DECIMONÓNICA

VOLUME 1, NUMBER 1 FALL 2004

Gothic Larra

Rebecca Haidt

Mariano José de Larra's scathing review of Dumas's *Antony* often is cited as evidence of his disapproval of the aesthetic excesses characteristic of Romantic productions.[1] Comparatively few critics have remarked on Larra's special disregard for the conventions of Romantic works we tend to classify as "Gothic"—texts and performances that expressly seek responses such as fear or horror.[2] For example, he disdained Ducange's *El verdugo de Amsterdam* particularly because (as he wrote in a review) that play makes audiences "llorar como haría llorar a cualquiera una paliza" (395), without appeal to an audience's deeper moral and intellectual capacities. Though he was a friend of the theatrical impresario Juan de Grimaldi, Larra saw much popular literature and entertainment as betraying the (enlightened, progressive, patriotic) writer's obligation to develop readers' and viewers' critical faculties.[3] Yet (as he so often pointed out in his articles), Larra himself labored under a weekly obligation to attract readers' attention, and it was not easy to appeal to a people who saw things "de tan distinta manera" ("El castellano viejo" 119) and whose preoccupations—with appearance, display, social standing—were illusory at best.

Larra's aesthetic challenge, then, was to find a way to give audiences what they wanted—spectacle, strong emotional impact, horror—even as he satisfied his own critical—and political—criteria for effective art. One of his chief rhetorical techniques toward meeting this end, is the personal despair (what Sherman pithily has termed "existential angst" 138) with which he imbues the voice of his narrating individual observers.[4] This despair has been one of the central foci of Larra criticism over the last two decades, which has focused on questions of the political contexts and cultural allusions of Larra's stated and figurative anguish.[5] Perhaps in part from respect for his battles, the criticism has tended to class Larra's work apart from the literary productions he disqualified in his day, accommodating the author's own self-promoted image, that of a seeker of beauty and truth in a desert of mediocrity and censorship.[6] Yet Larra responded productively to popular tastes as well. As Iarocci rightly observes, Larra's multiple narrative personalities and shifting identities are born of his need to appeal to readers in a competitive entertainment marketplace (48); and Lorenzo-Rivero points out that Larra wrote "conforme al gusto romántico" (Larra 155).

Decimonónica 1.1 (2004): 52-66. Copyright © 2004 *Decimonónica* and Rebecca Haidt. All rights reserved. This work may be used with this footer included for noncommercial purposes only. No copies of this work may be distributed electronically in whole or in part without express written permission from *Decimonónica*. This electronic publishing model depends on mutual trust between user and publisher.

Without in any way seeking to diminish the importance of Larra's profoundly political commitment as an author—to paraphrase Kirkpatrick, politics are "inextricable" from Larra's output—I would like here to consider that market- and audience-driven component of Larra's work, and focus on aspects of his narratives which perform aesthetic tasks beyond those of figuring the author's personal pain or frustrations with national politics. Specifically, I would examine Larra's employment of imagery and conventions drawn from entwined popular trends of the period: from "Gothic" works, and those informed by a Burkean aesthetics of the Sublime. Simply put, my purpose here is to point to formulaic Gothic elements in many of Larra's costumbrista narratives. That is, his narrators' angst-ridden references to gloomy mood, uncertainty in observation, and terror at compatriots' behavior rework narrative conventions (such as terror, haunting, live burial, or deprivation of language) of the very Gothic texts (e.g. Pérez Zaragoza's 1831 *Galería fúnebre de espectros y sombras ensangrentadas*) that critics have tended to consider anathema to Larra's oeuvre.[7] The fact that some of Larra's most important and representative articles incorporate Gothic conventions has gone unremarked. I would make clear that I am not attempting to proclaim Larra a "Gothic writer;" however, I will argue that the author who disdained the *Galería fúnebre* and penned that scathing critique of Antony's excesses employs several of the same formulae featured in texts showcasing horror and moral disorder—and that his doing so accounts in some part for the despair and gloom imbuing a range of narratives he produced under the imperative of attracting a populace impassioned by spectacle.

The Gothic Sublime and the Impressionable Narrator

As Haggerty has observed, the "primary formal aim of Gothic fiction is the emotional and psychological involvement of the reader [to] maximize affective potential by means of techniques we can call 'sublime'" (18). Eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century interest in the sublime was characterized by a fascination with the question of special effects and emotional intensities (Mishra 28-29). In particular, effects of the awareness of imminent danger are particularly compelling. Burke argued that stimulation of the passions "conversant about the preservation of the individual," which turn chiefly on "pain and danger," are the most powerful (86); the "passions which belong to self-preservation . . . are simply painful when their causes immediately affect us; [and] they are delightful when we have an idea of pain and danger, without being actually in such circumstances" (97).

In the effect of the Sublime, the viewer's or reader's ignorance is key, for "it is our ignorance of things that causes all our admiration, and chiefly excites our passions" (105-6). One of the prime situations of awareness of ignorance is that of terror at the unknown. Burke uses the term "obscurity" to refer to the viewer's or reader's "ignorance" and disposition, in uncertainty, toward the excitement of the passions. Obscurity can create the most powerful effects of terror in league with the imagination: "There is a passage in the book of Job amazingly sublime, and this sublimity is principally due to the terrible uncertainty of the thing described . . . but when this grand cause of terror makes its appearance, what is it? Is it not, wrapt up in the shades of its own incomprehensible darkness, more aweful . . . than the liveliest description, than the clearest painting could represent it?" (106-7). The unknown is terrifying precisely because we cannot see it clearly and must imagine it—deliciously—as "Vacuity, Darkness, Solitude and Silence" (113).

