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CODIFYING THE INEFFABLE: NATURE, HYPOCRISY, AND THE RHETORIC OF THE *FÁBULAS FUTROSÓFICAS*

RESUMEN

Este artículo examina las *Fábulas futrosóficas o la filosofía de Venus en fábulas* (1821), publicadas anónimamente, pero a menudo atribuidas a Leandro Fernández de Moratín. La crítica literaria se ha enfocado principalmente en la autoría de esta obra, ignorando la sátira y la crítica social que contienen estas fábulas. Mantengo que las *Fábulas* de Moratín representan un texto erudito, que se enfoca en muchos de los mismos problemas que otras obras ilustradas, con frecuencia incorporando elementos neoclásicos. Este ensayo examina dos vertientes retóricas: el uso de la «falacia naturalista», y su crítica de los abusos de poder.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Fábulas futrosóficas*—Moratín—fábulas—España—ilustración—falacia naturalista—retórica

ABSTRACT

This article examines the *Fábulas futrosóficas o la filosofía de Venus en fábulas* (1821), published anonymously but often attributed to Leandro Fernández de Moratín. Research on this work has largely focused on its authorship, neglecting the rich satire and social commentary contained in these fables. I argue that Moratín's *Fábulas* are an erudite text that engages with many of the same issues as other Enlightenment works, often in a neoclassical fashion. This

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essay examines two rhetorical axes: Moratín's use of the appeal-to-nature argument, and his condemnation of abuses by those in positions of power.

KEYWORDS: *Fábulas futosóficas*—Moratín—fables—Spain—Enlightenment—appeal-to-nature—rhetoric

The surviving corpus of erotic literature produced during the long eighteenth century in Spain is a modest one, yet it has garnered a fair bit of attention from critics. Menéndez Pelayo famously excoriated this vein of literature as “obscena y soez, que manchó y afrentó aquel siglo,” which produced “obras las más ferozmente inmundas que ha abortado el demonio de la lujuria” (19). In spite of such an incendiary condemnation, there really is no Spanish analogue to the Marquis de Sade, nor will scholars find equivalents to John Cleland's notorious novel, *Fanny Hill* (1748), or even Choderlos de Laclos' scandalous *Les liaisons dangereuses* (1782). The reasons for this marked difference have been explored in numerous studies, from which there emerge a number of clear, systemic differences between Spain and its neighbors to the North. As Philip Deacon's research makes clear, the Catholic Church's cultural and political power in Spain resulted in an environment inhospitable to unorthodox texts, least of all those concerning human sexuality and pleasure. “La Iglesia Católica”, he writes, “persiguió de manera sistemática lo que calificaba como ‘obsceno’, tanto en el arte como en la literatura” (“El espacio” 220). As a result, the Consejo de Castilla and its army of censors acted as cultural and moral gatekeepers for centuries, ensuring that works deemed profane, obscene, irreverent, dangerous or otherwise iconoclastic never made it to the printed page. Guereña believes that this effective censorship, “y sobre todo la permanencia de la temida inquisición hasta principios del siglo XIX, explican en gran parte el ‘retraso’ hispánico en materia de publicaciones eróticas” (32).

This is not to say that there was no appetite for erotic literature on the part the Spanish public. In fact, the motley collection of works that survive, along with the information we can glean from the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* and the Inquisition's records reveal that there was great interest in such works, and erotic literature was routinely, if clandestinely, imported from France.² It is also worth noting that the risk that Spanish citizens faced by owning a book or illustrations deemed obscene was not trivial, and could result in one's having to appear before the Inquisition. For booksellers and editors, the stakes were even higher, as Zavala explains: “son frecuentes las visitas a librerías para el control de la importación de libros, y las sentencias y las denuncias contra editores e impresores” (25). With such inherent risk associated with writing, publishing or even owning a piece of erotic literature, it is easy to understand both the relative paucity of surviving texts and the need for anonymity.

² See Defourneaux, Marcelin. *Inquisición y censura de libros en la España del siglo XVIII*. Taurus, 1973.

Erotic Spanish novels are non-existent due to the threat of censorship (though, again, foreign erotic novels circulated in clandestine fashion), and erotic theater could similarly not be published, much less represented on stage. This legal reality drove Spanish erotic literature underground, and confined it principally to the realm of poetry. As Deacon argues, poetry existed more naturally in manuscript format, which made it easy to share and copy works, as well as memorize them (“El espacio” 224). The works that survive today all circulated in manuscript form, were most certainly read aloud at various *tertulias* and intimate gatherings, were sung or memorized; only much later were they published.

