MARIANO AND MORENO: CHANGING MEN OF FICTION AND FASHION

"Human verisimilitude is the distinguishing mark of characters in the new novel"
Peter Anthony Bly, *The Wisdom of Eccentric Old Men*

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The year 2009 features the Bicentennials of the birth of three exceptional men of the Nineteenth century: a statesman, a scientist, and a writer—Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865), Charles Darwin (1809-1882), and Edgar Allen Poe (1809-1847). To these famous names of the Anglo-American world we must add that of Mariano José de Larra (1809-1837). Larra's legacy in Spain, like those of his counterparts abroad, continues to be an innovative force in politics, the social sciences, and the arts of literature and newspaper writing.

This timeless quality, which has shaped, most recently, the *Ciclo de conferencias* that celebrates the *Bicentenario Mariano José de Larra (1809-2009)*,[1] prompts renewed attention to an age-old theme: the power of fictional recreation inherent in Larra's life and work. This essay, conceived in honor and in dialogue with Peter Anthony Bly's recent study *The Wisdom of Eccentric Old Men* (2004), focuses on the self-referential or self-reflexive aspect of Larra's writings. I want to show how the imprint of Larra's life and of his mind and imagination became recreated in two major literary works: *Fortunata y Jacinta* (1886-87), Galdós's four-part masterpiece, and *La vida contemporánea*, a series of articles that Emilia Pardo Bazán published from 1895 to 1916 in *La Ilustración Artística* de Barcelona, as well as a review in her *Crónicas de "La Nación" de Buenos Aires* (1909-1921).

Among the many newspaper articles that depict Larra as *Fígaro*, we may take "El castellano viejo" (1832) and "La Nochebuena de 1836" as preeminent examples of literary self-consciousness and of what, in our time, critics came to call "interior duplication"—fiction as metafiction.[2] In each of these articles, *Fígaro*, styled as a complex, effervescent mix of literary personae—author and narrator, character and reader—speaks, acts, and writes himself into the text; he becomes, in John Kronik's words, "simultaneously an observing and an observed object" (37). Thus, in these particular newspaper articles, Larra as *Fígaro* executes a dual, dynamic role of critique, change, and exchange in literary roles, social values, and moral meanings.

In "El castellano viejo," Braulio, whose name "brays" like a "beast" ("animal") and who accosts *Fígaro* in the street, personifies the type of man, now on the rise in Madrid's *mesocracia*, who nonetheless retains the boorishness of traditional country ways. This unsettling mix of old and new—social pretensions to refinement, undercut by boisterous, uncivilized impositions—engages, willy-nilly, *Fígaro*, critic and *literato*, who once at the party, turns himself momentarily into a *castellano viejo*: he sees his identity "buried" ("sepultado") by the huge, grossly checkered jacket of his host; he becomes "stained" by grease as trays tip and spill, by the sight of the decaying teeth of the lady to his left, and by don Leandro's dirty wine glass. Finally, recognizing his former self to be obliterated and "dead" to this chaotic world, *Fígaro* watches himself emerge "reborn," transmogrified into

a "poet" who "vomits" verses at the end of day. Gravy and cigar smoke, spills and stains, invade and contaminate the cultivated, arch isolation of his narrative persona.

While the wretched *Fígaro*, resuscitated as a *castellano viejo*, does manage to escape the "ruins" of the day and to return to his old self—to that self-same image of a pristine, disciplined gentleman, well versed and well dressed in frock coat, white handkerchief, and pearl gray trousers—and while, thus refreshed and newly attired, he may retreat to the safety and security of that "corto número de gentes que piensan," he cannot escape a tormenting insight: those "élites" of French tastes, "que viven sujetas al provechoso yugo de una buena educación libre y desembarazada," are also those who wear masks—"fingen acaso estimarse y respetarse mutuamente para no incomodarse" (133). Personal comfort, premised on social distance, social isolation, takes precedence over the expression of true feeling, "al paso que las otras hacen ostentación de incomodarse, y se ofenden y se maltratan, queriéndose y estimándose tal vez verdaderamente" (133).

