



Show and Tell: Eva Canel at the 1893 Columbia World Exhibition in Chicago

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“En la imposibilidad de referirme a todos voy a recordar dos o tres cosas elegantes como sorprendentes y a describirlas en cuanto me sea posible [...] deteniéndome ante ellos”

Eva Canel, *Boletín* (132)

Agar Eva Infanzón Canel (1857-1932), a Spanish woman who took the penname of Eva Canel for her professional literary activities, married actor and author Eloy Perillán Buxó at the precocious age of 14 and, after being exiled from Spain for his subversive writing, traveled the theater circuit with him through the Americas. Wherever she stayed for some prolonged period she established cultural magazines, the texts of which she often wrote entirely herself. After her husband's death in 1889, she earned her living by giving conferences wherever she traveled, and by writing, being one of the first Hispanic women professional journalists. These writings relate mainly to the political and feminist questions of the day and appeared in prestigious venues in Spain and all over the Spanish-American continent—both topics, as Kenmogne and Hooper have indicated, being very daring for a woman of the era. As she was “[a]mante de la tradición por encima de todo” (Simón Palmer 299), one of the first paradoxes of this fascinating figure is the fact that, as Kessel Schwartz has pointed out, she strongly defended the traditional subservient role of women, but lived and worked outside of this role herself (211). Canel also published volumes of short stories, several novels (using the style and stereotypes of romantic sentimentalism “para fustigar los vicios sociales,” says Jean Kenmogne 57), and plays—some of which were performed in Havana, and again although they seem to be an apparent “defence of Spain's continued spiritual dominance...[they also reveal] a more critical view of the colonial legacy,” says Hooper (9). She also wrote several volumes of travel writing (see Caballer), including a collaborative work on her experiences as (Spanish) war correspondent and secretary of the Spanish Red Cross during the Cuban-Spanish-American war of 1895-1898, in which she strongly supported Spain's position. She left Cuba in 1898 but returned in 1914 to remain there until her death, always in difficult financial straits. Eva Canel's omission from serious critical study is compounded by the fact that she lived in many different places and wrote under several different pseudonyms; thus, she has not been recognized as any “national” writer—a circumstance

that is hugely ironic, as she was a lifelong, proud Spanish nationalist and conservative monarchist.¹ However, given her many “firsts,” her very diverse publications and controversial opinions, it is clear that her work merits more study.

In 1891 she established a satirical review in Havana called *La Cotorra* (which was awarded a prize at the Chicago World Exhibition of 1893), and solicited paid employment as a newspaper writer. The latter serves as her function as official correspondent to the World Exhibition for several Peninsular newspapers, as well as the Havana Chamber of Commerce, to which *el Gobierno* had entrusted the task of organizing Cuba’s contributions to the Columbian Exhibition and for which Canel was, again, one of the few Hispanic women correspondents—and an event in her career that has not at all been studied. This Chamber of Commerce, an organism officially representing the interests of the metropolis in the colony, and expressing itself in suitably competitive terms, took its role in Chicago very seriously by focusing on Cuba’s contributions to the Exhibition. In their presentation of this task in the February issue of its official organ the *Boletín de la Cámara Oficial de Comercio, Industria y Navegación de la Habana* (in which Canel’s reports would be published), Cuba is expressed as explicitly ‘part of’ (not dependent on or submitted to) Spain:

A esta Cámara de Comercio le ha sido confiado por el Gobierno el honroso encargo de ocuparse de todo lo concerniente a la concurrencia de los productos de la Isla a la Exposición de Chicago [...] misión que [...] nadie [...] podría en estos momentos rehusar, y menos una Cámara de Comercio, que [...] viene obligada a procurar constantemente el desarrollo de los grandes intereses que representa [...] una parte tan importante de la nación, como es la isla de Cuba. [...] Necesario es que Cuba realice acto de presencia [...] para que esta Antilla pueda digna, aunque modestamente, tomar la parte que le corresponde en ese fastuoso torneo de la civilización moderna. (20)²

“The government” would of course refer here to the Spanish government in Madrid, since in 1893 Cuba was still fully a colony, a circumstance that determined Canel’s particular sense of nationalism, to be further strengthened as “Spanish” by the events of 1895-98. It is reasonable to say, as does Kristy Hooper, that Canel was in fact, one of the very few women who “positioned themselves at the centre of debates about Spain’s colonial legacy at the turn of the 20th century” (2). Among the regular sections of the *Boletín de la Cámara*—news, laws pertaining to commerce and maritime traffic, official correspondence and lists of members, presentations to the government in Madrid, information on local exhibitions and products, etc.—in the four issues that appeared between July and October 1893 on the last day of every month, this *Boletín* would print seventeen “letters” totaling seventy pages of Canel’s reports on the Columbian Exhibition.³ In addition, she published a number of articles on her visit to the Chicago Exhibition in other newspapers in Madrid and Barcelona.⁴

World Exhibitions integrate characteristics of the spectacle and the museum, the tourist attraction and the didactic opportunity. They are grandiose, powerful spaces with monumental constructions; if gendered, they would be iconically masculine, and include a strong commercial (competitive) aspect. The Chicago World Exhibition had as its

particular focus the celebration of the 400th anniversary of Columbus' discovery of America, serving as a powerful hinge between tradition and history on the one hand, and a vision of a future of continued material development on the other, between has-been countries and new powers. The Exhibition thus almost openly became a showing off of America's "progress" during those 400 years. The celebration, whose venue had been hotly contested between Spain and the U.S. prior to 1892 and, within the U.S., between New York and Chicago, led to disputes which in part caused the Exhibition to occur in 1893 rather than 1892. This Exhibition also took place during a period of Cuban uprisings against Spain, political and economic unrest in the metropolis itself, and of U.S. interest in Central-American and Caribbean dominance. In Latin America, and especially in Cuba, there was great ambivalence towards the economic, political and cultural power of North America but also great admiration for what was seen as a model of progress and democracy.