The philosophical and sociocultural conditions that made erotic literature both possible and relevant in the eighteenth century have been studied exhaustively by scholars,³ and so I shall limit myself to a brief summary. The epistemological concept of sensualism, as put forth by John Locke and David Hume, was of enormous importance in the development of a new way of looking at and understanding the world. Moreover, their works were an “afirmación de la experiencia del individuo y de su capacidad para forjar sus propias creencias y rechazar la preexistencia de normas de conducta fijas como las proclamadas por la religión” (Deacon, “Imágenes” 420). The influence of English empiricists and sensualists was clearly felt in Spain; Meléndez Valdés wrote in a letter to Jovellanos that he had memorized Locke’s *Essay on Human Understanding*.⁴ The works of Condillac, who further refined in a systematic fashion the ideas elaborated by Locke, underscored the central tenet that human knowledge is fundamentally based on observations made by the senses. This emphasis on the realm of the senses translated into the consecration of individual interpretation and a renewal of interest in the human body and sexuality. These developments were generally viewed as a threat by both Church and Crown, both of whom “desconfiaban de cuanto aludiera a la sensualidad” (Zavala 521). Yet there was no stopping these new philosophical currents; as a natural consequence of this line of inquiry, the concept of pleasure came to the fore, though certainly not without controversy. Its laboratory is not that of doctors or scientists, but of authors and poets. As Gies reminds us, the fusion of scientific developments and a renewed interest in individual senses and experiences leads to “la sutil transformación del lenguaje poético dieciochesco en algo a la vez más científico y más íntimo” (“Sensibilidad” 26). The erotic compositions of eighteenth-century Spanish authors function as an articulation of these emerging epistemologies, striving to understand the world through the new lenses of experimentalism, empiricism and sensualism, as well as to reframe the experience of the individual within this context.

³ See David Gies, *Sensibilidad y sensualismo en la época dieciochesca* and “Sobre el erotismo rococó en la poesía del siglo XVII”. *Eros y amistad*. Calambur, 2016.

⁴ See Volume 63 of the *Biblioteca de autores españoles*. Rivadeneyra, 1875.

Scholarship on erotic literature has sometimes gotten mired in a taxonomic tangent, attempting to define the difference between erotic and pornographic works. Di Pinto rightly identified this desire to create clear categories as akin to “cadere nella trappola del falso problema” (181), a false problem due in large part to the subjective, moral grounds of each reader or scholar, and to the crucial importance of sociocultural and historical context. Those works which so repulsed Menéndez Pelayo have since been viewed as a complex literature that explores a “diversidad de territorios” (Galván González 1). Gies has it right when he notes that “[e]rotismo, pornografía, obscenidad: sería difícil, si no imposible, definir científicamente tales términos,” and that all one can do is focus on those works that deal with sexual desire and sensuality in more direct fashion than is customary in published poetry (“El XVIII porno” 216). Similarly, it might perhaps be most helpful to simply view erotic poetry of this era within the legal reality of the time: those texts that were approved by censors, and those that were not, and were thus “obscene”. This distinction is at the heart of what Di Pinto identifies as the essential component of erotic literature, the bourgeois transgression of norms, and what Deacon sees as a “reto al statu quo” (“Imágenes” 419).

In the first group, we may find the majority of compositions by the canonical poets of the century: Meléndez Valdés, Cadalso, Iriarte, Samaniego, both Moratines, along with many others. This does not mean that these poets did not engage with erotic concepts in their published writings, it simply meant that they developed and used a new coded language to express themselves. The rhetoric of sensual, Rococo poetry and art resulted in “la elaboración de un lenguaje que capta —simboliza, si se quiere— la estética de la época y la ideología de una clase. Es un lenguaje pictórico y poético que contiene un subtexto intensamente erótico” (Gies “Más” 27). These are compositions that draw heavily from classical tradition, as Meléndez Valdés himself acknowledged: “En esta parte han sido mis guías el mismo Horacio, Ovidio, Tibulo, Propercio, y el delicado Anacreonte” (9).