Yet the "ruling principle of the sublime" (according to Burke) is the link between surprise or astonishment, and the terror born of obscurity (102). Thus another key aspect of the Sublime is "suddenness." One's attention is stimulated, notes Burke, by sudden beginnings or endings of sounds, voices and sights. "In everything sudden and unexpected, we are apt to start; that is, we have a perception of danger, and our nature rouses us to guard against it" (123). The strongest emotion of the Sublime is "an emotion of distress" (127), brought about by one's consciousness of the danger involved in not knowing what is impending. Arteaga, echoing Burke in 1789, specifically sites the sublime in effects produced by suddenness or surprise that lead to terror: the Sublime comes from "la sensación rápida, viva y no esperada que produce en nosotros la presencia de un objeto, cuya potencia y fuerzas, elevadas mucho sobre nuestra capacidad, nos le representan como de una naturaleza excesivamente superior a la nuestra" (141).

Larra was well-acquainted with Burkean ideas on terror, obscurity, surprise and the Sublime, as he demonstrated in a passage from an 1836 dossier he prepared on "picturesque" travels.[8] In particular, his section on "Pancorbo" employs a wide range of Sublime terminology: "surprising;" "menacing;" "monstrous;" "one passes trembling;" "this beautiful horror" (Romero Tobar 306-307). Larra deliberately invokes the pleasures of terror, the overwhelming, and the unknown: "the traveler oppressed by the spectacle of this terrifyingly sublime nature"; "one turns one's head a hundred times to check whether it is an optical illusion, or perhaps to amuse oneself with the thought of the danger that one has just escaped."[9] Larra employed these terms toward creation of an "efecto escenográfico" (Romero Tobar 301), implicit in Burke's notion of the Sublime as an experience rooted in an individual's awareness of her own emotional reactivity and her imagined pleasure at staging a scene of (as Arteaga had put it) overwhelming force.

The narrator's stance as impressionable, surprised, and trembling subject is a Gothic convention linked to period preoccupations with phenomena not explicable by the use of reason alone. Macabre, confusing and lugubrious situations and descriptions appealed to even the most educated readers of the period precisely because they could understand them as evidence of reason's collusion in the imagination's workings.[10] The Enlightenment legacy of spirit-debunking (a prime example of which in Spanish literature is Tediato's chiding of Lorenzo in Cadalso's *Noches lúgubres*) generated a parallel late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century discourse of investigation into the phenomenology of apparitions and of the physiology of misapprehensions (Castle 174-75), generating popular treatises such as Hibbert's 1824 *Sketches of the Philosophy of Apparitions*. The mind was understood to be capable of haunting itself, of physiologically creating a "spectropia" or "phantom-scene" (Castle 181): as Hibbert observed, "an adequate cause of spectral illusions may arise from an undue degree of vividness in the recollected images of the mind" (19). Once one understood the mind's capacity toward spectrality, one could choose—or not—to succumb to it. Those of particularly exquisite imaginative capacity were understood to take the most pleasure in, and receive benefit from, submission to macabre and terrifying scenes. As Pérez Zaragoza stated in his introduction to the *Galería fúnebre*, terror can be "saludable" (51), and Gothic tales will most benefit "las personas de una imaginación viva y exaltada por las impresiones fuertes, y de una alma sensible" (54).

Larra's narrator, moody and open to suggestion, is "dispuesto a recibir impresiones" from the people, situations and phantom-thoughts that assail him ("Varios caracteres" 290). The Larran narrator already is immersed in that state of obscurity elemental to the Sublime: Larra writes of a "no interrumpida lucha de afectos y de ideas" ("Mi nombre y mis propósitos" 173); of "la dificultad de escribir diariamente para el público... que con tan distintos ojos suelen ver una misma cosa" ("El mundo todo es máscaras" 140); of a narrator's "gana de hablar, sin saber qué decir" ("¿Quién es el público?" 73); of living in "un perpetuo asombro de cuantas cosas a mi vista se presentaban" and "no comprender claramente todo lo que veo" ("El día de difuntos" 279); and of absorption in one's own thoughts ("El castellano viejo" 114). In this state of ignorance or confusion, caught between conflicting impulses and uncertain as to what he thinks or feels, Larra's narrators engage in a pleasurable aesthetics of terror. "En esta duda estaba deliciosamente entretenido" comments the narrator in "El día de difuntos" (279): Larra offers doubting, overwhelmed narrators whose difficulty negotiating the world provides readers with vicarious thrills similar to those purveyed through popular Gothic works. For as Burke argued, the "terrible uncertainty" (106) crucial to an experience of the Sublime can generate deep pleasure in readers "without being actually in such circumstances" (97). Larra's readers are invited to engage vicariously in the spectral pleasure of a state of terrible uncertainty, anxiety, and doubt—in a word, obscurity—without actually having to set foot in the muddy streets of the capital.