Most reports published on visits to World Exhibitions during the end of the nineteenth century combine aspects of travel writing, the consciousness of changes in world perception by the increasing dominance of the visual, of important inventions that brought improvement in living conditions, publications and transportation (increasing use of machines in households, color printing, electricity), the growing importance of urban spaces and, in the case of women writers, the impact of these new living conditions on women's issues, and the increase of feminist activism. They also tend to share a style which, in accordance with the era's focus on new sciences and encyclopedic comprehensiveness, includes classifications and lists of objects seen, repetitions of verbs of observation and descriptive adjectives and comparisons, the whole replete with nationalistic expressions which are again typical of the late nineteenth century and of the impetus of World Exhibitions. Eva Canel's style presents characteristics typical of exhibition goers, who become saturated with the innumerable objects on view, and suffer from visual information overload: "Se fatiga la imaginación admirando tanto," she comments, with reference to the Italian art exhibit (108).

Through an examination of Eva Canel's discursive strategies, this paper will explore several aspects of her writing on the Exhibition as published in the *Boletín de la Cámara*, and what effect these rhetorical strategies have on the construction of meaning in her texts, in order to further knowledge about Canel and to widen the perspective on discourse studies. Canel's writing is characterized by colloquialisms and strong, sometimes crude language, and no-holds-barred criticism of "modern" women. In sum, she critiques what she considers to be in bad taste, the United States, the representations of nudes in art, and many other aspects—elements that are in fact not exclusive of these "Exhibition" texts but, as Kenmogne especially has pointed out, characteristic of Canel's style in general (56). I will concentrate on the discursive strategies that reveal Canel's perspective on the political (ideological) relationship between Chicago, the U.S., Spain, and Cuba (in which her own identity and sense of national pride as a Spaniard come to the fore), her emphasis on economic aspects (necessarily related to the interests of the Chamber of Commerce) and, as one of the first professional women writers, on how women fit into this context.

As a starting framework, and with complementary views on spectatorship, I will refer to the concepts in Mieke Bal's *Double Exposures*, which proposes that an exhibition can be considered a discursive act, in which an agent (a subject or first-person discursive position) puts objects on display (makes a statement, a third-person discursive position) for a viewer (an addressee or second-person discursive position), but who is also and already, as Michelle Aaron reminds us, an agent (1), thus producing meaning through interdiscursive communication. Museums, exhibitions and spectacles *show*, through what Debord has called a social relationship between people, mediated by images (12). Bal explains that by the diverse *acts* of exposition—which include showing off, pointing out and pointing at, praising, criticizing, explaining, taking for granted, and persuading (88)—though ephemeral and silent, such displays can also be considered as *telling*. The necessarily sequential nature of a visit to the exhibition, which reflects the temporal order of the places visited and the objects seen—and is also based on the sequencing of the exhibits themselves—organizes the exhibition discourse as a narrative (a discursive act with a beginning, a middle and an end), and encompasses a second subject (the viewer), who then imposes his/her own time sequence. As a narrative selects and organizes a sequential story, Yi-fu Tuan reminds us that it tends to resolve or smooth over the contradictions of life (17);⁵ thus, the order in which objects are displayed in an exhibition guides the viewer and constitutes a [visual] syntax towards the construction of a coherent whole (a “sentence”) that makes meaning possible (Bal 36, 138)—the whole integrated into a dominant (masculine) system of meaning based on patriarchy and colonialism. One of the main characteristics of the exhibition narrative is its obscuring of the “first person” exhibitor, as exposing is a form of discourse that obscures its own power structure (Bal 96, 157). In this manner, and by a second semiotic operation, the exhibition viewer has the opportunity to become a first-person narrator in which the “third person” remains the same (the “Exhibit”), being represented in time and space by means of a verbal discourse of which it becomes the object, and the second person addressee will now be the reading public of the original viewer-turned-first person’s narrative. This narrative often constitutes itself into an expository essay in which the narrator describes or explains the significance, context, meaning or the working(s) of the object(s) displayed, through a logical sequence of details, explanations and examples. The two different types of narratives—the exhibit itself and the discourse that narrates it—thus overlap.

Bal points out that in Western cultural history, images have been assigned the function of showing (for a visual and hence dominantly spatial perception), whereas words have the function of telling (which, through the sequencing of syntax, integrates the temporal element)—and these two forms of representation are in competition to achieve maximum signification (49). “Words are used to provide images with meanings they would not have otherwise” (Bal 31). Eva Canel herself proposes the concept as she writes her perspective on Denmark’s exhibit of a replication of Hans Christian Andersen’s rooms, an exhibit she expresses as something that the country *desired to say*: “Y ese pueblo sencillo, ignorante y casi ignorado, guarda con piedad sin igual lo que ha pertenecido al incomparable amigo de la infancia y lo exhibe en Chicago como queriendo decir: [...]” (109). The positions of first and second persons in the discursive sense (the exhibitor and the viewer in the expository process) “shift” around the object exhibited, a shift (deictic movement) which destabilizes the rigid relation of authority and mastery among expository agent, viewer/reader and exposed object (Bal 10), the viewer-narrator being transformed into a

more or less strong authoritative instance. My interest lies particularly in seeing how Eva Canel problematizes the transformation of the expository act into her verbal narrative—being transformed from a second-person narratee to first-person discursive position with a very specific and explicit secondary narratee.

Thus, the first element that can be examined in Canel's reports is the construction of her narratee, the Cámara de Comercio of Havana, an official (Spanish) institution, a situation that would naturally include a political dimension. As Noël Valis has stated, the world exhibition is a public space that allows for affirmation of the national identity. In fact, the world exhibition "stages" it (635, 636) and confirms the dominant values of participating nations. Debord goes further and insists that the spectacle "represents the dominant *model of life*" (13); it is, in fact, "the ruling order's non-stop discourse about itself" (19). This political goal is at the same time the foundation for the business-related perspective that also represents power, as the exhibitor shows the world the objects presented as trade goods by participating nations in the areas of the decorative arts and industrial technology. Power, as Yi-fu Tuan notes, is exercised through the recognition and acceptance of the symbols of legitimacy (151), which would specifically include such an institution as the Cámara de Comercio in Havana. Canel's "letters" to the *Boletín* of the Cámara are always preceded by her addressing the reports to the director of the *Boletín* as legitimate titular head—*Excelentísimo Señor Presidente de la Cámara de Comercio, Habana*—thus explicitly defining her public, personalizing the journal through its president, and recognizing her narratee as the power that authorizes her own discourse. Canel recognized this structure in even broader, general terms: "A porfía las naciones productoras han dado muestras en este certamen de su importancia y de su valer" (111). As will become evident, more implicitly, she will see these political and economic dimensions as a comparative element, a contrast, or even a conflict between what is exhibited in Chicago (which represents the United States), and her own sense of pride in what Spain represents.