The subtle, refined sensualism of works like Meléndez Valdés’s famous “La paloma de Filis” was able to be published due mainly to those poems’ reliance on allegory, metaphor and literary tradition, such as Anacreontic odes. The works in the second category —which some have termed pornographic or obscene— can be characterized more effectively as those that simply did not, or could not, pass censorship and be published. The most famous of these erotic poetic compositions are Nicolás Fernández de Moratín’s *El arte de las putas*, composed in the 1770s but unpublished until 1898,⁵ and Félix María de Samaniego’s *El jardín de Venus*, a compendium of erotic tales written around 1790, but unpublished until 1921. There also exists a significant corpus of loose, assorted erotic poetry by numerous authors; some of these

⁵ *El arte de las putas* was added to the *Index librorum prohibitorum* in 1790.

poems have been anthologized in Reyes Cano's *Poesía erótica de la ilustración española* (1989). It is important to remember that what survives today is in all likelihood the proverbial tip of the iceberg; Aguilar Piñal reminds us that erotic poetry was prevalent, and could probably be found in "casi todos los autores dieciochescos" (120).

The third major standalone work is the focus of this essay: the *Fábulas futrosóficas o la filosofía de Venus en fábulas*. Both its authorship and its publication date have been the subject of some debate, though the nature of its content has not: it was placed on the index of forbidden books by the Cardinal Archbishop of Toledo in 1827 (Carbonero y Sol 279). Though the cover of the first edition states that it was published in London in 1821, and the second in Bordeaux in 1824, scholars believe that all editions originated in Bordeaux, where printers were accustomed to printing Spanish books to circumvent Peninsular censorship oversight (Guereña 38). Although the *Fábulas futrosóficas* were published anonymously, scholars have long attributed them to Leandro Fernández de Moratín. This claim is supported mainly by the fact that the younger Moratín was living in Bordeaux at the time of publication, and would live there until his death in 1827. Moreover, it is probable that the word *futrosóficas* is a Spanish portmanteau composed of the French *foutre* (meaning "to fuck" as a verb, "sperm" as a noun) and the Spanish *filosóficas*, making it another connection to the Francophile Moratín. Not all critics believe that he is the author; Philip Deacon calls this claim into question,⁶ but most others, like Víctor Infantes, David Gies and Mario Di Pinto view this attribution as quite plausible.⁷ Palacios Fernández sees little reason to doubt the attribution: "Gran aficionado al sexo fue el dramaturgo Leandro Fernández de Moratín, soltero admirado por las jóvenes [...] De su taller poético salieron abundantes poemas eróticos y pornográficos, en parte recogidos en el libro *Fábulas futrosóficas*" (56). The question of whether Moratín actually penned the *Fábulas* is not the focus of this essay, nor does it ultimately hold much significance. As any reader will quickly discover, these fables were clearly written by an author of great erudition, one who commanded an impressive knowledge of classical and neoclassical authors and tropes, and for this and the other aforementioned reasons, Moratín fits the bill better than most. Thus, for the purpose of this study, I will be referring to him as the author of the *Fábulas*.

While there has been a resurgence of studies on Spanish erotic literature in the last thirty years, the *Fábulas futrosóficas* have received an extremely limited amount of attention from scholars, and are usually noted only in passing, or as a literary curio. Whereas the *Jardín de Venus* has been the subject of multiple critical editions,⁸ the *Fábulas* have seen only one

⁶ See "Fábulas futrosóficas." *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Erotic Literature*. Vol. 1, Routledge, 2006, pp. 448-450.

⁷ See Gies ("El XVIII porno"), Infantes ("El saber clandestino") and Di Pinto ("L'obsceno borghese").

⁸ The most recent critical edition is by Emilio Palacios Fernández (2004).

modern printing, published in 1984 by El Crotalón. Aside from an essay by Victor Infantes on the possible authorship of this work, a brief encyclopedia entry by Philip Deacon,⁹ and a page-and-a-half overview in José Ignacio Díez and Adrienne L. Martin's *Venus venerada: Tradiciones eróticas de la ilustración española* (2009), there is no serious study focused solely of the content of Moratín's erotic work. This study aims to fill that void. The fables in *Fábulas futrosóficas* are certainly risqué, though no more outrageous than those in *El jardín de Venus*, yet I maintain that they are an important text that is fully inscribed in the tradition of neo-classical literature. It is the quintessential embodiment of Horace's ideal of *utile dulci*, both in terms of its format (fables) as well as its content (social and literary satire). In other words, it is a neoclassical text in both form and function.