Through the eyes of Larra's *costumbrista* narrators, Madrid is a place rife with ominous encounters and obscurity. Many of his articles feature a narrator distressed by sudden anxiety, or threatened by things and people whose motives and nature escape or overwhelm him. Larra's narrators frequently depict themselves as overtaken by visitors who rouse them from sleep, invade their rooms, and demand that they do strange or difficult things. For example, in "Empeños y desempeños" the narrator's nephew interrupts his uncle's toilette early in the morning (87); in "El mundo todo es máscaras," the narrator is waked by a friend who loudly demands that he accompany him (140); in "El castellano viejo" the narrator is terrified by the sudden blow of Braulio's heavy hand (114); and the narrator even surprises himself, tripping while walking and rousing himself from immersion in his own thoughts (114).

However, Larra's narrators seek such sensations. The typical Larran narrator places himself at the disposal of the world, not knowing what to expect but hoping to be jolted into utterance. Many articles begin with the narrator's observation that he has nothing to say, or that he cannot find a theme with which to entertain the reader: thus his forays into the streets in search of surprise, or his willingness to endure the shocks of social monstrosities so as to describe them. The observer of costumbres is disposed to receive impressions in any event (as Larra's narrator comments), to be acted on by what he sees: "no quiero hacer hoy impresiones, sino recibirlas" ("Varios caracteres" 290). Larra's famously melancholy and displeased narrators are exemplary in their capacity to receive impressions: as the narrator of "La diligencia" notes, "sabido es que nunca está el corazón más dispuesto a recibir impresiones que cuando está triste" (76).

Ghostly Absence and Gothic Spectacle

As Larra pointed out in his review of *El verdugo*, audiences relished productions that would induce sublime melancholy or make them cry. Yet not only dramatic spectacle could impress viewers or readers hungry for strong emotion. According to Larra, the author of *cuadros de costumbres* should "ver claro lo que mira a veces oscuro" ("Panorama Matritense" 242); even as he creates pleasing images that would "retratar" the country and its people, he should "formarse una censura suya y secreta que dé claro y oscuro a sus obras" (243). The *cuadro de costumbres*, in other words, should stimulate readers to extend their imagining mind's eye beyond the surface of description, and toward emotional and political engagement ("claro y oscuro"; "censura secreta"). The act of observation—of the narrator's stepping through the streets, recording what he/she sees—is a deliberate invitation to moral experience beyond mere specularity, for stimulation dependent on a narrated envisioning implies emotional reactivity to, and struggle with, the act of witness. As in Burke's aesthetics of the Sublime, Larra's aesthetics of *costumbrismo* accords primacy to the witness's consciousness of impression and feeling.

The management of affect, the struggle to organize the impressions of the moment; those fearful, terrified impressions caused by suddenness, obscurity, and other components that evoke the Sublime in Larra—all these are part of the Gothic force of texts such as "Empeños y desempeños," "El mundo todo es máscaras," and "Antigüedades de Mérida II." They are also textual elements designed to appeal to an audience whose preference for horrifying or macabre theatrical experiences "forma el substrato sobre el que se construye toda la literatura romántica" (Gies, "Larra" 61). Throughout the 1830s, *comedias de magia*, gloomy works treating medieval political machinations, and dramas featuring suicidal lovers treated audiences to stage effects designed to rouse strong emotion, inviting a heightened audience consciousness rooted in the pleasurable aspects of sublime distress. For audiences of the period, the appeal of such plays lay not only in the plots' containing murders or disasters, but also, significantly, in their depiction of the characters' struggles with the claims made on our existence by disorder, confusion and terror.

Nonetheless, Juan de Grimaldi, the genius behind the effect-filled *La pata de cabra* (1829), "knew full well that theatrical success was tied to spectacle" (Gies, *Theatre and politics* 57), and during the 1830s provided audiences with the "grand spectacle" that so appealed to them (63). Grimaldi and other popular dramatists of the period understood that the most effective plays "reached audiences through the senses—the visual and the auditory" and they expertly displayed a "heightened regard for visual impact" (114) that would incite confusion, fear or other raw emotions in viewers.

In 1836, Grimaldi mounted a series of masked balls as a means of capitalizing on the public thirst for spectacle and effect. Masked balls were some of the few public diversions permitted by authorities during the Lenten season, and after a decade of government suppression of balls (1822-32), they were enthusiastically received by the public and well attended (125). Kirkpatrick points out that "the newspapers of the period commented on the public balls as if they were theatre pieces" ("Larra" 53); and Gies observes that they were "semi-social dramas presented without a proscenium arch, and the actors were the

people themselves. The balls were treated as theatre and their runs were extended if they were hits" (Gies, *Theatre and politics* 131). The 1830s public understood the crossovers among multiple cultural forms and practices: balls were theatre, theatre was life, life was a ball (as Larra noted in his article "El mundo todo es máscaras"); the constant shared across all three was the capacity of spectacle to evoke strong emotion in witnesses. But spectacle did not guarantee poetry: the balls (like most spectacles available to *madrileños*) were not art.