The expository act is also already an act of representation, and thus a construction of meaning (Heffernan 12), and Canel's observations of it are made through a process of visual perception that is, inevitably, also already a culturally biased and historically constructed interpretation as controlling systems of conventional thought shape the meaning generated (Aaron 17), which will "show" (be "exposed") in the narration. As in dialogue, the two discursive positions act as shifters, in a back-and-forth movement that, in addition to the destabilization referred to above, would tend to replace the temporal element with the spatial dimension, thus emphasizing place over time. The exhibition becomes a continuous, timeless present appropriated by the spatial dimension. Canel's reports, in effect, generally appear mostly without sequencing any chronology; there are few personal anecdotes that would constitute a narrative.⁶ The first sentence in Canel's first report to the *Boletín* almost promises a narrative, as it announces a "beginning"; in addition, this sentence presents as a multiple index of the signs involved in her writing. Reporting on her first visit to the Exhibition, to the Spanish pavilion, she states: "Salvo mejor parecer creo que debo comenzar por casa" (101), a formulation which includes her acknowledgment of the importance of *pareceres*—which can be taken as opinions, appearances, or beliefs—of herself as a first-subject position, of her duties as a reporter,

and her narrative sequencing, all of which would allow for differentiated viewing positions which, in fact, will be rare in Canel's discourse.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of the sentence quoted above would be that aspect which refers to her nationalistic position, as she uses "home" as a metaphor of Spain's national exhibit—a first instance and formulation of continued pervasive expressions of her Spanish nationalist sentiment, more or less explicitly formulated. Mieke Bal mentions synecdoche, metonym and metaphor as three tropes that, in her words, "pervert" meaning (79) by relating an element that is visible and present to another, absent. This concept would tend to support Debord's affirmation that spectacles are "an affirmation of appearances [...] a visible *negation* of life—a negation that [as spectacle] has taken on a *visible form*" (14). By the use of this metaphor, Canel thus immediately demonstrates one of the tropes that transform meaning by suppressing the referent that is the Spanish exhibit as such. In Canel's case, of course, the metaphor also insists on her nationality which, in spite of her living most of her life elsewhere, she always claimed as Spanish—even to the extent of working tirelessly against any form of Cuban autonomy while living in Cuba, and so in favor of the continuing existence of Spain as a colonial power. In the phrase quoted, Cuba, emphatically not a metonymic association but an auxiliary part, thus becomes a synecdoche of Spain as her "home," and a sign of the importance that the political or nationalistic component of the Chicago World Exhibition had for Canel.

The synecdoche (which refers to a part to signify a whole) is useful in exhibition discourse because it extends the range of object selection. However, like metaphor, which substitutes one identity for another, synecdoche absorbs the visible by repressing the object exhibited. Canel's use of these tropes will be illuminating in that, among others, they contribute to her emphasis on *Spain* as the important and meaningful place of the exhibition—rather than Chicago; an emphasis that signifies as an implicit comparison in many of her texts. For example, she seldom mentions Chicago as a place with its own identity. More usually, "Chicago" is not a place as such but rather a synecdoche for the U.S. and "things American," all placed in opposition to Spain. The latter synecdochically includes Cuba, thus, both the city and the island "disappear" from the production of meaning, being replaced by a binary opposition in terms of a higher, (inter)national level: the U.S. vs. Spain, a model that is constant throughout Canel's discourse.

The metonym (which relates a referent with another, absent object through an association of time, place, or logic), is the third trope mentioned by Mieke Bal. It brings both elements of the relation into the presence or place and is based on the idea of a "model" (an original or paradigm), reproduced by a "copy" in a process of repetition and sequence, generating two different levels or representations of the real as present (34). In this manner it reinstates the narratological perspective that frames the museum walking tour, and does not promote the repression of the referent, the visible object or place (96). In its contiguity the metonym reminds the viewer of what was/is also there, restoring the displaced. Canel's identification with the plants and flowers in the small park surrounding the re-created *La Rábida* convent from which Columbus set sail, allows her to synecdochically and metonymically claim the space as her own and thus turns the discourse into an elated expression of patriotism: "[t]an españolas y tan bonitas me

parecieron estas plantas y estas flores [...], que se me ensanchó el alma creyéndome transplantada a mi patria” (153).

A reference Canel makes to repetition—a discursive phenomenon related to the metonym and very typical of exhibition writing—however, is revealing. On the one hand, she claims to avoid repetition of details: “Renuncio a describir los demás palacios porque tendría que repetir demasiado” (203). On the other, however, her narrative strategies (lists of countries and of their exhibits, very brief elaborations, selections of agricultural and commercial products from many countries) are in themselves repetitive. Although, as Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan pointed out long ago, repetition does not exist without difference (153)—of context, of time—Canel’s use of repetition of course does confuse the temporal element in the very “sameness” of the repeated terms by omission of any sequential order. This contributes to obscure the unique identity of the places visited and things seen at the exhibition, and the differences between them. In this formulation, the order of syntax, and its implied requirement as symbolic authority (as per the Lacanian “law of the father”), also disappears, opening the way for disorder and lack of meaningful communication. In addition, she simply refers to repetition without actually making it present, a strategy which still has the effect of emphasizing her (negative) evaluation: “Los infinitos objetos de *souvenir* son en su mayoría coleccionados por señoras y repito que tienen más de nimios y de risibles que de otra cosa” (191).

