

THE PROBLEM OF FRAMING IN *LA DE BRINGAS*

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The nineteenth-century novel is commonly defined by its concern for closure. All meaning, whether in life or art, depends on the placing of a frame round select elements so as to organize them into a coherent structure distinct from a formless ground.¹ But the nineteenth-century realist novel is seen as the expression of an age beset by a particularly acute urge to impose forms of control on a rapidly changing and expanding world. In their eagerness to denounce the repressiveness of bourgeois ideology, critics have not sufficiently stressed that such a need for limits is the other side of an awareness of limitlessness. It could be argued that the ages most preoccupied with order are those most conscious of disorder. Much has been written about the arbitrary nature of the closural devices on which the nineteenth-century novel relies, but critics have generally assumed that, in exposing the heterogeneity that threatens the apparently unified novelistic world, they are reading "against the grain," unearthing unconscious contradictions which the text glosses over. In this essay I shall argue that *La de Bringas* comprises a self-conscious exploration of the precariousness of limits. Formlessness is considered a threat, but it is fundamental to the novel's structural and thematic organization.

The concept of novelistic closure derives from the pictorial analogy which has since Plato underscored the mimetic theory of literature. Norman Bryson has shown how the realist tradition in painting is based on a psychological theory of art as perception, according to which artists "copy" what they "see" (xii, 6). Just as the eye operates within a limited field of vision governed by the laws of perspective, in the same way the work of art arranges its contents within a frame so that they become intelligible from a single point of view, occupied by artist and spectator alike. Realist literature, as Roland Barthes—echoing Plato—observes, "copies" the "copy" that is painting: "Toute description littéraire est une *vue*. On dirait que l'énonciateur, avant de décrire, se poste à la fenêtre, non tellement pour bien voir, mais pour fonder ce qu'il voit par son cadre même: l'embrasure fait le spectacle. Décrire, c'est donc placer le cadre vide que l'auteur réaliste transporte toujours avec lui (plus important que son chevalet), devant une collection ou un continu d'objets inaccessible à la parole sans cette opération maniaque [. . .]; pour pouvoir en parler, il faut que l'écrivain [. . .] transforme d'abord le 'réel' en objet peint (encadré)" (61). As a branch of vision, realism presupposes perspective (point of *view*), which in turn presupposes the existence of a frame to give a sense of unity to the whole.² *La de Bringas* is a novel about the problematics and limits of vision. As I hope to show, its references to blurred vision and distorted perspectives are part of a wider examination of what happens when framing devices fail to hold.³

In his essay "Le Parergon," Jacques Derrida has analysed the contradictory nature of the frame which, as a "supplement" to the work of art, is extrinsic to it and yet, inasmuch as the painting depends on it for its comprehension, intrinsic. The frame creates an opposition between inside and outside, but it also shows the opposition to be a false one (*La Vérité* 44-94). Edward Said (xvii, 3, 4, 372) and Frank Kermode

(8-9) have likewise observed that textual beginnings and endings relate the apparently closed world contained within their frame to what is anterior and posterior. This contradiction is heightened in the realist novel, which depends on closure to achieve pictorial verisimilitude but also sets out to blur the boundary between life and literature by offering an unstructured "slice of life." The principal closural device used by the nineteenth-century novelist is causal explanation, which affords total intelligibility at the expense of revealing the arbitrariness of the narrative frame. Since every beginning is the result of an earlier cause, the narrative has to start *in medias res* and then flash back to what happened "before the beginning." In the same way, the end of the story marks the beginning of a new causal sequence: the classic realist novel ends with an epilogue that tells what happened "after the end."⁴

The formal contradictions inherent in the concept of framing are unavoidable. My proposal is that in *La de Bringas* Galdós exploits the «aporias of closure» (Hillis Miller 4) in order to probe anxieties about marriage, class, and capital. In his brilliant study, *Adultery in the Novel*, Tony Tanner has argued that adultery is a major concern of the realist novel because it blurs the line between what is inside the law (society) and what is outside it (nature): the adulterer, being inside and outside marriage, is in both places at once.⁵ As Tanner puts it: "The triumph of adultery is the destruction of difference" (367). The adulterer—like Derrida's "parergon"—represents "an impossible crisis of forms" (Tanner 18). Just as Derrida (*Of Grammatology* 30-65, 95-316) notes that Rousseau's view of culture as the "supplement" to nature supposes that the two are separate while mutually dependent, so Tanner shows how the realist novel echoes eighteenth and nineteenth-century legal and political tracts in regarding the marriage contract both as a means of distinguishing the social from the natural and as a mediation of the two categories. Marriage creates the adulterous category confusion it is designed to avoid. The narrative frame that contains and yet does not contain the story is a structural model of the "crisis of forms" presented by the slippage of marriage into adultery. Galdós's classic novel of adultery is also the one that most problematizes the concept of narrative closure.