Larra held that effect was not enough; that great art had to make people feel beyond raw fear or tears: as he observed drily of Ducange's gothic *Verdugo*, "Horroriza, espanta, asombra, estremece, horripila" (395). The workings of art required depiction of danger, or stimulation of fear, beyond the limits of conventional wisdom and imitation of what is shocking on the surface. Love can kill more powerfully than weapons or disease, for example (he observed in his review of *Los Amantes de Teruel*), and only those who have lived the confusions of life's paradoxes will produce art treating audiences to a rich exploration of the moral implications of feeling (299). Thus *La pata de cabra* or *El verdugo* made audiences react strongly, but as (happy) slaves to effect, and not with feelings born of true immersion in human difficulty. In Larra's view, the terror stimulated by a work such as *La conjuración* was qualitatively different from that inspired by *El verdugo*: though in Martínez's play "el terror hace enmudecer; las manos no pueden reunirse y golpear cuando han de acudir a los ojos" (385), it was the playwright's skill in depicting the complex experiences of human hearts which made the play a work of art.[11]

In his costumbrista essays, Larra combines the best of both worlds: both spectacle and poetry, emotional effect and artistic aspiration. He brings together human suffering— of a distressed friend, a horrified citizen, an unmoored Spaniard— with effects of terror, obscurity and alienation beloved by theatergoing audiences and readers of Gothic productions. His narratives are filled with situations designed to confront readers with complex "claro y oscuro" while providing them with the excitement of the Sublime. He treats a thorny, difficult or compelling moral or political topic even as he scripts the narrator's Gothic discomfort at uncanny presences, melancholy at scenes of ruins, anxiety at overwhelming forces, and confrontation with the shades rising from the tomb of history.

In "La sociedad," for example, Larra depicts Madrid as a place in which people shift appearances, don't appear to be what they really are, and say one thing but do another; in this place that unmoors the narrator with its phantasmagoria of illusions, people can change radically and do strange or seemingly impossible things: it is a place of corruption, perversion, and loss (445). The narrator's nephew in "Empeños y desempeños" is deceptive in appearance, pretending to be an affectionate and solicitous relation, then reverting (after his uncle has helped him) to a superficial and callow cad. Given to the culture of balls, gambling and romance, he sets out purposefully to "engañar" (87); he gets involved with a pawnbroker through his absurd devotion to an honor he does not possess (87). The narrator proclaims himself a shape-shifter in "Las casas nuevas" (279-80); but this is consonant with a city in which houses are not homes, and people cannot fit into the spaces supposedly built for living (282).

The narrator of "Empeños y desempeños" can sense the missing owners of the objects jumbled in the pawnbroker's garret; their absence is palpable, and the pawned objects' incongruous assemblage serves to introduce a strange host of phantoms into the narrator's imagination. "No podré explicar cuán mal se avenían a estar juntas unas con otras, y en aquel incongruente desván, las diversas prendas que de tan varias partes allí se habían venido a reunir" he relates of the things given to pawn (88); a spectropia of memory images, vestiges of the bodies that once wore the pawned things, crowd his imagination; and he is deeply disturbed by the objects' loss of the original meanings they bore through possession. "Parecióme bien que no hablasen" he relates (88): no longer legitimate possessions, haunted by the memory traces of their previous owners, the pawned objects acquire an uncanny power, having changed from mute things into sentient witnesses who lack only the power of speech to complete their monstrosity.

Traveling to Mérida in search of Spanish history, the narrator instead finds phantoms and spectres. The city is "uno de los recuerdos más antiguos de nuestra España" ("Antigüedades" I, 88), a trace memory of what now is only absence. When he first approaches the city, it is a Burkean experience: rising from "una explanada sin límites," appearing hazily through "el fondo pálido de un cielo nebuloso," the city is obscured by forces and meanings larger than the spread of its "confusos y altísimos vestigios" (88): the narrator realizes, as he struggles to perceive the city through this obscurity, that Mérida is a ghost town, a shade rising to haunt the living. "¿Hay hombres por allí? Me pregunté. No, los ha habido. Eran las ruinas de la antigua Emerita-Augusta" (88). As Punter notes, in Gothic texts "cathedral and castle ruins both remind us of . . . the transience of forms of domination" (94). Larra utilizes the journey to the ruins of a once-dominant city as the setting for Gothic horrors around metamorphosis, shape-shifting, loss of power, and death.

Even before he arrives at the edge of the spectral ruins, the narrator has found phantoms along the route. Castille is a "desierto arenal" whose void emits a "gemido sordo, pero prolongado" of "desesperación" (88). It is a "desnudo horizonte," barren of people; as he observes from his carriage, "ni habitaciones, ni pueblos. ¿Dónde está la España?" (88). After arriving at the ruins of Mérida, the narrator's imagination is still gripped by phantom-scenes: "rodeada de ruinas, la imaginación cree percibir el ruido de la gran ciudad, el son confuso de las armas, el hervir vividor de la inmensa población romana" (89). The narrator summons spirits—the bustle and life of a past population; the gloom and obscurity of long-devastated ruins—and presents them to the reader. Yet he also stages the presence of the imagining, sensing subject in sway to the experience of the Sublime: "un silencio sepulchral y respetuoso no es interrumpido siquiera por el aquí fue del hombre reflexive y meditador" (89).

The narrator's visit to Mérida is clearly an exercise in the exquisite pleasures of imagination: "Perdíase mi fantasía en la investigación de los tiempos," "figurábaseme ver el dios tutelar del río" ("Antigüedades" II, 91), "la imaginación cree percibir" ("Antigüedades" I, 89). His Gothic experience—overwhelmed by the devastation of the countryside and the horror of death—causes him to enter a "stupor" or Sublime state of thrall to what he is imagining and sensing ("Antigüedades" II, 91). Upon leaving the ruins, he realizes that he is "lleno de aquella impresión sublime y melancólica que deja en

el ánimo por largo espacio la contemplación filosófica de las grandezas humanas, y de la nada de que salieron, para volver a entrar en ella más tarde o más temprano" (93).