"El castellano viejo" presents the intersection of two literary and social categories, the one commenting on the other. In this way, a typical "cuadro costumbrista"—an amusing "picture" of social mores—turns into a "cuento"—a kind of doubled-sided narrative that communicates a double result; in turn, this double result takes place on two interchangeable levels. On the one hand, there are the operations of *mimesis: imitation* occurs as Braulio postures as a newly-minted bourgeois gentleman and as *Fígaro* falls into the habits of his host. On the other, there is the communication of reversed social values and moral meanings: Braulio and his guests stand revealed as capable of true affection and respect, while "el corto número de gentes" only practices a mannered hypocrisy. Between them, negotiating, as it were, inside and outside the two spheres, as well as inside and outside his own identity and his own text, *Fígaro* / Larra emerges as a multiple, self-conscious *persona*: he becomes momentarily the object of his own critique as he stands divided between real and fictional worlds, reporting those differing worlds and values to *himself* as he reports them to his reading public. For Larra / *Fígaro* is always the reader of himself—of his antics, his hopes, his disillusion and opinionated views.

"La nochebuena de 1836," subtitled "Yo y mi criado. Delirio filosófico" and written hardly two months prior to Larra's suicide on 13 February 1837, presses this capacity for self-consciousness and multiple roles to extremes of mental and moral suffering. As *Fígaro* dreads the date of the 24th—the date of his birth and of utter isolation on Christmas Eve—he experiences a kind of literary psychic "split," one that breaks the reciprocal balance of *cuadro / cuento*: those *two* categories collapse into *one*—a self-styled *confesión*, while the sense of *one* becomes *two*: voices criss-cross into a dialogue that is a monologue, oriented via metaphor on *one* unforgiving vertical axis of despair. In this text, invisible numbers rise and fall. Windows streak with tears; temperatures plummet, "bankrupting" to "zero" like the nation's illusory balance of credit. Articles lie "dead" on the desk, their titles gesturing as empty niches in a cemetery; demons arise; the house is a hell, and in the street, death hovers, grimacing, behind the delights of stacked goods on display as Figaro, recalling the siege of Bilbao, envisions starving, livid mouths, blackened by bullets.

As the clock strikes midnight, the mirror speaks: "La verdad me esperaba en él y era preciso oírla de sus labios. La verdad es como el agua filtrada, que no llega a los labios sino a través del cieno" (440). This muddy filth ("cieno") infuses *Figaro* himself; his own voice accuses via his drunken manservant, a stolid Astur who nonetheless "tells" the truth of his master: *Fígaro* is "criminal" in conduct; he is a finely dressed womanizer ("calavera"), a rake who wields elegance like a weapon and who remains impervious to the damage of facile seductions. Yet *Fígaro*, famous *literato*, stands forever scorned by the only woman he loves. The scene ends with the servant in a stupor while *Fígaro* tries in vain to light a match. Day breaks and his eye caresses a yellow box in which a pistol lies—already suicide is *Fígaro's* "temptation" that soon will become a reality.

Given the complexities of these literary instances of self-referentiality, we are now positioned to perceive, in the writings and ideas of essayists and novelists later in the century, the filmy imprint of *Fígaro* and Mariano José de Larra. Well known is the affinity of the Generation of '98, particularly Azorín, for the prescience of Larra's vision of Spain, for his ideas about political reform and cultural renewal: "El 98 resucitó a Larra y, como dijo Azorín, 'la juventud actual ama a Larra cada vez más' porque el 98 y el 14, con Ortega y Azaña y la idea de la 'España como preocupación', hicieron de Larra un compañero distinguido" (Miranda de Larra 1). Less visible, perhaps, are the reasons why this complex, self-questioning and self-regarding dual *persona* inhabits so persuasively later writings, such as those by Benito Pérez Galdós, Leopoldo Alas, and Emilia Pardo Bazán. Further, as we shall see, certain contemporary works keep returning to the Nineteenth century to select *Fígaro* / Mariano as a central character.

Fígaro (1919), the magisterial biography by Carmen de Burgos ("Colombine"), provides some clues with which to account for this sustainability, this inspiration through time, of Larra's life and works. Carmen de Burgos writes:

> Fígaro es la figura gallarda, joven, pasional, impetuosa y justiciera que se adelanta a su época; es el eslabón que enlaza a los grandes clásicos españoles con los grandes ingenios de nuestra generación; es el que en ese siglo azaroso, en el que todos andan perdidos buscando la fórmula, enciende la antorcha e ilumina el camino. Larra no se queda atrás, Larra no envejece como los otros; Larra conserva su prestigio de escritor, su prestigio de hombre y hasta su prestigio de suicida. Es eternamente joven, eternamente original. (7-8)