La de Bringas does not open with a traditional flashback because it is a sequel: the assumption is that readers know what happened "before the beginning" from their reading of *Tormento*. Alda Blanco and Carlos Blanco Aguinaga have shown how the start of the novel refers back constantly to the previous novel (Pérez Galdós 24; see also Bly, *Pérez Galdós* 30-31). The beginning of *La de Bringas* is not a beginning but a continuation; rather than separate what is inside the novel from what is outside, it connects the two.

Even more disconcerting is the fact that the novel has two beginnings: the description of Francisco Bringas's hair picture that provides a false start; and the second attempt at a beginning with the narrator's visit to the Royal Palace to meet the Bringas family for the first time. The "second beginning" must logically have taken place before the "first beginning," which thus is not a beginning at all: like Derrida's "parergon," it stands outside and inside the story. Bly has noted that the opening description of the hair picture mentions columns which in chapter 17 we are told Francisco Bringas is still planning to add (*Pérez Galdós* 20-21). Derrida observes that, as a supplement, the frame that completes the work of art at the same time reveals it to be unfinished; that is, in need of completion (*La Vérité* 65, 69). The initial frame chapter of *La de Bringas* similarly presents its readers with a work of art which is and is not finished. The temporal location of the novel's start at some point after chapter

17 means that a large portion of the novel is a concealed flashback. This is more disturbing than a conventional flashback because the narration does not start with the beginning of the story and double back to fill in what happened “before the beginning”; instead, it starts with the middle—with no indication of exactly where in the middle—and doubles back to the beginning. This false start that is a middle presents the reader with the impossibility of a narrative framed by its centre. The confusion of frame and centre creates a total collapse of forms. As Derrida notes: “the notion of a structure lacking any center represents the unthinkable itself” (*Writing* 279).

More problematic still is the nature of the novel’s two beginnings. What is striking about the opening description of the hair picture is that one does not realize that the details being described comprise a work of art until one learns that the scene is contained within a frame: “Estaba encerrada en un óvalo” (55). The hair picture’s frame permits readers to make sense of the hitherto nonsensical description by allowing them to see it not as a miscellany of details but as a whole. They are led towards the existence of the frame by the immediately preceding reference to perspective: “El fondo o perspectiva consistía en el progresivo alejamiento de otros sauces de menos talla”; “[1]a gradación del oscuro al claro servía para producir ilusiones de perspectiva aérea” (55). Galdós reminds his readers that the same perspective that confers intelligibility is an illusion. As a framed object within the narrative frame, the hair picture constitutes a *mise-en-abyme*. Derrida (*La Vérité* 71) points out that the frequent inclusion of framed structures within the design further complicates the question of whether frames stand inside or outside. The opening chapter of *La de Bringas* functions as an object lesson in the importance of framing, while at the same time it plays with the concepts in order to expose their arbitrary nature.

Bringas’s picture is a flawed work of art because it does not succeed in imposing unity on the chaos of reality: “El artista había querido expresar el conjunto no por el conjunto mismo, sino por la suma de pormenores, copiando indoctamente a la Naturaleza” (55). Its contents are indiscriminately heaped together—“se encaramaban unos sobre otros” (53)—with the result that such perspective as there is becomes smothered by the mass of detail. The horizon does not set clear limits to the scene but attempts to cram in as much as possible: “Más allá se veían suaves contornos de montañas [. . .]; luego había un poco de mar, otro poco de río, el confuso perfil de una ciudad con góticas torres y almenas” (55). Bringas’s attitude to art mirrors his hoarding of capital. John Berger has related the closure of realist painting to the bourgeois urge for possession, arguing that “the model is not so much a framed window open on to the world as a safe let into a wall, a safe in which the visible has been deposited” (109). The cemetery represented in the hair picture is an attempt to contain heterogeneity in a deathly stasis, but by including so much that the structure breaks down it defeats its own purposes.