The display itself (the “third person” in the discursive situation, the visible presence) is silent but, as the only visible element, is the most essential. Without an explanation—“sign,” identification, name, context—however, the object remains meaningless. Its importance is thus displaced by the text that identifies and explains it. Thus, the gap between the object and its “meaning” makes signs, text, words (labels on the objects) necessary and give them meaning, in fact, rather than the evidence of direct perception. Canel complains vociferously and frequently about the lack of clear and correct labels on the exhibits, attributing the defect to a deliberate intention of forcing visitors to buy the exhibition catalogue, which is, according to her, also incomplete, as well as expensive: “adolecen la mayor parte de las instalaciones de falta de rótulos y detalles, quizás para obligar a comprar el catálogo general que se vende caro y es muy incompleto” (110). The space—discrepancy, gap—between the thing exhibited (object, item) and the statement (word, text) is filled up to produce meaning; one such “filler” is the narrative produced by the viewer transformed into text producer. In this instance Canel goes beyond interpreting the object, and instead proposes an interpretation for the motive behind the lack of signing language as an economic strategy, where this gap takes on a capitalistic meaning. She takes the criticism a step further by claiming (“warning”) that information related to the exhibits is not available, and that those in charge know nothing: “Aquí me toca hacer una advertencia: nadie sabe más que términos generales respecto a lo que exhiben; los encargados de las instalaciones a penas pueden dar razón y eso cuando pertenecen al país que representan, porque si son yankees ni esos términos generales saben siquiera” (136). The last phrase, in addition, emphasizes the confrontational tone constantly used by Canel against the U.S., and a strong effect of destabilizing the authority of both the Exhibition and its host, the United States.

The author continually repeats that due to this lack, the inaccuracy or the incompleteness of the information provided on the objects and their context, she has had to put her own efforts into collecting data—statistics, information on products and countries: “[...] no me canso de decirlo, raros los países que tienen estadística y a los que la tienen les resultan muy incompletas: cada uno de los datos que aporto es un triunfo de la calma y la paciencia machacona de que he tenido que revestirme” (144). She emphasizes especially her endeavors to obtain information that can be compared to Cuban data, which would, of course, be specifically relevant to the Havana Chamber of Commerce. Thus, for example, and explicitly, she mentions agricultural production by “las Repúblicas Americanas [understood by Canel as South-American, needless to say], porque son éstas las que cosechan productos similares a los de Cuba” (162). Once again, it is important to remember the commercial implications both of the Exhibition itself and of the current context: in Spanish, World Exhibitions are often called a *certamen*, and the *Cámara de Comercio* itself, as quoted earlier, speaks in terms of a *fastuoso torneo*, a competitive dimension that enters into the construction of meaning in Eva Canel’s discourse.

It is evident that Canel’s vision of Chicago as the place to affirm the superiority of Spain quite often took the form of criticizing the United States, and one of the forms this criticism takes is a questioning of the veracity and claims of authenticity of American objects or exhibits. There are various mechanisms of what Mieke Bal calls “truth-speak” (36) used by exhibitors (i.e. discursive strategies that would be used to support the authenticity claim of the object exhibited, such as labels, contextual material and explanations). Canel concentrates on the (lack of) veracity of the labelling, and on her doubts about the authenticity of the objects displayed—almost exclusively directed at (against) U.S. displays, as where the U.S. in its own exhibit presents cork imported from Spain, which Canel calls “sobre inaudito vergonzoso” (151). Several of her comments are couched in explicit first-person discourse, singular or plural, incorporating the narratee(s): “Presentan muchísimo y bien ordenado pero permítenme si me permito dudar que todo lo expuesto sea fabricación suya” (133). Cemetery statues are displayed as North-American, but “ya sabemos que son artistas italianos los que aquí hacen esta clase de trabajos” (134). In fact, she generalizes: “en esto de museos amontonan los norteamericanos muchísimos objetos falsificados” (185),⁷ thus bringing into question the entire value (authority and legitimacy) of the U.S. exhibit and by extension, the honesty of U.S. citizens and Chicago as the center of the Columbian celebrations.

As has become evident from the fragments quoted so far, Eva Canel’s discourse is generally expressed in impersonal terms, by using the Spanish reflexive *se*, the expression *hay* or the existential declaration *es*, where in all cases a first person “subject position” is absent. This strategy gives prominence to the object described and creates a distance between this object and the subject “I.” This gives the appearance of objectivity and therefore presents the idea of her discourse as “truth.” Expressions in first person singular do occur, but generally it is to state an opinion or an evaluation. The subject “I” present in her discourse, therefore, often appears as a very personal, judgmental critique: “en esta misma Sección [cubana] he visto algunos bordados, obra femenina muy insignificante” (104). “El lavabo de mármoles diversos que Don Alfredo Tricornia ha enviado [...], llama justamente la atención: y no lo he visto cuando lo expuso en la Habana y voy a decir lo que me parece: encuentro que es demasiado alto y que tiene recipiente muy

pequeño [...] le falta propiedad y le falta arte” (105); “Y siquiera sea de paso rectificaré a otro cronista, don Raimundo Cabrera, que hablando de los famosos jarrones de Felipa, muy someramente, por cierto” (195), etc.

Canel’s view of the Spanish national pavilion, seen as “truth,” is presented in the impersonal form; it is the most beautiful, since those of “las naciones europeas no tienen cosa de particular como arquitectura, si se exceptúa el de España que [...] resulta de gusto superior” (203). When she does see something negative in anything relating to Spain she is quick to blame someone, anyone: “La Sección española en el Palacio de Manufactura es un verdadero desastre, por la clase de terreno que le han concedido [...], culpa no sé de quién” (101). In *La Rábida*, Canel finds the exhibits in extremely poor taste, but American visitors, having worse taste, actually admire “cuanto malo y mediano han podido reunir” (153). She discursively broadens the reach of her opinion by encompassing the entire world, negatively and impersonally, in the judgment of this part of the Exhibition: “No puede nadie hacerse idea de todo lo malo artísticamente considerado, que en las celdas y pasillos del convento admiran los Yankees” (153). Where there is no need to “blame” anyone, her praise is unconditional and needs stronger words than a simple impersonal expression. Thus, in the industrial arts section, Spanish products are awarded a list of the most superlative adjectives: admirable, beautiful, of the highest taste and richness, magnificent, splendid, artistic, etc. (102). It is in the section that she calls *las Artes Liberales*—perhaps the most traditionally “museum” aspect, which is located in the Manufactures Building—that Canel also broaches the issues of light and size, the perceptible factors in exhibitions, and the specifically visual and the spatial components:

No se comprende que los arquitectos se olviden en la construcción de un palacio destinado a Exposición diurna, de lo principal, de lo esencialísimo, de la luz solar, factor indispensable para que reúna las condiciones, apetecibles solamente. Los que se han asombrado con el *tamaño* del edificio por que estaba reputado por el mayor del mundo, no comprenden o no quieren comprender que el tamaño entra por poco y apenas si, [...] resulta el grandor contraproducente. (183)

It is clear that even with Canel’s predominant use of impersonal syntax, her preferences are strongly expressed, supported by other discursive strategies.