Her evocative description picks out three major factors: Larra's power to interconnect ("eslabón") different writers and times, the romantic impact of his "figura gallarda," and mysterious attraction of his "prestigio de suicida." First among these factors is, as we have seen, the collusion of living and writing. Newspaper articles like "El castellano viejo" and "La Nochebuena de 1836," "El casarse pronto y mal" and "La sociedad," as well as *Macías* (1834), a romantic drama, and the novel *El doncel de don Enrique el Doliente* (1834) gesture as intensely autobiographical compositions. *Fígaro* / Larra experienced writing and living as a succession of intersecting, duplicating mirrors. Thus, as a supreme connector

("eslabón"), Larra not only links the literary achievements of the past to his own time; his writings forecast the future, while past and future appear to reflect each other. All told, such a dual reflection, like that of facing mirrors, represents both an inspiriting and dispiriting phenomenon that winds its way forward into later novels, such as *La Regenta* (1884-85), de Leopoldo Alas (Clarín). Early in that novel the Magistral recognizes, as *Fígaro* might have done, how any personal progress or gain through time is a delusion:

Así son las perspectivas de la esperanza, pensaba el Magistral; cuanto más nos acercamos al término de nuestra ambición, más distante parece el objeto deseado, porque no está en lo porvenir, sino en lo pasado; lo que vemos delante es un espejo que refleja el cuadro soñador que se queda atrás, en el lejano día del sueño [...]" (I, 106)

Acting as corollary to this evocation of duplicating mirrors is *Fígaro's* / Larra's capacity for *textual* self-projection. His art of narrative disguise accounts, in part, for the creation of what Menéndez y Pelayo, referring to *Fortunata y Jacinta*, was to call "la ilusion de vida" (101), communicated in his time by Galdós's new "novela moderna de costumbres" (130).[3] The achievement of this illusion, of palpable verisimilitude, of "novelar como respirar" (Gullón 120), became in the 1870s and 1880s the *sine qua non* of literary realism. Writers like Galdós, Valera, Leopoldo Alas and, to a lesser extent, Emilia Pardo Bazán already had begun registering the clever textual projections of narrators who "vacillate in their role" (Kronik 38), experimenting also with shifts of narrative focus and *style indirect libre*. Further, as a "character" in his own fictions, *Fígaro* / Larra kept infusing factual observation with the collaborative energy of partial metafictive dimensions. In this way, his "hybrids" of fact and fiction anticipated the mental and moral operations of a character like Máximo Manso (*El amigo Manso*) or Benina (*Misericordia*). The self-reflexive dualities conjured by *Fígaro* / Larra hark back, as Carmen de Burgos asserts, to "los grandes clásicos" at the same time as they look forward to those prodigious experiments in literary realism later in the century.

The enduring imprint of Larra's "figura gallarda, joven, pasional, impetuosa y justiciera" shapes another linking factor, marking in tone and intensity certain scenes and relationships that enliven later realist novels. A salient example is the tormented figure of don Manuel Moreno-Isla, a secondary, yet vivid character, whose agency, as Peter Bly has shown, becomes essential to the conflicts and conciliations of *Fortunata y Jacinta*.[4] Moreno-Isla appears in Part I as merely one of the many minor figures whose lives form the tangled branches of the Santa Cruz family tree. Moreno is closely connected to this prosperous family by birth, profession, and social standing. He is cousin and godson of don Baldomero, a distant cousin to Jacinta, nephew of Guillermina, and chairman of the board, one might say, of *Ruíz Ochoa y Compañía*, one of Madrid's most prominent financial establishments. In the long course of the story leading up to Chapter II of Part IV, Moreno appears now and again, always from intermediate distances as he mingles among the many friends and relations who congregate regularly in the Santa Cruz house.

Moreno-Isla, as his name suggests, is an isolated person—an "island" to himself. Like Mariano José de Larra, he is an expatriate, aristocratic in bearing, fashionably dressed, cosseted by servants, and schooled in social skills. After living abroad in London, hobnobbing with Prince Alfonso, later King of Spain, and speaking English fluently, in a way reminiscent of Larra's ability in French, Moreno considers his native country hopelessly backward and uncivilized. Like the acerbic *Fígaro*, he is full of "esplín" ("spleen"), retaining a peevish impatience with details of ordinary city life. Just as *Fígaro*, recording "la petulancia de este siglo" (57), complained to himself about the potholes of Madrid's streets, so Moreno complains about "boorish" street sweepers: "Eso es, bestias, encharcad bien para que haya fango y paludismo" (II, 332). A self styled "antipatriota" (332), Moreno slurs "r's" in the English way (Bly 130) and, when aging and ill, he appears on social occasions to family and friends "ya completamente trastornado" (II, 342)—in a word, "eccentric" (Bly 130). Joaquín Casalduero even defines him as caricature: "Con Moreno-Isla, se critica, es claro, al individuo de fácil caricatura que una vez salido al extranjero sólo tiene denuestos para su país" (109).