Bringas has of course produced a hotchpotch of features used to create perspective in various works of art. In the same way, the architectural motifs are an absurd jumble of discordant artistic styles: “a la manera viñolesca,” “a la usanza gótica,” “con ciertos atisbos platerescos,” “piramidal escalinata,” “zócalos grecorromanos,” ludicrously juxtaposed with “cresterías semejantes a las del estilo tirolés que prevalece en los quioscos” (53). In chapter 3 readers are given a list of Bringas’s miscellaneous artistic sources: a popular engraving of *La tumba de Napoleón en Santa Elena*, the tomb of one of Fernando VII’s wives in the Escorial, “no sé qué librote lamartinesco,” and an illustrated manual on *El lenguaje de las flores* (62-63). Not only is Bringas mixing

different artistic styles; he is unable to differentiate between copying nature and copying other works of art. His response to Carolina de Pez's concern that he may use hair that does not come from the Pez family—"¿Me cree usted capaz de adulterar?" (60)—is ironic, given both his inability to recognize his wife's adultery and his own adulterous confusion of culture and nature.

The "second beginning" of the novel also relates the problem of artistic framing to the blurring of the boundary between culture and nature represented by adultery. Bringas's failed attempt to create a work of art is now replaced by the narrator's failed attempt to describe the setting that contains the action of the novel. The narrator's first act on introducing readers to the Royal Palace is to get lost in it. His incompetence in finding his way around his fictional world detracts from his narrative credibility. Leo Bersani (8) observes that the ambiguous position of the narrator inside and yet outside his text necessarily undermines the realist assumption that there is a clear frame separating the observer from the world being observed. Barthes (34) further notes that the narrator's interstitial position, poised between inside and outside, makes him a transgressive figure. The dubious morality of Galdós's narrator, who, we are informed, is coming with the unscrupulous Pez to bribe Bringas so as to get out of a lawsuit for shady financial dealings, reinforces his subversive function.

The narrator's inability to give an authoritative narrative frame to his story is echoed in the description of the Palace itself as an architectural frame threatened by collapse. The text stresses the Palace's ambiguous location between the "civilized" formal gardens of the Plaza de Oriente and the "wild" Campo del Moro. Indeed, the narrator and Pez mix up the "ala de la Plaza de Oriente" and the "ala de Poniente" facing the Campo del Moro (69-70). They are unable to find their bearings because the Palace is an impossible amalgam of what should be outside with what is inside. It is portrayed as a city complete with neighbourhoods, streets, squares, streetlamps, and fountains (66-68), not only because it is a microcosm of Madrid society but also because it reflects a society in which boundaries are breaking down.⁶ The Palace interior is inside and outside at once, a "labyrinth" (65, 67) where it is impossible to make distinctions and place oneself correctly. The reason for this loss of difference is the constant rebuilding that has produced an adulteration of architectural styles, as in the case of Bringas's hair picture: "Es que durante un siglo no se ha hecho más que modificar a troche y moche la distribución primitiva, tapiando por aquí, abriendo por allá [. . .], convirtiendo la calle en vivienda y la vivienda en calle, agujereando las paredes y cerrando huecos" (68). The impossibility of distinguishing between essential structure and superfluous accretion reminds one of Derrida's discussion of the "parergonal" qualities of Baroque ornament (*La Vérité* 75-76). The Palace invites comparison with the *trompe-l'oeuil* perspectives of Baroque painting and architecture as the narrator goes up a proliferation of staircases, finding himself higher up when he thought he had been going down and vice versa (a confusion of levels mirrored in the promiscuous cohabitation in the Palace of different social classes). Particularly disconcerting is the conversion of solid walls into gaps and the reverse. Eco (7) has noted that the baroque play of solid and void breaks open the closure of realist art by denying the possibility of a single, unified perspective and forcing the spectator—like Pez and the narrator in *La de Bringas*—to shift position constantly. The *trompe-l'oeuil* perspectives of the novel's "first beginning," which trick the reader into confusing what is inside a work of art with what is outside, are mirrored by those of its

“second beginning,” which make it impossible for Pez and the narrator to tell the difference between indoors and outdoors.

