo doloroso de sus padres [i.e., los de Lita], [por] el total abandono en que [...] tuvieron siempre la educación y cuidado de sus hijas" (78).

The second example comes from de los Ríos's portrayal of the traveling hypnotizer of "Metempsychosis." She describes the encounter between him and the medical student in these terms:

Llegó un loco, un hipnotizador de feria [...]. Venía de Oriente [...]. Creía en la metempsychosis [...]; juraba poseer el negro secreto que hace mudar de cuerpo las almas. Le creí, quise creerle. Le ofrecí todo el oro del baron

si lograba infundir mi alma en su cuerpo. Compramos al ayuda de cámara, el mago realizó su rito, nos adormeció con una pócima [...].Y ¡desperté en el cuerpo del baron! (21)

In terms of form, the passage is significant for at least two reasons. Firstly, although the passage is brief—a point emphasized by the numerous ellipses—its importance to the story should not be understated since it reveals the foundational event around which the entire story is structured. Secondly, the accumulation of verbs and ellipses creates the sense that the medical student is rushing to arrive at the climactic finish of his story. These formal features suffuse the text with a heightened sense of anxiety. Like Susana, readers anticipate with bated breath the medical student’s thundering declaration “Y ¡desperté en el cuerpo del baron!”

In this sense, de los Ríos encourages readers’ emotional investment in the story, since Susana’s death throws into greater relief the repulsive actions of the medical student and the traveling hypnotizer. De los Ríos hopes her readers, like her, will disapprove of their intervention in Alberto and Susana’s lives. Here the content of the passage is important because de los Ríos reveals (and conceals) certain details about the hypnotizer that serve to justify his characterization as repulsive. The fact that he remains nameless obscures his identity in a shroud of mystery that is augmented both by the unknown details signaled by the ellipsis and by the use of terms like “de feria” and “mago.” These terms also give him a carnivalesque air. Furthermore, his belief in metempsychosis and his Oriental provenance mark him as other and foreign. Finally, the fact that he successfully infuses the medical student’s soul in Alberto’s body, seemingly without Alberto’s permission or even knowledge, clearly reveals how dangerous he is, especially since the adjective “loco” implies his actions are irrational. As Sánchez Herrero and others went to great lengths to argue, the primary purpose of hypnotism was to alleviate psychological pain, not hijack bodies. De los Ríos’s description of the hypnotizer thus serves to distinguish him from the culturally sanctioned practitioners of hypnotism who were steeped in scientific rationality and asceticism.

Garba obviously differs from the travelling hypnotizer of “Metempsychosis” in that he is not Oriental, nor is there any evidence he believes in metempsychosis. However, the point is not whether Garba really *is* a hypnotizer, only that he speaks “con el imperio de un sugestionador” (106, my emphasis). The connection between the two characters is one of analogy, and it is by way of analogy that de los Ríos draws a parallel between the respective fates of Alberto and Lita. Just as Alberto loses his subjectivity to the medical student because of the intervention of a shady character, so, too, does Lita lose hers to Garba. After Lita agrees to run away with Garba, she returns home to pack her belongings. As her early-morning rendezvous with him approaches, she becomes emotionally overwhelmed: “El romanticismo de aquella novelesca fuga, la inminencia de la dicha, el vértigo de la acción asieron de ella. Inflammóse su fantasía, sus nervios se tendieron, y como sonámbula, como loca, moviéndose en rápidos revuelos sigilosos, recogió de aquí y de allá algunas prendas” (109). The emotional charge of the moment resembles the heightened anxiety of the meeting between the medical student and Susana when she learns what had happened to her husband. In a certain sense, this scene from *Las hijas* is just as pivotal to the story’s development as the corresponding scene in

“Metempsychosis,” for just as the student’s revelation about Alberto provokes Susana’s death, Garba’s suggestive invitation to Lita to run away with him marks a key point in her demise. On the one hand, it leads to her abandonment, which then leads to her turn to prostitution.