However, in a manner not unlike Larra's dual voices in "La nochebuena de 1836," the interior monologue granted Moreno-Isla in Chapter II of Part IV, together with subsequent manipulations of inside views with other ranges of narrative focus, change caricature into character—Moreno, like Fígaro, becomes "a changing man" (Bly 132). Like Larra, he is desperately in love with a married woman, an impossible, exclusive love—"el número uno, el número único" (II, 343). Further, in his suffering, passion, and struggle with approaching death, Moreno gains a measure of self-consciousness comparable to the dynamics of *Figaro's* imagined psychic split: he, too, is a "reader" of himself, taking the guise of two "players" in a game in which he comes to see himself as fatally "checkmated": "A la manera que el jugador saca las piezas del ajedrez y las va poniendo sobre el tablero de casillas blancas y negras, así fue sacando sus ideas. Teníase por pareja a sí mismo en aquel juego [...] " (II, 342).

Moreno, acutely aware of those "dualismos en el corazón humano" (II, 346), vacillates, like *Fígaro*, between illusion and despair; recognizing what, in his view, are the childish, inept, swooning responses of an adolescent, Moreno never loses a developing, mature self-consciousness, the capacity, like *Fígaro's*, of accusing himself, of seeing himself as two-in-one. Again, invisible numbers, transcoded in the text, appear to rise and fall: Moreno contemplates the light of *one* oil lamp with *two* shades that illumine a vast "penumbra manchada" (II, 345); Light, in turn, collapses into darkness. This textual gesture, a kind of dim watermark, recalls that long-ago, single match that *Fígaro* strikes to illumine *two* interlocutors collapsed within the ultimate darkness of *one* tormented thought. In Moreno's case, the more he thinks and feels and the more he lives, contravening the prescribed "plan de vida vegetativa" (336), the more he dies and the more we are made to perceive the tragedy of that aborted life, so rich in potential, so desiccated and useless in the end. High noon—"A las doce"—and midnight: for Moreno, as for *Fígaro*, life and the premonition of death are struck on the same hour.

In the chapter dedicated to Moreno, we also find, closely related to the irony polarized around the motifs of sleep and insomnia, rumor and silence, light and darkness, desire and death, a living paradox that Moreno's own "figura gallarda, joven, pasional, impetuosa y justiciera" inscribes in the text. As Moreno lives and loves, he dies; as he dies, he recovers, in remembrance, a long lost child-like self and becomes emotionally enriched; thus, as he ages, resembling San José ("Debo de parecer un San José"— II, 332), he also, like San José, is able to deliver a "child" through the imagination of his beloved Jacinta. This child, a gift from Fortunata to her rival, becomes a kind of "changling": looking at the baby's sweet face, Jacinta imagines that "bien podría tener la cara de Santa Cruz, pero cuyo corazón era seguramente el de Moreno [...] aquel corazón que la adoraba y que se moría por ella [...]. Porque bien podría Moreno haber sido su marido [...] vivir todavía, no está gastado ni enfermo, y tener la misma cara que tenía el Delfín, ese falso, mala persona [...] (II, 534).

Thus does Moreno's passion, like *Fígaro*'s, become "justiciera": it exposes the perfidy of Santa Cruz, "ese falso, mala persona," and plays no small role in placing both women—Fortunata and Jacinta—within a moral perspective that not only reconciles them but, in that reconciliation, exposes the inadequacy of social convention and religious law. Reason itself, as *Fígaro* might agree, stands exposed as a beggarly thing; even more, reason as imagined in Moreno's misery is a false friend, a "prostitute"—" '¡La razón! Buena tía indecente está', observó D. Manuel dentro de su pensamiento" (IV, 340). His thought anticipates the title "La razón de la sinrazón" (Chapter V, II, 416).