This “crisis of forms” is aggravated by the fact that the Palace (the institutional centre of society) has been invaded, literally and figuratively, by nature in the wild. The pigeons have taken over its interior and turned the seat of the Monarchy into a “salvaje república”; the Palace chimneys are a “bosque”; and Pez feels he is “at sea”: “Paréceme que navego y que toda esta mole da tumbos como un barco” (70). Tanner notes that the breakdown of distinctions caused by adultery is illustrated in the realist novel by images of water (66-72, 86, 204-05, 314-16). In *La de Bringas*, the ocean metaphor and the “mareo” it produces represent a formlessness that threatens to engulf Pez and the narrator in a prefiguration of the adultery both will commit with Rosalía. Pez’s aquarian name, of course, makes him the perfect candidate to initiate Rosalía into adulterous habits.

The novel ends as it begins with the invasion of the Palace by extra-social forces, this time in the form of the uncultured *pueblo*. The crumbling architectural frame of the Palace constitutes the narrative frame to the story of Rosalía’s adultery. The revolutionaries are referred to as “las turbas” (299) and as “caballeros disfrazados” (301), for the Revolution upsets class distinctions. At the end of the novel Madrid is again described as a monstrous ocean in which Rosalía will set sail in adulterous pursuit of “gallardos tiburones, pomposos ballenatos y peces de verdadero fuste” (295-96); its waters are teeming with turncoat Peces in an equally adulterous “revuelta” of “legitimate” Monarchists and “illegitimate” revolutionaries. The Revolution is of course triggered by a naval insurrection. Madrid has become swamped in a sea of indifferenciation.

The most important feature of the novel’s ending is its identification of the narrator with the revolutionary intruders. Since the narrator had formerly been an associate of the monarchists Pez and Bringas, he is himself in an adulterous position, representing both legality and the Revolution. He will follow the political turncoat Pez as Rosalía’s next accomplice in adultery. The end of the novel erodes the concept of narrative closure in two ways: first, as is usual in nineteenth-century novels, by telling readers what happened “after the end” (Rosalía’s future career as adulteress); and, second, because the narrator now provides additional reasons for not trusting his word (his own involvement with Rosalía, which makes him a far from detached observer). It is interesting that the narrator’s untrustworthiness should be brought to the readers’ attention at the start and end of the novel.

Belsey has shown how narrative closure depends not only on the existence of a clear-cut beginning and end but also on a “hierarchy of discourses,” where the unreliable voices of the characters are framed by the voice of an omniscient narrator (67-84). *La de Bringas* constitutes a reversal of this process. An omniscient narrator will be responsible for most of the central body of the text (the character-narrator removes “el estorbo de mi personalidad” at the start of chapter 6 and remains largely absent till the final chapter), while it is precisely the novel’s frame—its beginning and end—that is explicitly related by the unreliable character-narrator. The inscription of omniscience within a frame of unreliability means that the novel’s frame is not a frame at all. The narrator is an adulterer not only because of his political infidelity and his affair with Rosalía but also because, by failing to provide a frame to his story, he makes it impossible for readers to distinguish between the true (legitimate) and the false (illegitimate). As Barthes points out, narrative authority is an assertion of

property rights: the text "belongs" to the speaker (48; see also Said 16, 91). That the narrative voice in *La de Bringas* oscillates between the unreliable character-narrator and an omniscient narrator means that doubt is cast over the ownership and therefore the legitimacy of the text. The dubious property deals of the character-narrator mirror the uncertainty over whether he enjoys exclusive rights to his story. The novel depicts a society in which it is not clear what money and what women belong to whom; neither is it clear who owns the narrative.

Throughout the novel, Rosalía's adultery is inserted into a wider scenario of boundaries that break down. Her dalliances with Pez take place, like the adulterous assignations that Tanner studies (113-20, 154-61, 199-206), in locations ambiguously sited halfway between city and country: the Palace terrace and the bay window in the Bringas's apartment, both of which overlook the Campo del Moro; and the Retiro Park, which, with its landscaped gardens that simulate nature and its "Casa de Fieras" (125), provides a graphic image of the confusion of the civilized and the wild. Pez and Rosalía's stroll in the Retiro makes them "reverdecerse" (125) in the triple sense of "resembling the vegetation," "being rejuvenated," and "becoming randy." The act of adultery will take place after Pez's return from the sea and after Madrid has reverted to nature in the summer months as its inhabitants take to swimming in the river as if they were living in "un pueblo de moros" (245). This ruralization process is accompanied by the breakdown of class barriers as the mass exit of most of Madrid society forces its remaining members to mingle with the extra-social *pueblo*.