On the other hand, de los Ríos’s depiction of her as a “sonámbula” provides the text’s clearest indication that she has lost the essence of her subjectivity. As noted above, somnambulism constitutes a state of hypnosis marked by a weak will and the lack of discerning faculties and motivated actions. In this regard, Lita represents the antithesis of a self-governed, autonomous self. Her somnambulist state reflects the distinction Sánchez Herrero makes between a “Yo I” and a “Yo II” (96). In other words, the existence of the Lita whose subjectivity is shaped by others’ suggestions obscures the existence of another Lita: one who, because of her upbringing, is never more than a subject in posse. This image of two *Yos* betrays Lita’s own split subjectivity, a phenomenon not unlike Garba’s diminished subjectivity.

Here the analogy between hypnotism and writing becomes especially significant. De los Ríos represents Garba as both the hypnotizer and the writer of (the story of) Lita’s life. She, meanwhile, is represented as the one who is hypnotized/written. Lacking her own agency or any sense of her self, she is reduced to a mere character in the latest of Garba’s pornographic tales, as attested to by her turn to prostitution. In this vein, consider the following remark by Bertrán Rubio: “Tengo para mí que el sujeto no adquiere la convicción de que *es otro*, y aun pareceme que [...] no hace otra cosa que avenirse á *representar un papel* del personaje que se le ha sugerido” (qtd. in González Ordi et al. 211, emphasis in the original). In Lita’s case, I would argue that although she is playing a part, either she remains unaware of this fact, or, at very least, she does so at Garba’s behest, her will being subjected to his.

The trope of writing (or re-writing) is also important for what it reveals about the character of Don Juan in *Las hijas*. Although the discourse of hypnotism posits the natural inferiority of women, in terms of their increased vulnerability to hypnosis, the case of Alberto in “Metempsychosis” illustrates that men are not immune to its dangers. In fact, in *Las hijas* de los Ríos associates vulnerability to hypnosis with certain culturally prescribed behaviors. In the aftermath of Dora’s death, Don Juan and his family are forced to move to the slums, which accelerates his degeneration. The narrator portrays his condition in this way: “Tumbado en el mísero camastro, o encogido en una derrengada silluca, clavados los ojos en los rotos ladrillos o en el techo jiboso y aplastante del guardillón, pasábase los días absorto, como hipnotizado” (117). Don Juan’s inability to deal with the pain caused by the family’s desperate circumstances and the recent revelation that Lita had fallen into prostitution after having been abandoned by Garba have left him in a condition not unlike that of a hypnotic.

The descriptions of his condition—“tumbado,” “absorto,” “como hipnotizado”—underscore Don Juan’s diminished will. In his hypnotic-like condition, he desperately searches for some means of escape, eventually stumbling across a solution in the pages of a *folletín* titled *El paraíso de un morfínmano* (117). The “novelesco *hatchis* sugeridor,” as the narrator labels morphine, provides him a morbid escape resembling that produced by

“las flores del mal” (118). The unveiled critique of Baudelaire and his *Les fleurs du mal* seems clear enough. For de los Ríos, the answer to life’s problems was not to be found in the drug-induced Paradises of *modernismo*. Morphine “deprime y afemina” and ultimately eviscerates Don Juan’s subjectivity (120). Suggestively, the narrator refers to his “yo embotado” (120). In this way, de los Ríos contrasts Don Juan’s debilitated subjectivity with Garba’s diminished subjectivity and Lita’s split subjectivity.

De los Ríos’s portrayal of Don Juan challenges the assumption that women are in some way innately inferior to men. The supposed paragon of masculinity, Don Juan is just as susceptible to hypnosis as his daughter. Moreover, like Lita’s, his subjectivity is debilitated through the act of reading. In the case of Don Juan, his literature of choice is the *folletín*. As a genre, the *folletín* has historically been lumped together with women’s literature as the counterpart to male-authored “high” literature.¹⁵ However, Don Juan’s maleness provides little protection from the consequences of reading this culturally “bad” literature. He still decides to throw himself into drug use as a means of escaping the wretched conditions of his life. Lázaro’s comment about Don Juan’s daughters could apply equally well to him: “[E]l hecho que la única literatura accesible a Dora y Lita sean los libros de santos y folletines románticos tiene consecuencias no sólo culturales, sino vitales” (475-76). The parallels between Don Juan’s demise and that of his daughters suggest that culture (i.e., reading *folletines* or tales of Saints) is more important than nature (i.e., sex) in the dénouement. And this privileging of culture over nature highlights the artificial nature of the cultural biases against women as they are reflected in the discourse of hypnotism.