Across the years, a third factor—Larra's "prestigio de suicida—" also accounts for his identity as a connector ("eslabón"). As attested, most recently, in "Mil y una maneras de matarse", an op-ed piece by Rosa Montero in *El País Semanal* (30 November 2008), the suicide of well known writers always has attracted scholars and commentators.[5] For example, in Larra's own century, some 70 years after the event, his suicide began appearing almost obsessively in the newspaper writings of Emilia Pardo Bazán. Horrified, yet curious and compassionate, doña Emilia sensed an enigma suppurating in that terrible act, and over time she sought to capture its elusive truth—the cause of that "tremenda escena" (*La vida* 179). Some of her fictional recreations were published in *La vida contemporánea* (1895-1916), another as a contribution to her celebrated *Crónicas de "La Nación" de Buenos Aires* (1909-1921).

Doña Emilia's views of the legacy of Mariano José de Larra evolve over time as she matures through a varied range of responses. Approaching his figure with a maternal, almost patronizing attitude, initially she saw Larra and his generation as "profundamente románticos en el espíritu y en la acción, y clásicos, muy clásicos en el gusto literario" (*La vida* 179). In particular, Larra appeared to her "precoz"—"niño casí"—an impetuous adolescent who never had the chance really to live—"no se ha gustado el agenjo y la miel de la existencia" when, she asserts, "a los veintiocho años," "apoyó sobre su sien el cañón de la pistola" (*La vida* 179).[6] Writing from the easy comforts of her age at 50, doña Emilia saw Romanticism as a style appropriate only to relatively young people, from ages 24 to 35; after age 35, she declares, "la fisiología puede más que la psicología, y con el alma

despedazada se vive" (*La vida* 179).

However, Larra, like Moreno-Isla, was "a changing man," and doña Emilia changed right along with him. Although as a young woman she had loved the poetry of Zorrilla (Freire López 209), by 1901 she saw the spitefulness of Zorrilla's verses, famously pronounced over Larra's grave, and she saw in herself a new capacity to understand the extent of Larra's unrequited love. Zorrilla, she writes, "contemporáneo de Larra [...] nunca quiso convenir en que fuese el amor, el amor verdadero, quien impulsó a Larra al suicidio." Zorrilla's dismissive image of Larra as a "malvado" was, to her, a supreme insult: "no cabe decir de ningún hombre cosas peores" (*La vida* 179).

Informed by a friend—"testigo coetáneo, pariente de Zorrilla por cierto"—soon doña Emilia, writing to her reading public, felt compelled to recreate "la tremenda escena":

Fígaro había rogado a aquella dama, a la cual le unían las candentes memorias de cinco años de pasión, que antes de abandonarlo le concediese una última entrevista. ¡Doloroso ruego! Quizás no exista, en el catálogo de los sufrimientos pasionales, otro como el de pedir una hora a quien ofreció la vida entera, y que esa hora sea regateada con ávaro desdén [...]. Después de muchas cartas, *Fígaro* obtuvo ver a la señora de C . . . Pero ésta temía quizás la sugestión de la conversación a solas, y se acompañó de una amiga, que debía de ser a prueba. En el sombrío y vasto caserón en que *Fígaro* las esperaba, se desenvuelve el epílogo: ruegos, quejas, lágrimas quizás. Ella, indiferente, helada, se niega a reanudar las relaciones. Aquello se ha concluido para siempre. La amiga siéntese conmovida, y al bajar la escalera le dice algo que pudo ser esto: "Queda desesperado. Temo que haga cualquier disparate". *Ella* ríe, se encoge de hombros. Al salir de la casa, se oye un golpe sordo y profundo. La amiga se estremece. "Parece un tiro . . . –No hagas caso, responde la amada. No le conoces. Habrá pegado un portazo, por asustarme". (*La vida* 179)

The scene, evolving as twice-told story, offers the spectacle of four enlivened fictional characters—*Fígaro*, desperately pleading, the anonymous friend, pained and wondering, "la señora de C ..." cold and unmoving, even brazen in her indifference, and the romantic doña Emilia, who, faced again with the inexplicable, can only exclaim and question as *Fígaro* himself might have done: "¿Quién escruta del todo el misterio de una alma? El amor, ¿es el torrente que anega, o sólo la gota de agua por la cual rebosa la copa? Con aquella mujer o sin ella, ¿sería Larra siempre un desesperado? Imposible resolver este problema. Sólo el mismo Larra nos sacaría de dudas" (*La vida* 179). Now she sees *Fígaro* dignified by his passion, "realmente enamorado, y que la falta de aquella mujer le enemistase con la vida" (*La vida* 179). Now she acknowledges the limits of her own fiction-making enterprise:

He tratado, inútilmente, de ver un retrato de la señora de C ... , alguna de esas miniaturas de la época, con peinado de cesto, bucles y escote insolente: una figurita de abanico *restauración*, o como aquí decimos, *cristina*. No sé si existe. Acaso valdrá más que no exista, porque ¿y si era fea, bigotuda, amarillenta, chata? No nos acerquemos demasiado a la realidad. (*La vida* 179)

Like the unnamed companion of "la señora de C ..." *Fígaro* kept persisting as a writerly presence—a "companion" of doña Emilia to the end of her days. In "La gloria de Larra," published only a few months before her own death in September 1921, Emilia Pardo Bazán sketches a review of *Fígaro*, the biography of Carmen de Burgos. This review is her final attempt to grasp the cause, to perceive the meaning, of what she always saw as "un abismo y un enigma" (*Crónicas* 265). She remains captivated by Larra's "prestigio de suicida": "Yo había oído relatar la triste página a un amigo mío versado en intimidades literarias, don Antonio Bernal de O'Reilly, hijastro de Zorrilla. Según este testimonio, Larra, en la noche última, advirtió a su amada Dolores que si pasaba el umbral, él se mataría. La amiga acompañante susurró: 'Lo hará como lo dice'. Y la amada dio por respuesta: 'No hagas caso, es para asustarme'. En el portal ya, oyeron la detonación" (*Crónicas* 265).

As we have seen, some twenty years earlier doña Emilia had touched a lively nerve in herself and in the literary history of her two centuries. The reasons for Larra's suicide—"que aún se discuten hoy" she wrote in 1901 (*La vida* 179)—remain unresolved yet recreated again and again in such later works as *La detonación* (1977), a political drama by Buero Vallejo, in *Flores de plomo* (1999) by Juan Eduardo Zúniga, a novel that imagines the impact of Larra's suicide upon the mind of his contemporaries, and in the newspaper article by Rosa Montero (30 November 2008), which takes a feminist view of Dolores Armijo de Cambronero, "la señora de C ...".

Thus it is that Mariano José de Larra, like his fictional counterpart Manuel Moreno-Isla, keeps inhabiting our imagination. Each is a changing man of fiction and of fashion who never goes out of style.

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NOTES

[1] *Bicentenario Mariano José de Larra (1809-2009)*, a conference sponsored by the Departamento de Filología Española III (Seminario Pilar Palomo) and the Departamento de Historia de la Comunicación Social of the Facultad de Ciencias de la Información (Universidad Complutense), 2 a 6 de Marzo de 2009. Other sponsors are the Museo Romántico y Amigos del Museo Romántico, Ministerio de Cultura, Sociedad Estatal de Conmemoriaciones Culturales.

The program of this "Bicentenario" featured a wide range of topics that includes biography, literary and structural analysis, history and politics of the times, as well as artistic adaptations of Larra's life and works, such as "*La detonación*," de Buero Vallejo," "Larra en Francisco Umbral," and "Sombras y máscaras de Larra en la literatura contemporánea."

[2] Leon Livingstone, in his celebrated essay (1958) on Unamuno's *Niebla* (1914), coined the term "interior duplication" to denote the mechanism that equates author and character and thus represents reality as a "mist" of fictions. See "Interior Duplication and the Problem of Form in the Modern Spanish Novel" PMLA, 73 (1958), 393-406.

Citing Livingstone's study, John W. Kronik, in his view of *Misericordia*, points up the kind of artistic self-consciousness that, "[t]hrough its dual dimension as fiction and metafiction, [...] examines the creative process itself, dramatizes the confusion of the planes of fiction and reality, and ultimately exalts the power of fiction" (38). I draw upon his analysis in order to illuminate those traces of the self-conciousness in Larra's writings that we find operative in the fictional person of Manuel Moreno Isla in *Fortunata y Jacinta*. My analysis of the figure of Moreno-Isla comes, in part, from my previous essay "Strategies of Narrative Point of View: On Meaning and Morality in the Galdós Novel."

[3] The quotation comes from Galdós's famous essay of 1870, "Observaciones sobre la novela contemporánea."

[4] *Conflicts and Conciliations. The Evolution of Galdós's* Fortunata y Jacinta is the title of Geoffrey Ribbans's indispensable study of that novel.

[5] In the *Bicentenario Mariano José de Larra (1809-2009)*, the opening address, delivered by Dr. D. Jesús Miranda de Larra, was entitled "Del nacimiento al suicidio: evolución de un español desesperado."

[6] The suicide occurred on 13 February 1837, when Larra was 27, not 28 years of age. He was born 24 March 1809 in Madrid.

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