The sea reappears as an image of loss of differentiation when Amparo and Agustín invite the Bringas family to stay with them at the fashionable resort of Arcachon. Try as they may, the Bringases cannot produce a harmonious "conciliación" (248) out of the contradictory tangle of French civilization nor out of Amparo and Agustín's illegitimate liaison. Rosalía's refusal of the invitation—"Pues qué, ¿no hay ya distinciones entre las personas [. . .]?" (247)—is ironic, given that her adultery will also blur class distinctions. On the one hand she beds a member of the *haute bourgeoisie*; on the other she is forced to fraternize with, and even act as maid to, the working-class Refugio. Indeed, Refugio's knowledge of Pez's private affairs suggests that she and Rosalía may be sharing his bed. Refugio's sexual promiscuity allows her to mix with all levels of society. The untidiness of her flat reflects this sexual and social mobility: neither things nor people are where they belong. The relish with which Galdós describes the way Refugio gives Rosalía her come-uppance for her snobbery suggests that he is in favour of the lower classes joining the middle classes but against the middle classes joining the upper classes. A central thesis of Galdós's work, apparently supported in *La de Bringas*, is the need for class extremes to merge with the centre.⁷ But this formula creates the contradiction of a structure that is all middle and therefore not a structure at all. The social ideal which Galdós proposes at the same time represents the dissolution of society. The collapse of class distinctions depicted in *La de Bringas* is partly welcome but also produces a "crisis of forms."

Money is of course the force that leads to Rosalía's adultery and to the erosion of class boundaries. Alda and Carlos Blanco have pointed out that the novel charts the transition from a precapitalist mentality (represented by Francisco Bringas, whose dream is to immobilize capital in his money box) to a new industrial expansion based on the free flow of capital (represented by the credit system in which Rosalía becomes enmeshed) (Pérez Galdós 19-44; see also Varey). Tanner notes that marriage is the

“means whereby society attempts to bring into harmonious alignment patterns of passion and patterns of property” (15) and that the fictional depiction of “particular modes of sexual exchange” is likely to reflect “particular modes of economic exploitation” or “transactional rules between classes” (12). He speculates that the concern with adultery in the realist novel stems from the fact that “in nineteenth-century industrial society, when both commerce and division of labor increased exponentially, the difference between women and goods and services becomes more problematical because the systems of exchange begin to blur into each other as, to use Marx’s terms [. . .], use values everywhere give way to exchange values” (80). Alda and Carlos Blanco observe that, in committing adultery for money, Rosalía turns herself into a commodity (Pérez Galdós 21). The development in the nineteenth century of a market economy means that goods cease to have a rightful owner and go into circulation. To use Derrida’s pun, “property” does not have a “proper” place (*Of Grammatology* 244). Man is no longer what he has but what he can exchange. The logical consequence is for marriage to give way to “wife swapping.”

In *La de Bringas* money is constantly on the move, with the result that it is no longer possible to say what its proper place is. Contraband and legitimate capital merge: the state is the principal “ladrón” (231); the smuggling of imported goods through the customs is applauded as free enterprise (the abolition of customs tariffs was a prime demand of the free trade lobby). The constant “aplazamiento” of credit repayments leads to an interminable process of “displacement” as new loans are taken out to cover existing debts: the solution of the problem that the circulation of capital creates is to move it round further. Everyone is lending money at the same time as borrowing it. The loss of difference between debtor and creditor leads to a breakdown of class distinctions, symbolically represented by the promiscuous mixture of furnishings in Torquemada’s home which have passed into his hands because their various original owners defaulted on their debts.