The ghosts and phantoms conjured by the narrator in Mérida, or in the pawnbroker's attic visited in "Empeños," differ from the mappings of vanity and pretense described in articles such as "Cuasi" (for example) or "El mundo todo es máscaras." In those two essays, Larra writes in the tradition of Quevedo and Torres Villarroel, whose tours of urban vice continued a long Christian moralist tradition of rhetorical contrast between dream and reality, and revolving around precepts concerning vanity, greed and the soul.[12] However, Larra injects new or different elements into the tours taken in "Antigüedades," "Empeños," and (to take another example) "El día de difuntos." His apparitions are uncanny, and the reader's attention is specifically directed toward the narrator's unease and confusion in their presence. The narrator is a sensing subject horrified by what he sees, confused by the monstrous presences before him, and overwhelmed by the implications of such enormous absence and loss—all conventions of Gothic fiction, and not of the moralist sermon. For Larra very deliberately does not instruct the reader that the human error and waste he sees are false, in the sense that Christian doctrine teaches the false and fallible nature of worldly things. Rather, he creates situations in which the narrator questions whether or not he is dreaming, and discovers—to his horror—that in fact though he has awakened, the nightmare is true. For example, in "Empeños" he asks rhetorically, "¿es posible que se viva de esta manera?" (90), hoping that the world does not really function through the continual creation of living death, but painfully aware that, indeed, what he sees is not a dream. And in "El día de difuntos," Larra describes the "pesadilla" of seeing Madrid as a "vasto cementerio," a nightmare from which he cannot escape even when awake: "quise salir," he writes; but his narrator wakes only to find "otro cementerio" in his heart (282). Waking to discover the truth of the nightmare is a prime scenario of the Gothic (Sedgwick 28). As in the Gothic spectrality so compelling to early nineteenth-century readers, Larra's narrator discovers that ordinary thought—ordinary existence—itself can produce phantoms, and that those ghosts do not disappear, for their horrors are always inside the imagining subject.

Loss of Meaning and Live Burial

Thus the Gothic pleasures of imagining inescapable tombs, gloomy enclosures, or—as Sedgwick terms it—"live burial." In Gothic fiction, a chasm often exists between two incommensurate semantic states or systems for meaning. Thus a hallmark of the Gothic is the difficulty of bridging the divide between "within" (one's inner reality or perceptions) and "without" (the reality experienced or imposed by others; the surface appearance of events). Kirkpatrick has pointed to the narrative despair imbuing many of Larra's essays as the author's artistic exploration of "la tension entre la subjetividad personal y la objetividad social" (Larra 287). Indeed, the unbridgeable gap between interior and exterior, subjective perception and external appearance, and a subject's helplessness and entrapment within that gap, are hallmarks of the Gothic "live burial" trope.

Larra employs a variety of Gothic techniques to develop the convention of live burial. His narrator realizes that all he has thought true is in reality a terrible inversion; things

and objects are anthropomorphized and lent uncanny powers of perception; he is haunted by a Doppelgänger, or double. When the narrator of "¿Quién es el público?" realizes that "esta voz público que todos traen en boca" (73) is a mere "pretexto, el tapador de los fines particulares de cada uno" (76), he makes the horrifying discovery that something supposedly shared is actually a marker of isolation; something apparently understood by all is actually "monstruosa," impossibly diverse, both everything and nothing. "Lo que no se puede decir" depicts a narrator deprived of the ability to say what he wants, even as he is permitted to speak (49): he may use words, but not their meanings. In "Empeños y desempeños," pawned objects uncannily lose their capacity to "speak," to reconcile their past uses and their present imprisonment, to expose the façades and pretensions of Madrid life (88). And in "La alabanza," the narrator experiences the strange effect of a double (a common device in gothic fiction): "El escritor que, lleno ya un pliego de papel, lo lleva a casa de un censor, el cual le dice que no se puede escribir lo que el ya lleva escrito, no escribe siquiera para sí. No escribe más que para el censor" (61). Obliged—that is, doubled—by the censor, Larra's narrator becomes a sort of monster, writing both as himself and as the other who shadows him (60-61).

The censor is an irreparable break between language and meaning, between the individual and what he/she can communicate by use of language, between what seems to have currency and life (language, the truth) and what is actually dead and meaningless (the words struck by the censor). "It is the position of the self" in Gothic fiction "to be massively blocked off from something to which it ought to have access" argues Sedgwick (62). Blocked from access to speaking the truth, to writing as himself, from any public other than that made possible by the shadow of the censor, Larra's haunted narrator renders for his readers the Gothic horror of losing the capacity to be seen, heard or recognized by one's fellow human beings.