The public discourse on the Fair constantly emphasized the concept of progress as a willed national activity toward a determined, utopian goal (Rydell 46), but Canel sees this drive to the desired utopia on the part of the U.S. as negative. In a formulation that uses the personal “I” subject—though distanced by the conditional mode—she considers the U.S. (compressed into Chicago) as ambitious, materialistic, pragmatic, hypocritical, and unartistic: “[...] si no se me acusase de parcialísima, diría que los EEUU han patentizado en esta Exposición su pequeñez en punto a manufactura, a bellas artes y a todo lo que requiere sutileza fina, inteligencia cultivada y espíritu educado en la vida del arte y del sentimiento” (133). However, and in fact, the Chicago “Columbian Exhibition” of 1893 did show a “new world” order. The southern part of the continent Columbus “discovered” 400 years earlier was now the continued object of conquest by the northern

part, which was becoming dominant in the whole world, and Columbus's sponsor, Spain was buried in its own past history. Canel seems to recognize some of that atmosphere when from the very first letter to the Chamber of Commerce, she complains of "el poco respeto que se nos ha tenido" (101)—the personal and inclusive *nos* referring to Spain, and the impersonal, distancing *se* to the American Exhibition authorities, in a clear dichotomic expression.

The end of the nineteenth century saw a strong rise in feminism, and the World Fairs of this period were events that brought together in one place and time a large number of elements that relate directly to women's status in society. Eva Canel's firmly conservative attitude towards women's place in the world comes to the fore especially in the Chicago World Exhibition which, for the first time, offered a "Women's Building," designed by a woman architect and administered and managed by a "Board of Lady Managers." This "separate place" for a women's exhibit was a decision that had been the subject of heated debated prior to the Exhibition and became a cause for much controversy among women activists.⁸ The building was one of the most popular of the Fair and its exhibits among the most commented; the actions of the Board of Lady Managers offered journalists and cartoonists great opportunities to fuel controversy. Canel—anti-U.S. and anti-feminist—would see all this feminine activity negatively both politically and as a woman. It should be noted that her report on the Women's Building is published only towards the end of her submissions, in sections thirteen and fourteen of sixteen; it is also of interest to see that her pages on the Woman's Building exhibit and activities occupy fifteen pages, vs. two for the State Department, Treasury, War, Navy, justice, Agriculture and Patent Office all together. Exceptionally, this report on the Woman's Building also includes long sections of comments on the Lady Managers' activities, the congresses held, the opinions expressed—and interpreted by her.

From the beginning of her exposition on *El Edificio de la Mujer* she expresses severe criticism of the building itself, which she describes as *un caserón informe*; even a quick look would "of course" judge it to be a complete failure, "a simple vista y desde luego se advierte que todo es un puro defecto" (192). She claims Spanish women to be the most outstanding contributors in the Women's Building, again in the "objective" formulation, underscored by a traditional set expression: "mal pese a quien pese, las mujeres españolas se han llevado la palma en el concierto universal femenino" (193). She then launches into a long harangue of second-hand gossip on the meetings and the internal bickering of the Lady Managers, claiming that the actions of the Board had resulted in "que fueron la burla y el escarnio de la prensa norteamericana, de los corresponsales extranjeros" (193), i.e. nationally and internationally.⁹ The absolute impersonal expression in these phrases do not allow for any other (shift of) perspective, being that the press, and especially some North-American papers, simply made fun of the women and the women's pavilion because there was still very strong anti-feminist sentiment in society. While in some of the articles Canel wrote for Spanish newspapers and magazines, she elaborates fully on how Spanish women are superior to North-American women, for the *Boletín Oficial* of the Havana *Cámara de Comercio*, Canel is not that explicit. She emphasizes the superiority (and therefore the importance) of women's *labores*: "A las españolas nos hace reír la novedad de estos encajes Yankees" (201), clearly including herself by her expression in the first person plural of "las españolas." She also broaches the issue of women voting and occupying

political positions, condemning the concept in absolute terms: “Se sabe que para ser mujer del siglo XIX y para ser igual a los hombres que valen, no se necesita votar en las urnas ni querer ser ministro ni menos ser marimacho” (196). She thus seems to cover both ends of women’s issues, the traditional and the recent. However, her particular stance on Spain, on women and their place in the world is clear from one of her brief statements which claims strongly—and to the twenty-first century reader outrageously and even comically—that “[S]abido tenemos que el bordado en blanco es la base, el fundamento de la educación de adorno de la mujer” (193). The use of the first person plural for “knowledge held” claims all-encompassing authority for her opinion. Another brief impersonal passage clearly functions as an editorial comment beyond the parameters of the section on the educational exhibits in which it occurs and again shows her traditional perspective on women’s issues: “A los niños no se les salva en las escuelas, se les salva en el hogar y mientras para el hogar no se eduquen las mujeres, no se salvarán las naciones por los niños” (186).¹⁰

Canel mentions the existence of several periodicals in Madrid devoted to the “Primor Femenil” [women’s lace-making, sewing, embroidery and other needlework], a fact which she claims supports her position of women’s place being in the home. She asks, “¿Puede haber atraso intelectual para la mujer donde se publican diez o doce periódicos dedicados exclusivamente a las labores manuales de adorno?” (193). The strategy of the rhetorical question, although still formulated in impersonal terms, returns her discourse to the narrative form by pretending to be the presentation of a passionate dialogue, and thus brings to the fore both her addressee, the Havana *Cámara de Comercio*—which she assumes would supply the correct, presupposed, negative answer to the question—and an affective expression of patriotism. Again, many of her comments are specific denials of U.S. women’s progress and are directed at (against) these women, who endeavor to appear industrious and exhibit a profusion of *labores* but are inferior: “no hay realmente ningún trabajo de mano que sobresalga” (201).¹¹