The free flow of capital is mirrored in the description of fashion, the only expanding industry referred to in the novel. Clothes are in a constant state of metamorphosis as old garments are transformed into new, abolishing the difference between primary materials and secondary manufacture.⁸ Like the banknotes, the clothes refuse to keep still, passing from hand to hand so that it is impossible to say what belongs to whom. Just as Francisco Bringas tries to stop the traffic of capital by locking it in his money box, so does he plan to contain Rosalía’s clothes by building her a wardrobe out of marble, like a tomb (one is reminded of his attempt to contain heterogeneity in the cemetery of his hair picture). The novel depicts the circulation of capital—and of dress materials—as a delirious blurring of distinctions, but it also shows that Bringas’s attempts to halt the process are futile. Galdós does not appear to be opposed to a market economy in principle. What seems to worry him is that, if everything can be exchanged for everything else, it is no longer possible to differentiate what is essential from what is superfluous. Derrida notes that, in sculpture, clothing functions as a “parergon” because it is part of the statue but also an accessory (*La Vérité* 66). In *La de Bringas* clothing is a “lujo” but also a necessity: when Rosalía and Refugio take their clothes off, social chaos ensues. Given the constant movement and formlessness of clothes in the novel, it is not surprising to find the image of the sea applied to fashion: “empezó a funcionar Emilia en medio de un mar de trapos y cintas, cuyas encrespadas olas llegaban hasta la puerta” (214). Rosalía’s passion for clothes is not simply the cause of her adultery; her ever more extravagant combinations of different

materials (sophisticated French manufactured fabrics alongside feathers from the jungle) duplicates the adulteration process.

Small wonder that the Bringas's children should be afflicted with delirium and nausea (Isabelita), revolutionary sympathies (Paquito), and an obsession with removal vans (Alfonsito).⁹ Isabelita's case is particularly interesting. In waking life she shares her father's love of classifying things by putting them in boxes, but the absurd jumble that she collects erases the difference between the useful and the useless. Her collector's mania undermines its own premises: her habit of constantly rearranging her treasures—"después de puesto todo, se volvía a sacar para meterlo de nuevo, colocado de otra manera" (255)—ends up destroying the notion that things have a proper place. Isabelita's nightmares can be seen as the return of the repressed as she vomits up an intolerable confusion of objects (89-90, 222-23).

In the same way, Francisco Bringas's concern for order—not for nothing is he referred to as a "legislador" (180, 214)—is subverted by his sight disorder. If sight is the capacity for distinguishing one thing from another, Bringas's eye strain leads him to temporary blindness, followed by blurred vision: "la visión calenturienta de millares de puntos luminosos o de tenues rayos metálicos, movibles, fugaces" (156). Bringas's "alteración de la vista" is another image of the adulteration process, whereby everything is on the move and refuses to let itself be pinned down so that it can be properly identified. By the end of the novel Bringas's visual disorder is threatening to become permanent: the confusion of forms has become so extreme that seeing is no longer a useful cognitive tool. The oculist Golfín foregrounds the question of the value of vision as the capacity for making distinctions. Even the surgeon who can restore sight to the blind is misled by the affluent appearance of Rosalía and her children.¹⁰ The ironic description of Rosalía setting off to commit adultery with Pez reminds readers that seeing is not believing: "Iba a misa, como lo demostraba el devocionario con tapas de nácar que llevaba en la mano" (267). Gaston Bachelard, objecting to the way in which Western philosophy simplifies the ambiguities of reality by thinking in terms of clear-cut spatial—that is, visual—distinctions, asks: "if a metaphysician could not draw, what would he think" (212). Derrida's attempt to get beyond binary oppositions has been described as a demand for "blurred vision" (Krupnick 41). Bringas's sight disorder provides an image (perceived by Galdós as a nightmare) of what thought might be if we faced the formlessness of reality. His "visión calenturienta" does not enlighten him about Rosalía's adultery, but it does confront him with the loss of difference that it represents.

In the adulterous world of *La de Bringas*, nothing is where it should be. Everybody is in everybody else's house. Being at home is regarded as a form of "destierro" (112, 235). Conversely, wife swapping comes to be seen as the restoration of order: "¡Oh Pez! [. . .] Ya sé yo qué mujer le correspondería si las cosas del mundo estuvieran al derecho y cada persona en su sitio" (129). Rosalía's adulterous attraction to Pez will lead her to indulge in the dangerous mental game of moving everything around: "ejercitando el derecho de revisión y rectificación de las cosas sociales, concediendo en el reino de la mente a todos los que se creen fuera de su lugar o mal apareados" (128). Her first step on the path to adultery is her substitution of counterfeit currency for the legitimate banknotes in Bringas's money box: in order to make the counterfeit notes seem genuine, she has to give them the texture of notes that have been in circulation. From now on she is faced with the impossible task of putting things back in their proper places: "Trataba de volver todas las cosas al estado en que se hallasen