In "El castellano viejo," for example, the narrator's Gothic experience arises from his effective invisibility to Braulio, due to an irreparable loss of agreed-upon meaning. At the beginning of the encounter Braulio persists in misunderstanding the meaning of "no" when the narrator declines an invitation:

> … estás convidado.
> —¿A qué?
> —A comer conmigo.
> —No es posible.
> —No hay remedio.
> —No puedo – insistió ya temblando.
> —¿No puedes?...
> —No es eso, sino que…
> —Pues si no es eso – me interrumpe—te espero a las dos. (115)

The narrator is left wondering "cómo podrían entenderse estas amistades tan hostiles y tan funestas" (115), for the meanings of the simplest terms—"no," "friendship"—have become unmoored, leaving him in an abyss of uncertainty. Indeed, he is trembling ("ya temblando") and feels trapped: "no faltaré—dije con voz exánime y ánimo decaído, como el zorro que se revuelve inútilmente dentro de la trampa donde se ha dejado coger"

(115). The narrator fears the prospect of dining with Braulio, not only because Braulio is a boor, but also because his host's terrifying refusal to share even basic semantics raises the spectre of more ominous social isolation and cultural losses of connection. The scene between the narrator and Braulio incorporates the "threatening presence of the unintelligible and the incommunicable" so common in the Gothic (Sedgwick 85). Indeed, by the end of the essay, the narrator faces the horror of an unclosed chasm between himself and those around him, for the words he has to name the world—amigo, patria—do not serve to make sense of his society. Yet the narrator remains buried within his interior discourse, for he has no one with whom to share the meanings he believes are true: "reflexionando en mi interior que no son unos todos los hombres, puesto que los de un mismo país, acaso de un mismo entendimiento, no tienen las mismas costumbres, ni la misma delicadeza, cuando ven las cosas de tan distinta manera" (119).

In Gothic fiction, "the important privation is the privation exactly of language" (Sedgwick 17): characters are unable to move beyond barriers of interpretation or knowledge to reconcile the apparent gap between word and meaning, between custom and reality. Larra explores this sense of privation as a national loss of the capacity to make and share meanings. Spaniards have inherited "las frases hechas y las locuciones enteras de su lenguaje, sin heredar sus costumbres" his narrator laments amid Roman ruins in "Antigüedades de Mérida" (II, 92); he and his compatriots have thus lost a good part of the sense they might make, and say things with no basis in reality (92). The absence of shared meaning in language is like the absence of life in a body: upon seeing an inscription whose bronze letters are missing, leaving only their impression in stone, the narrator relates "la idea que este contraste presenta imagínela el lector... habiendo saltado el metal, solo ha quedado el hueco de ellas, y éste hace el mismo efecto que el cóncavo vacío de los ojos en una calavera" (92). To the narrator's horror, "la idea que este contraste presenta" is, precisely, one of Sublime obscurity, that is, the emotionally draining confusion and distress inherent in the strange irreconcilability of absence and presence, death and currency, in the meanings supposedly shared throughout the nation.

Conclusion

Gies observes that "el gusto por la fantasía macabra y por lo gótico en los años inmediatamente anteriores al pleno florecimiento del romanticismo marca toda la época" ("Larra" 60). The taste for the macabre and the spectral was shared across audiences and not restricted to only those who relished *comedias de magia* or Pérez Zaragoza's thrilling novellas. Even as demanding a theatre critic as Larra could enjoy some Gothic productions, as long as they met his aesthetic and moral criteria for art. A work should explore powerfully the subtleties and paradoxes of the human condition; and if it did so through spectacle that caused the viewer to hide his or her eyes and quake (as did *La conjuración de Venecia*), so much the better.

This is precisely what Larra does in so many of his *artículos*. He depicts moral and human conflicts, offering no easy resolution, even as he gives his narratives a frightening, gloomy, despairing feel. For period readers, the entertainment value in such essays did not reside solely in the ironic exposure of hypocrisies or the satire of contemporary mores, but also in Larra's skillful referencing of the conventions of Gothic and other spectacular works

popular in a larger cultural context. Punter suggests that a work's "Gothic quality" can derive from a number of factors: "the portrayal of the misery of separation from civilized norms," "dehumanization," and "the inadequacy of most of the characters to deal with extreme situations" among them (43). As Larra's narrators lament the decline of Spanish civilization, experience isolation from fellow humans and feel helpless to change the "extreme situations" (political, social, urban) they describe, they reiterate narrative postures inherited from a long satirical tradition and critique (with greater or lesser obliquity) the failings of governments and political processes—but they also rehearse conventions of the Gothic and the Sublime.

Larra's trip to Mérida is an allegory of a patriot's search for his country, and of the horrifying revelation that Spain is a void. His use of history in "Antigüedades" and other essays has explicitly political ends. Yet during a period of European political and social upheavals, Gothic fiction's preoccupation with ruins and ghosts is also a result of its effectiveness as a vehicle for political reflection. As Punter observes, "the Gothic itself seems to have been a mode of history, a way of perceiving an obscure past and interpreting it" (52). Gothic dangers, monsters and tombs conjure spectres of the past that haunt thinking subjects scarred by war and revolution. If Larra wanted readers to recognize contemporary political failings and comprehend the importance of history to their current situation, then working Gothic and Sublime conventions was an ideal way to lead them toward that goal. As Larra the seasoned theatre critic knew, "en las artes de imitación la perfección consiste no en representar a la naturaleza como quiera que pueda ser, sino de aquella manera que más contribuya al efecto que se busca" ("Representación de Gabriela Vergi" 208). In the literary marketplace of 1830s Madrid, a potent way to achieve the effect Larra sought was to allegorize political or moral problems through scenes in which a citizen senses danger, feels helpless and trapped, confronts shades and strange presences, is alternately overwhelmed, fearful, and horrified—in a word, was to go Gothic.

OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Notes

[1] Larra's review of *Anthony* was published in two parts in June 1836.
[2] Notably, Gies treats Larra's disapproval of the Gothic in his essay "Larra y el gusto . . ."
[3] See Gies, *Theatre and politics*.
[4] For more on Larra's narratorial "multiplicidad de personalidades" (Lorenzo-Rivero *Larra* 153), see Lorenzo-Rivero, *Larra: Técnicas*.
[5] For example, see Iarocci; Kirkpatrick *Larra*; Lorenzo-Rivero *Larra*; Nordlund; and Ullman.
[6] As Sherman puts it, Larra saw himself as "one endowed with special powers of observation and discernment" (135). Gies ("Larra") and I have suggested altering the critical paradigm that resists full popular contextualization of Larra's work.
[7] Gies has pointed to Larra's rhetorical equation, in "¿Quién es el público?", of the *Galería fúnebre*'s readership with an uncontrollable mob that "quema, asesina y arrastra" ("Larra" 66).
[8] According to Romero Tobar, Larra wrote the dossier documenting his travels toward France for Taylor's later use in the *Voyage Pittoresque en Espagne* (298).
[9] Cited in Romero Tobar, 306-307. In Larra's original French: "surprenantes"; "menaçante"; "monstrueux"; "on passe en tremblant"; "cette belle horreur"; "[le] voyageur oppressé par le spectacle de cette nature d'une effrayante sublimité"; "on retourne cent fois le tête pour voir si c n'est pas une illusion optique, ou bien pour s'amuser du danger que l'on vient de courir."
[10] For more on this period's cultural preoccupation, see Haidt.
[11] Gies notes that Larra held *La conjuración* to be the best play ever produced in Madrid (*Theatre in nineteenth-century* 100).
[12] Lorenzo-Rivero has observed that Larra worked within the Spanish tradition of "visiones y sueños literarios" and "recursos oníricos" ("Madrid" 558). See Iarocci for a reading of Larra's work with regard to the theme of the Passion and Crucifixion.

Works Cited

Arteaga, Esteban de. *Investigaciones sobre la belleza ideal*. Ed. Agustín Izquierdo. Madrid: Comunidad de Madrid/Consejería de Educación y Cultura, 1993.

Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime And Beautiful*. In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful and Other Pre-Revolutionary Writings*. Ed. David Womersley. London: Penguin, 1998. 49-199.

Cadalso, José. *Noches lúgubres*. In *Cartas marruecas. Noches lúgubres*. Ed. Russell P. Sebold. Madrid: Cátedra, 2000.

Castle, Terry. *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Cultura and the Invasión Of the Uncanny*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995.

Gies, David Thatcher. "Larra, *La galería fúnebre*, y el gusto por lo gótico." *Romanticismo 3-4: Atti del IV Congresso sul romanticismo spagnolo e hispanoamericano (Bordighera, 9-11 Aprile 1987)*. Genova: Faculta di magistero dell'Universitá, 1988. 60-68.

---. *Theatre and politics in nineteenth-century Spain: Juan de Grimaldi as impresario and government agent*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988.

---. *The theatre in nineteenth-century Spain*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994.

Grimaldi, Juan. *Todo lo vence amor o la pata de cabra.* (1829). Madrid: Repullés, 1836.

Haggerty, George. *Gothic Fiction/Gothic Form*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1989.

Haidt, Rebecca. "How Gothic Is It? The *Galería fúnebre*, Panoramic Seeing, and Enlightenment Visuality." *Dieciocho* 26.1 (Spring 2003): 115-129.

Hibbert, Samuel. *Sketches of the Philosophy of Apparitions*. New York: Arno, 1975.

Iarocci, Michael. "Between the Liturgy and the Market: Bourgeois Subjectivity and Romanticism in Larra's 'La nochebuena de 1836'." *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos* 33.1 (Enero 1999): 41-63.

Kirkpatrick, Susan. *Larra: El laberinto inextricable de un romántico liberal*. Madrid: Gredos, 1977.

---. "Larra y *El Español*: Los artículos no firmados." *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos* 399 (1983): 47-76.

Larra, Mariano José de. "*Antony*. Drama nuevo en cinco actos, de Alejandro Dumas. Artículo segundo." (1836). *Obras de D. Mariano José de Larra (Fígaro)*. Ed. Carlos Seco Serrano. 2 vols. Madrid: Atlas, 1960. II: 249-53.

---. "Cuasi. Pesadilla política." (1835). *Obras de D. Mariano José de Larra (Fígaro)*. Ed. Carlos Seco Serrano. 2 vols. Madrid: Atlas, 1960. II: 120-23.

---. "El castellano viejo." (1832). *Obras de D. Mariano José de Larra (Fígaro)*. Ed. Carlos Seco Serrano. 2 vols. Madrid: Atlas, 1960. I: 114-19.

---. "El día de difuntos de 1836. Fígaro en el cementerio." (1836). *Obras de D. Mariano José de Larra (Fígaro)*. Ed. Carlos Seco Serrano. 2 vols. Madrid: Atlas, 1960. II: 279-82.

---. "El mundo todo es máscaras. Todo el año es Carnaval (artículo del Bachiller)." (1833). *Obras de D. Mariano José de Larra (Fígaro)*. Ed. Carlos Seco Serrano. 2 vols. Madrid: Atlas, 1960. I: 140-46.