By now it should be clear that Eva Canel in many respects held very traditional views—on authority, on women, on progress, and on Spain’s place in the world. Another expression of this clinging to tradition—and Spain as Canel’s “place”—is her abundant reference to Spanish nobility in her long list of contributors to exhibits in the Women’s Building—“la reina y las Infantas,” the Duchess of Alba, the *Marquesa* of the Casa Loring, Countess Mortera (193), the Countess Llobregat (194), the *Infanta Paz*, “aquella dulcísima princesa poética” (195)¹²—metonymically bringing both the object and the authority of nobility into the text. It is therefore very interesting to note an omission in this list. Canel does not specifically mention the *Infanta Eulalia*, who actually visited the Exhibition as the officially invited guest of the United States government in representation of the nation that had made possible Columbus’s voyage, and America’s discovery. Eulalia had visited Cuba on the way to Chicago, and Canel had been there. It is not clear whether Canel was in Chicago at the same time as Eulalia, but the latter’s visit had been notable and controversial, since the American public had had preconceived ideas of what a princess should look and act like, and Eulalia did not live up to these expectations on occasion. Yet—or perhaps because of this—in her reports to the *Cámara de Comercio* Canel omits all mention of the entire Cuba-Chicago Eulalia episode.

The brief list of Spanish nobility presented by Canel is but a small sample of what was, in fact, one of the main discursive strategies in her exhibition letters: lists, brief mentions or descriptive phrases.¹³ Robert Belknap metaphorizes the concept of the list spatially as a framework, receptacle or container that holds separate and disparate items together and is “organized to display information; [...] to enumerate, account, remind, memorialize [and] order” (2-30). Lists are generally dominated by nouns and can be made memorable or productive for further meaning with added details such as adjectives, anecdotes, descriptions and epithets. Examples (*lists*) of Canel’s articles in the *Boletín* generally show no such embellishments or attempt at order or selection, and quickly become monotonous; many are simply names of expositors (102, from Spain); of contributors to the Woman’s Building (193); of women and their handwork (194); of Spanish noble women who have sent objects (195); of the provinces of Canada, the states of the U.S. and their principal products (107); nouns listing products from Belgium (lace, bronzes, illustrations, 111); types of sweets and chocolates from Spain (“esquisitos, inmejorables,” 163); statistics on wheat and sisal fibre from Mexico (141) and Argentina (149); patents from the U.S. State Department—“en esto de las patentes se hace mucho ruido y hay pocas nueces en la mayoría de los casos” (190); and lists of paintings on exhibit in the Women’s Pavilion (195). Thus, her lists simply tend to verbally display and arrange “objects” without any attempt at order or the reality of her exhibition visit. Typical is her list of products presented by Mexico:

México indudablemente se halla muy adelantado. Presenta casimires bien tejidos y de finos colores imitando a los franceses y haciéndoles seria competencia. Percales y driles de algodón, fósforos, cordelería, esteras, espartos, papel de imprimir y de escritorio, velas estearina superiores al parecer, jabones de uso doméstico, perfumería; calderas de cobre trabajadas a mano, cocinas de hierro, planchas y baterías de cocina, mantas de lana, ponchos y *sarapes* [sic] o chales; escobas y objetos de lata pintados, tales como jarros jofainas, bañaderas, faroles, etc. (111)¹⁴

This list, and most others she enumerates, offers no order or classification of any kind; it is not even clear, for example, whether her narration orders the words as per the sequence presented in the exhibit. This lack of order or classification in her own writing becomes interestingly ironic when we read her criticism of the Manufactures Building of the Exhibition, in which there was much confusion because “no se habían hecho las debidas separaciones entre las manufacturas y las Artes Liberales [...]” (184). On occasion Canel does explicitly select some items for elaboration, omitting the rest of the “list” of items in an exhibit: “En la imposibilidad de referirme a todos voy a recordar dos o tres cosas tan elegantes como sorprendentes y a describirlas en cuanto me sea posible [...] deteniéndome ante ellos a pesar de la fatiga de cuerpo y de imaginación que sentía. [...] Imposible seguir enumerando” (132). Her comment on the Argentine exhibit, that “Las riquezas de esta República se ven aquí representadas más por datos que por lo expuesto en la instalación” (148), in fact applies very well to Canel’s own writing. The exhibits are more “represented” by her lists of statistics and data, especially those related to Cuba (i.e. Spain), than by a narrative or by descriptive terms that would re-create the images of the places and objects on show. In effect, her narrative clearly comes to dominate that of the Exhibition.

Descriptive writing, though it also remains outside the temporal sequence, emphasizes place, shape, form, and color through vivid and precise modifiers and the use of figurative language; it intends to “show” more than “tell.” Description allows the narrator to include an affective dimension to the text, but it also spatializes the discourse, rhetorically making the object mentioned “visible” by presenting its salient characteristics, qualities and values, much like a still-life painting. While often providing the context and situation of the object in its space, “somehow” making it visible (Hamon 3), for the nineteenth-century interest in comprehensive and “scientific” knowledge, description is most of all a linguistic mastery (appropriation) of terminology, identification, and apparent proof that the object was, indeed, viewed by the “I” expressing the description. A note also needs to be made here to the fact that Canel’s reports appeared in the *Boletín* entirely without illustrations; readers themselves thus had no visual perception of any of the places or exhibits and depended completely on the verbal text Canel provided. The lack of descriptions as such in Canel’s *Boletín* letters is thus truly remarkable; when they do occur, they are short and not very informative. Even where she pronounces her own artistic judgments, much more evidently based on having been in the place where the objects were viewed, her text is expressed in impersonal and absolute forms (*hay, es, se ve*), and the values articulated do not appear in the deictics or verbs of perception or evaluation, but in nouns and adjectives: “Hay en la instalación de Pensilvania un sillón muy curioso, hecho de pedacitos de caña braba [sic] y tapizada con *peluche* color de oro viejo: y también han armado una estufa de pedacitos de mazorca, que es una verdadera curiosidad” (108). It is also clear, however, that the style used by Canel does not, in fact, guarantee her having been in the place and viewed the object described. She employs non-subjective description, including the mention of colors and fabrics, insisting on the impersonal present, the passive or reflexive verb forms, again spatializing the discourse, removing any concept of “event” (which would have a temporal dimension) or dynamic movement or, indeed, narration. As an example, I quote a fragment of the full half page describing the memorabilia pertaining to Ludovico II, “aquel pobre rey demente” of Bavaria: “Las paredes de [su] saloncito están cubiertas de terciopelo azul bordado en oro a realce primoroso. El sillón real, colocado en medio de la estancia, es de oro tallado y con escultura de gran mérito. El asiento se ve cubierto en el centro con una tapiz pompadour delicadísimo, y rodeado con bordados de oro” (116, 117).¹⁵