By way of conclusion, I want briefly to consider de los Ríos’s use of hypnotism in *Las hijas de don Juan* as it relates to the literary legacy of Romanticism. Hypnotism develops out of the same historical moment as Romanticism and, perhaps not coincidentally nor surprisingly, shares with it certain core assumption about modern subjectivity. As “la mujer de la Generación del 98,” de los Ríos was fully steeped in the so-called Generation’s continuing engagement with core Romantic issues like subjectivity, often using her literature to combat unjust biases she perceived (Bordonada 32). As Roberta Johnson has argued, “women ‘modernists’” were highly suspicious of the “romantic literary legacy with its emphasis on male subjectivity and the idealization of women” (129). I have argued that in *Las hijas*, de los Ríos advocates on behalf of women’s rights by likening the dangers of Lita’s and Dora’s lack of education to the dangers of hypnotism. Without the proper training and preparation, the girls are unable to resist the harmful suggestions of their father’s love letters and, in the case of Lita, Paco Garba. The consequences for their subjectivity are disastrous.

However, I would go one step further and assert that de los Ríos invokes hypnotism to strike at the very heart of Romanticism’s gender-biased notion of subjectivity.¹⁶ The girls’ situation is not perilous simply because they are uneducated, but because their lack of education is based on the problematic notion that, by virtue of their sex, they should not be educated. In this sense, their demise is something of a self-fulfilling prophecy. How can the girls be expected to lead successful lives if they are never given the tools to do so?

What de los Ríos would have her readers recognize is that the truly dangerous suggestion is that women are somehow inferior to men, and that as a result their differential treatment in society is justified.

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Notes

- ¹ I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers of *Decimonónica* whose suggestions have greatly improved this article.
- ² It must be pointed out that for some scholars, doña Blanca's denunciation of *donjuanism* has its limits. Reyes Lázaro has convincingly argued that de los Ríos does not dismiss it outright, only the decadent iteration of it that permeated *fin de siglo* Spain: "*Hijas* no es, simplemente, un texto desmitificador, puesto que la narradora no achaca los males nacionales al mito en sí, sino, más bien, a la desaparición de los valores que, en su opinión, representaba originalmente" (470). For Lázaro, the text reflects de los Ríos's own nostalgia for the *nacional-romanticismo* embodied so peerlessly by Don Juan Tenorio. In addition to her article, see also James B. Mandrell's "Nostalgia and the Popularity of *Don Juan Tenorio*: Reading Zorrilla Through Clarín." As I show below, doña Blanca's recourse to hypnotism also hearkens back to the Romantic period.
- ³ Doña Blanca actually made a name for herself based on her research into Tirso de Molina. One example of her scholarship on Tirso includes a critical edition of his complete works.
- ⁴ The notion of magnetic fluid comes from Anton Mesmer and is defined by Alan Gauld as "a material influence which bodies, animate and inanimate, exercise upon each other through the mediation of a universal and extremely fine fluid (the 'magnetic' fluid), which underpins the phenomena of animal [i.e., animate] life in the same sort of way as air is the vehicle of sound or the ether of light" (11). With the rise in prominence of hypnotism as the nineteenth century advances, the belief in magnetic fluid is replaced by an emphasis on the power of the mind.
- ⁵ The titles of various Spanish works dealing with hypnotic phenomena attest to the growing importance of *sugestión* alongside hypnotism proper. See for instance Manuel de Tolosa Latour's *El hipnotismo y la sugestión desde el punto de vista gubernativa*, E. Bertrán Rubio's *Hipnotismo y sugestión: Estudio crítico*, Francisco Martínez y González's *Aplicaciones útiles que puede sacar la medicina del hipnotismo y la sugestión*, Abdón Sánchez Herrero's *El hipnotismo y la sugestión*, and José Hernández Ardieta's *Sugestión. Su importancia religiosa moral y jurídica. Estudio psicofisiológico*. Within Spain, Pere Mata i Fontanet recognized the power of ideas as early as 1864, before magnetism had yet evolved into hypnotism. In his *Tratado de la razón humana en sus estados intermedios*, he writes:

Herir la imaginación del magnetizado es todo lo que hace el magnetizador; y no la hiere ni con flúidos, ni sustancias irradiadas de sus manos, ojos ni otras partes, ni con emanación alguna espiritual, ni otras ridiculeces del estilo; se la hiere...con ideas que su presencia y su mímica ó sus pretensiones engendran en el cerebro del somnábulo. (396; italics in the original)

The (magnetic) fluids and hand passes ("sustancias irradiadas de sus manos") come from Anton Mesmer and his notion of animal magnetism, which Mata i Fontanet dismisses as ridiculous. For Mata i Fontanet, a magnetizer's power comes from his ideas, not from any inherent power he possesses or an ability to control natural or supernatural forces. Moreover, this author sees the magnetizer's influence as injurious to the magnetized person, a point echoed by de los Ríos in *Las hijas*. The subtitle to Mata i Fontanet's treatise includes the following intermediate estates: "sueño,

ensueños, pesadillas, somnambulismo natural, fisiológico y morboso extático; somnambulismo artificial ó magnético; ilusiones y alucinaciones compatibles con la integridad de la razón; pasiones” (3).

- ⁶ Although scholars have demonstrated Cajal’s broad interest in the matter (Stefanidou et al. 352, 353; González Ordi et al. 210; Diéguez Gómez and Diéguez Gómez 114), only one of his published articles on hypnotism has survived to the present.
- ⁷ The fine line between professionalism and charlatanism prompted Cajal to stop his experiments with hypnotism (José Sala et al. 366) and may explain his reluctance to publish his research on the subject. Similarly, Sánchez, fearing how the reception of *El hipnotismo y la sugestión*—especially some of its more sensationalist findings—would impact him professionally, wrote Julián Calleja, then General Director of Public Education, requesting to publish the text “bajo la égida del Jefe de Instrucción pública” (iv). The letter communicating Calleja’s consent appears in the prologue to Sánchez’s text.
- ⁸ See for example, Ricardo Gullón’s contribution to *Nuevos asedios al modernismo*, “Espiritismo y modernismo.”
- ⁹ The perceived need to include such language was not academic. In 1848, the ecclesiastical court of Santiago opened a case against Mariano Cubí y Soler for his published works on phrenology and magnetism, specifically *Sistema completo de frenología*. (Cubí y Soler is best known for introducing the former discipline into Spain.) Later, when he published *Elementos de frenología*, which included a section on “Magnetismo humano”—dubbed by González de Pablo “the most complete work on animal magnetism published in Spain in the first half of the nineteenth century” (285)—he “emphasized that magnetism does not affect spirituality, free will or the immortality of the soul” specifically to avoid trouble with the Church (285).
- ¹⁰ Lázaro sees taste in the novelette as the conceptual basis on which de los Ríos articulates her “nacionalismo nostálgico” (468).
- ¹¹ In *Hipnotismo y sugestión*, Sánchez Herrero declares that “Todos y cada uno de los sentidos pueden [...] sufrir ilusiones y alucinaciones por sugestión” (277).
- ¹² Also, one should not forget de los Ríos’s “Metempsychosis,” published a year prior to *Las hijas*, or the widespread popularity of hypnotic phenomena in the period, indexed by the multiple editions of Sánchez Herrero’s *El hipnotismo y la sugestión*.
- ¹³ Glenn has perceptively noted how the “demythification of Don Juan does not necessarily lead to an idealization of the female figures around him” (227).
- ¹⁴ This dehumanization echoes Glenn’s view about the text’s demythification and denunciation of Don Juan and Johnson’s about the *burlador*’s domestication.
- ¹⁵ On some of the issues involved in the relationship between genre and gender, see the various contributions to the “Diálogo crítico” in *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos* as well as Stephanie Sieburth’s *Inventing High and Low*. For a comparable perspective, see chapter three of Andreas Huyssen’s *After the Great Divide*. Ironically, as Lázaro has noted, *Las hijas* resembles a *folletín* in order to reach her desired audience despite implicitly criticizing it as inferior to “high” literature (475). In this way it evinces many of the tensions of Galdós’ *Tormento*, as discussed by Sieburth in chapter three of *Inventing High and Low*.
- ¹⁶ I would like to thank Curtis Wasson for initially suggesting I look more closely at hypnotism and Romanticism’s shared assumptions about subjectivity.

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