---. "*El Verdugo de Ámsterdam*, drama nuevo en tres actos, de Víctor Ducange, traducido para la escena española." (1834). *Obras de D. Mariano José de Larra (Fígaro)*. Ed. Carlos Seco Serrano. 2 vols. Madrid: Atlas, 1960. I: 394-95.

---. "Empeños y desempeños." (1832). *Obras de D. Mariano José de Larra (Fígaro)*. Ed. Carlos Seco Serrano. 2 vols. Madrid: Atlas, 1960. I: 86-91.

---. "La alabanza, o que me prohiban éste." (1835). *Obras de D. Mariano José de Larra (Fígaro)*. Ed. Carlos Seco Serrano. 2 vols. Madrid: Atlas, 1960. II: 60-63.

---. "La diligencia." (1835). *Obras de D. Mariano José de Larra (Fígaro)*. Ed. Carlos Seco Serrano. 2 vols. Madrid: Atlas, 1960. II: 74-78.

---. "Las antigüedades de Mérida. Primer artículo." (1835). *Obras de D. Mariano José de Larra (Fígaro)*. Ed. Carlos Seco Serrano. 2 vols. Madrid: Atlas, 1960. II: 87-89.

---. "Las antigüedades de Mérida. Segundo y último artículo." (1835). *Obras de D. Mariano José de Larra (Fígaro)*. Ed. Carlos Seco Serrano. 2 vols. Madrid: Atlas, 1960. II: 90-93.

---. "Las casas nuevas." (1833). *Obras de D. Mariano José de Larra (Fígaro)*. Ed. Carlos Seco Serrano. 2 vols. Madrid: Atlas, 1960. I: 279-82.

---. "La sociedad." (1835). *Obras de D. Mariano José de Larra (Fígaro)*. Ed. Carlos Seco Serrano. 2 vols. Madrid: Atlas, 1960. I: 442-45.

---. "Lo que no se puede decir no se debe decir." (1834). *Obras de D. Mariano José de Larra (Fígaro)*. Ed. Carlos Seco Serrano. 2 vols. Madrid: Atlas, 1960. II: 48-49.

---. "*Los amantes de Teruel*. Drama en cinco actos, en prosa y verso, por don Juan Ignacio Hartzenbusch." (1837). *Obras de D. Mariano José de Larra (Fígaro)*. Ed. Carlos Seco Serrano. 2 vols. Madrid: Atlas, 1960. II: 295-99.

---. "Mi nombre y mis propósitos." (1833). *Obras de D. Mariano José de Larra (Fígaro)*. Ed. Carlos Seco Serrano. 2 vols. Madrid: Atlas, 1960. I: 173-76.

---. "*Panorama matritense*. Cuadros de costumbres de la capital observados y descritos por un curioso parlante. Artículo segundo y último." (1836). *Obras de D. Mariano José de Larra (Fígaro)*. Ed. Carlos Seco Serrano. 2 vols. Madrid: Atlas, 1960. II: 242-45.

---. "¿Quién es el público y dónde se le encuentra?" (1832). *Obras de D. Mariano José de Larra (Fígaro)*. Ed. Carlos Seco Serrano. 2 vols. Madrid: Atlas, 1960. I: 73-77.

---. "Representación de *Gabriela Vergi*. Tragedia en cinco actos." (1833). *Obras de D. Mariano José de Larra (Fígaro)*. Ed. Carlos Seco Serrano. 2 vols. Madrid: Atlas, 1960. I: 208-11.

---. "Representación de *La conjuración de Venecia*, año 1310. Drama histórico en dos actos y prosa, de don Francisco Martínez de la Rosa." (1834). *Obras de D. Mariano José de Larra (Fígaro)*. Ed. Carlos Seco Serrano. 2 vols. Madrid: Atlas, 1960. I: 383-87.

---. "Varios caracteres." (1833). *Obras de D. Mariano José de Larra (Fígaro)*. Ed. Carlos Seco Serrano. 2 vols. Madrid: Atlas, 1960. I: 290-92.

Lorenzo-Rivero, Luis. *Larra: Técnicas y perspectivas*. Madrid: José Porrua Turanzas, 1988.

---. "Madrid recurso de Fígaro en su revolución hacía una España moderna." *Neophilologus* 69 (1985): 548-58.

Mishra, Vijay. *The Gothic Sublime.* Albany: SUNY P, 1994.

Nordlund, David E. C. "Larra: Theatrical Criticism and Social Revolution, 1833-36." *Revista Hispánica Moderna* 48.2 (December 1995): 233-49.

Pérez Zaragoza, Agustín. *Galería fúnebre de espectros y sombras ensangrentadas*. Ed. Luis Alberto de Cuenca. Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1977.

Punter, David. *The Literature of Terror*. I. The Gothic Tradition. New York: Longman, 1996. 2nd ed. 2 vols.

Romero Tobar, Leonardo. "Larra ante el *paisaje sublime* (comentario de un texto desconocido)." *Letras de la España Contemporánea: Homenaje a José Luis Varela*. Ed. Nicasio Salvador Miguel. Alcalá de Henares: Centro de Estudios Cervantinos1995. 297-307.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*. New York: Methuen, 1986.

Sherman, Alvin F., Jr. "Larra vs. *El Jorobado*: Spanish society and the debate over *Antony* (1836)." *Anales de Literatura Española* 9 (1993): 129-39.

Ullman, Pierre L. *Mariano de Larra and Spanish Political Rhetoric*. Madison: U Wisconsin P, 1971.