An artifact or object displayed—the “third person” of the discourse—never “means” on its own, or even through its identification on a label—part of the explanatory procedures in exhibitions, and what Bal called “the handwriting on the wall,” (87ff). Its relationship with other elements of a particular culture, with other objects in the exhibition and translated through specific cultural or verbal conventions are also required to construct meaning. Items exhibited are selected (i.e. included or excluded), presented in a certain order, labeled or explained in a manner that constructs the narratee (viewer). The “you” to whom the exhibit is directed is, like the reader of a book, anticipated and partly constructed by this organizing discourse. Canel the narrator again criticizes what she considers to be a confusion directed to her as exhibit viewer. This time her target is the German pavilion, which fails to distinguish between the different conceptions of “art,” which prevents the construction of meaning. She uses the synecdoche to extend her criticism of this lack of clarity to other exhibits: “[...] haciendo una advertencia que puede servir de una vez por todas. Si mezclo las industrias con las artes liberales en la

enumeración, es porque indistintamente han colocado los expositores las segundas en la planta baja y alta del edificio revolviéndolo todo a gusto y capricho de cada cual” (131). It is clear that she feels structure (as syntax in linguistic expression) to be necessary to provide meaning, and her use of the terms (*mezclo, enumeración, indistintamente, revolviendo, gusto, capricho*) is revealing. Her own dominant discursive strategy is the list, and she does not realize that, in fact, this usage is similar to the unorganized (unclassified) accumulation of objects, or words. While it may reflect her passage through the exhibits, by its lack of verbs and temporal indications, this usage transforms the list into an accumulation of nouns, a number, which is precisely the dominant value that she criticizes in the general visiting (North-American) public: “En carruajes, modelos de botes y material de ferrocarriles, han acumulado cuanto han podido acumular los Estados Unidos. La fuerza del número dominando siempre, en la comprensión y en el criterio del vulgo” (164). Even when her text is somewhat more descriptive or detailed, the list-effect remains, and becomes a discursive strategy which also spatializes her own discourse and erases its narrative qualities: “El dentista D. Florencio Cancio y Zamora, de la Habana, expone una dentadura completa, y la viuda de Aramburo, de Madrid, tiene una vitrina con instrumentos de electricidad” (106).

It is only at the very end, in her last paragraph, that Canel explicitly returns to the narrative form, again with the consciousness of first-subject agency, and offering an “open” ending to the text, with a promise of more to come—“Doy por terminada mi tarea en el *Boletín de la Cámara de Comercio de la Habana* que me concedió la honra de nombrarme su cronista en la Exposición Colombina, prometiendo ampliar en volumen estas cartas y añadir más datos” (205)—a promise never fulfilled. But, in this way she explicitly brackets (frames) her voluminous enumerations, lists, and repetitions with a narrative beginning and end.

The “meaning” ultimately communicated by Canel in the text in which she “tells” the Havana *Cámara de Comercio* about the Columbian Exhibition—thus fulfilling her “deber de cronista [para] interpretar los deseos de la Corporación que me ha confiado este honroso cargo” (101)—is generated by a mostly impersonal syntax, the preponderant use of lists, enumerations, and repetitions rather than sequences constructed with verbs and tenses, as well as an almost complete lack of descriptive visualizations, or anecdotes. In sum, her discursive strategy is marked by a lack of the temporal element, and thus obscures narrativity and negates the order of syntax. On the one hand, this format is quite appropriate for and consequent with her own narratee and employer, a commercial institution. However, the very strategies she uses in her discourse construct a meaning that expands well beyond her stated aims. She appropriates metaphors and synecdoches to expand her reach from the local (Chicago, an exhibit), to the grandly political (Spain’s situation in the world as superior to the U.S.). In the face of the aim of the Exhibit to demonstrate “progress,” she insists on presenting women’s traditional work. She omits the mention of known controversies specific to the Exhibition (the Eulalia episode is but one),¹⁶ but provokes her own (the Lady Managers’ conflicts at the Woman’s Building) or stirs up known debates (women’s place and work in society). She questions the exhibition’s legitimizing elements such as labels and other “truth-speak” strategies used to “show.” In their totality, these elements together construct a discursive strategy whose foremost characteristic is the destabilization of the shifted relationship between the

original narrator (the various exhibition “curators”) and the viewer-turned-narrator that is Eva Canel, to the extent that the original narratee is transformed into a text-narrator who appropriates the power of the Exhibition itself and “speaks back” to propose views independent of (and frequently quite contrary to) the first narrator’s assumed purposes. These strategies construct implicit comparisons between Chicago (i.e. the U.S.) and Spain, always to the detriment of the former. This strategy can almost be called competitive—in the Exhibition as *certamen*, as the purposes of the *Cámara de Comercio*—and succeeds in thrusting forward Canel as an ideologically conscious subject with very specific and strong opinions on controversial topics that are uniquely expressed. Furthermore, the element of competitiveness and comparison reflect on her own situation and status as an independent professional woman who expresses her opinions freely and powerfully—in ironic opposition to her detailed and frequent mention of royalty, and her insistence on the importance of women’s traditional roles. It becomes evident that obedience to tradition and authority is not for Eva Canel, but for other Spanish (women) subjects. She thus constructs her discourse as a hinge between different (frequently opposing) perspectives; as the viewer in the first instance she constitutes herself into an agent, appropriating the show—away from the exhibitor as the implied proprietor and first narrator—and telling, describing (making visible) and thus assigning meaning in the creation of her own exposition.