antes" (180). It is an impossible task because there are no proper places left. As Francisco Bringas remarks when his wife suggests that he can go back to his prerevolutionary job as superintendent of "Santos Lugares": "¿tú crees, tonta, que van a quedar Lugares Santos? Todos serán lugares pecadores" (298). If the incongruent perspectives in the novel are an image of moral distortion, as Bly observes ("The Use of Distance" 88-90), it is because they represent the breakdown of the frame that separates what is inside society (the legitimate) from what is outside it (the illegitimate). Without a frame to hold things in place, the establishment of perspective becomes impossible.

The novel ends with "el día de la mudanza" as all the characters move house and change places: "El día que salieron, la ciudad alta parecía una plaza amenazada de bombardeo. No había en ella más que mudanza, atropellado bombardeo de personas y un trasiego colosal de muebles y trastos diversos. Por las oscuras calles no se podía transitar" (305). Rosalía's adultery is only part of a more general category confusion that makes it impossible to say what belongs where. The circulation has reached the point where, as in Isabelita's nightmares, movement threatens to turn to congestion: the final image of a city on the move is also the image of a city locked in a giant traffic jam. The seriousness of the situation is indicated by the comparison to a citadel "amenazada de bombardeo": the city's walls are under threat. The mass evacuation of the Palace shows that, when the boundary between inside and outside fails, the centre ceases to exist. Madrid is a "carnaval de todos los días," as Refugio's omniscient gentleman friend comments, because the periphery has invaded the centre in a reversal that dissolves the opposition.¹¹ The person in charge of the final "mudanza general" is of course the narrator, entrusted by the Revolutionary Junta with evicting tenants from the Royal Palace. The narrator who fails to give a frame to the novel is also responsible for the adulterous traffic of people and objects that threatens the city's frame with collapse.

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NOTES

¹ See Goffman for a discussion of the importance of framing in cognitive psychology.

² For the implications of the pictorial analogy underlying realism, see Paul Julian Smith (78-126). Eco (5) discusses the relation between perspective and closure.

³ Bly examines distorted perspectives in *La de Bringas* in "The Use of Distance" and in *Pérez Galdós* (18-29). His later *Vision and the Visual Arts* adds little to his earlier discussion of the novel.

⁴ For a discussion of ambiguous closure in the nineteenth-century novel, see Torgovnick, Mortimer, D. A. Miller, Hillis Miller, and of course Barthes. The use of codas as "ends that come after the end" is discussed by Barbara Smith (188-89).

⁵ For a sociological approach to the treatment of adultery in the nineteenth-century novel (excluding *La de Bringas*), see Armstrong and Ciplijauskaitė. Acosta de Hess's recent book, which does discuss *La de Bringas*, is disappointing.

⁶ Bly remarks that the description of the Palace interior "suggests an over-weight, ill-proportioned Royal Palace which might topple over" (*Galdós's Novel* 62).

⁷ In his 1870 article, "Observaciones sobre la novela española contemporánea," Galdós had noted that "la clase media [. . .] es hoy la base del orden social"; the list of characteristics he attributes to the middle classes includes "los estragos del vicio esencialmente desorganizador de la familia, el adulterio." The narrator of *Fortunata y Jacinta* praises the "feliz revoltijo de las clases sociales" represented by the bourgeois Santa Cruz family's acquaintances (65). In later novels such as the *Torquemada* series and *La*

loca de la casa, Galdós will argue for the fusion of the aristocracy and the *pueblo* to form a new centre to replace the existing middle classes.

⁸ Bly (*Pérez Galdós* 52-53) observes that clothes are described in the process of making and that the confusion of fabrics in Rosalía's room and Refugio's flat mirrors the architectural confusion of the Palace and the artistic confusion of Bringas's hair picture.

⁹ Round notes that the contrasting characters of Alfonsito and Isabelita reflect those of their mother and father, respectively.

¹⁰ Bly (*Pérez Galdós* 25-29) comments on the characters' visual incompetence but does not relate it to the category confusion represented by adultery. Indeed, he suggests that "the theme of adultery [. . .] is not in itself important" (59).

¹¹ For a discussion of carnival as a reversal of the centre/periphery antithesis, see Paul Julian Smith (113).

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