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Notes

- ¹ D. J. R. Walker indicates that this lack of critical work may in part be because her articles and books are not readily available (4). I feel Walker's second reason, that Canel's "blinkered approach to nearly everything she wrote about" (21)—or her "posición ideológica intransigente" as Simón Palmer expresses it (294)—may be a stronger argument.
- ² I am indebted to Ricardo Quiza and Ana Vera in Havana, for first alerting me to the location of these texts, and secondly, for making them available to me, as they are not easily accessible. Subsequent references to this text will show only the page number.
- ³ Other Cuban newspaper writers also traveled to Chicago to report on the World's Fair. Aurelia Castillo de González, one of Cuba's foremost writers of the time—and a traveler of considerable experience, having attended the 1889 Paris World Exhibition, and traveled to Chicago by train from the Mexican coast—was sent by the Havana newspaper *El País* and published her accounts in the *Revista de Cuba* in 1894 and later in her five-volume *Escritos* (see Vallejo). Two others were Raimundo Cabrera and Manuel Serafín Pichardo, whose accounts afford interesting differences of perspective—both political and gendered.
- ⁴ The Madrid newspaper was *El Día*. A series of four lavishly illustrated articles appeared in August and September of 1893 in Barcelona's *La Ilustración Artística*, which prefaces Canel's first contribution with a laudatory introduction: "escribe desde aquella ciudad expresamente para LA ILUSTRACION ARTISTICA nuestra corresponsal la notable escritora Eva Canel" (21 August 1893, 540). There may, in fact, be more material; except for Kenmogne, Canel's journalistic writing has not been exhaustively catalogued—a difficult task since she was published widely in many Spanish-American countries, including Argentina, Peru, the Dominican Republic and other countries.
- ⁵ Michelle Aaron adds that French feminists considered that narrative was a tool of patriarchy (35).
- ⁶ This is true for the 70 pages of text published in the *Boletín de la Cámara Oficial de Comercio*, but some of her contributions to the Spanish newspapers do contain some (infrequent) anecdotes. These latter texts also show a more narrative style, which contrast with the *Boletín* underscores the effect of the different narratees of the reports.
- ⁷ A charge repeated later: "aquí [EEUU] se ven los museos atestados de falsificaciones" (203).
- ⁸ This issue is, of course, still being debated: should the study of women's work be the subject of separate (special) academic courses and catalogue listings, or should it be incorporated into other, thematic or chronological organizations of material. For the first time, women participated in committees set up to select the national contributions to the Fairs, in the administration of the building operations and in the congresses that formed part of the exhibitions' events. The Women's Building as constructed incorporated among others art and industry by women, a library of 7,000 volumes by women writers, and a hall which celebrated 325 conferences with 185 participants during the *Congress of Women* held in May 1893 (Wels 3, Weimann 531).
- ⁹ Her criticism of these "ladies" is legitimized precisely by the fact that she quotes a "letter" from "la ilustre escritora" Mary (Mrs John) Logan (192), a disenchanted Board member and publisher of *Home Magazine*.

- ¹⁰ Canel's views on women, in fact, as expressed in her journalism, fiction and dramas, and as were her views on Spanish-American relations, are complex, often contradictory, and merit further study (see Hooper).
- ¹¹ The insistence on women's needlework as representing (metaphorically) the foundation of women's place in the world was even in Canel's time seen as retrograde. Many correspondents writing on the Columbian Exhibition considered the presence of this type of work in the Women's Building excessive. Aurelia Castillo, for example, severely criticized needlework as one of the leading causes of blindness in women—"¿A qué gastar una vida, perder ojos y pulmones en obras que nunca se retribuyen en todo lo que cuestan a sus autoras?" (III 114)—admiring instead many of the new inventions that made women's lives easier (III 70, 160).
- ¹² In other sections of her letters she also devotes long passages to King Ludovico of Bavaria (116), the imperial family in Germany (117), and Prince Thomas of Savoy (167).
- ¹³ It is interesting to note that Schwartz observes the "prolific enumeration" as one of the stylistic characteristics of Canel's novels (208).
- ¹⁴ The list for Canada is also typical:

Presenta el Canadá en manufactura casi la misma producción inglesa, aunque como es natural, en más pequeña escala. Alfombras, paños, sartenes, géneros de punto, confecciones para caballeros, pieles, astas de búfalo trabajada, hilados de algodón, madapolanes, calzado, pieles curtidas, sillones de operar para dentistas, perfumería, drogas y productos farmacéuticos. También expone cocinas, baterías, calderas de vapor para caldear casas; inodoros, básculas, cordeles, cables, herraduras para caballerías, muebles, no de gran valor, y un artístico marco de hierro, por el cual piden dos mil duros. La colección de sierras para serrar a máquina que exhibe el Canadá es grandísima. (114)

- ¹⁵ Another almost half-page is devoted to descriptions of objects that belonged to the deceased emperor dom Pedro of Brasil, in which she severely criticizes the fact that these objects are for sale: "Bien estaría que estos objetos de valor histórico y de gran lucimiento al propio tiempo, se expusiesen; pero muy mal que se hayan traído para venderlos" (115). Although this might seem to be an elaboration of a sort of ethics of commercial practice, her discourse is in fact a criticism of *los brasileiros* who with this practice, she says, show a denial of their own historical consciousness as well as a lack of gratitude towards the Emperor, who "amó mucho a su pueblo y a sus hijos." Both her monarchical preference and her family-oriented ideology are revealed in this fragment—as is her view of the need for a conscious national identity on the part of Latin American countries.
- ¹⁶ Another notable silence is Canel's omission of the fuss made over a painting by a Cuban artist that showed Columbus in chains, which was barred from the Exhibition by the Spanish director until the chains were painted out.

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