The difference, of course, is the subject matter. Di Pinto, in his oft-cited study of erotic literature, eloquently summarizes the essence of erotic discourse: "si tratta cioè di un cosciente esercizio di codificazione dell'ineffabile" (178). This is the task undertaken by Moratín in the *Fábulas futrosóficas*, to codify the ineffable, to find ways to express that which cannot be stated. He wrote in an erotic register both for pleasure (these are, after all, humorous and ludic compositions) but also out of necessity, since many of the ideas represent transgressions of social mores and of literary convention. While in our current age the notion of high versus low art has been relentlessly assailed and denigrated by postmodernism and other movements, it is important to remember that this was not the case in Moratín's era. Not only did he and his peers live in a culture in which there was a clear demarcation between "high" and "low" discourse,¹⁰ but he also actively chose to utilize the lower register when he penned the *Fábulas futrosóficas*. This conscious decision is at the heart of the codification of the ineffable, since it essentially imposed a set of restrictions on his work. It limited the reach of his *Fábulas*, since Moratín undoubtedly knew that they could not ever be published (at least not in Spain), and made their readership uncertain.

Yet at the same time, choosing to write in this erotic register afforded him a significant number of freedoms. The (relative) anonymity might embolden him, and his fables could explore topics deemed too risky, impolite, obscene or downright blasphemous, and could do so using language that would likewise have been censored. Because of this, his *Fábulas* had a chance to reach a reading public that might not otherwise have sought a more sober, serious volume. The informal manuscript format allowed poetry to be easily memorized, copied and even sung, as is noted above. Moreover, it is entirely possible that a number of these fables saw the light of day as counterfeit *pliegos sueltos*, or that the entire Bordeaux edition was pi-

⁹ See Works Cited.

¹⁰ Let us remember the long-standing debate on the topic of "buen gusto," which seems quaint and almost impossible in our modern, post-truth world.

rated by booksellers. Popular literature was a booming segment of the literary marketplace, often taking the form of loose-leaf *literatura de cordel*, as well as counterfeit editions or even clandestine works (those that had not received a printing license from the state).¹¹ Finally, let us not forget that Moratín lived and participated in a salon and tertulia culture, which ensured that this work (like other salacious compositions by his contemporaries) could be read and would circulate among many of the literary elites of his time.

For a clandestine work to survive to the modern day, there were two necessary conditions. First, there needed to be enough editions, printings, or copies of a work to ensure that it had a chance to survive the inevitable passage of time, not to mention war, fire and other events. Second, the work needed to fall into the right hands, into the hands of readers who would see the relevance and importance of the book, and were willing to risk facing the Inquisition for simply owning the volume. As Infantes sees it, “en este ambiente de difusión clandestina de manuscritos e impresiones piratas se mueven los desvelos literarios y biográficos de Leandro Fernández de Moratín” (151).

If Moratín is indeed codifying the ineffable in his *Fábulas futrosóficas*, a critical question arises: what precisely is he codifying? The aim of this essay, therefore, is to explore the subject and nature of this codification process. The *Fábulas futrosóficas* offer a wide-range of topics, locales and characters, so much so that Deacon believes they “form a curious grouping,” generally lacking the cohesion or focus of Samaniego’s *Jardín de Venus* (“Fábulas” 449-450). The forty fables that make up the *Fábulas* are framed by a prologue, a sonnet, a delirious ode titled “Oda a Priapo”,¹² and an unusual index that briefly sums up the moral of each fable. As we shall see, the index functions as part of a framing device announced in the prologue, and also as paratextual source of satire. Far from being a haphazard arrangement of uneven compositions, I argue that Moratín’s text follows a clever structure centered on the relationship between author and reader, and also between word and meaning. Through a framing device that we shall examine shortly, the author is able to link form and function. The compositions themselves repeatedly focus on two core concepts: the appeal-to-nature argument, and a denouncement of hypocrisy. Some fables might fall squarely in one camp, while others will incorporate elements of different concepts. In addition to examining these core themes, I hope to show how Moratín articulates these ideas as a cohesive whole.

The path to reading and understanding the *Fábulas futrosóficas* is cleverly laid out in the prologue, which immediately makes clear not only the purpose of the book, but the vast

¹¹ For more see J.F. Botrel, *Libros, prensa y lectura*. Fundación Germán Sánchez Ruipérez, 1993.

¹² The sonnet and “Oda a Priapo” were added in the 1824 edition.

erudition of its unnamed author. Its essential function is twofold: it engages in a dialogue with the reader, and also introduces the framing device around which the text is constructed. Although quite short (barely two pages in length), the prologue is a rhetorical powerhouse, packing in a wide range of devices. First is the “found manuscript” topos, which Moratín invokes in a fashion reminiscent of *Don Quijote*, establishing rhetorical distance and separation between author, editor, text and reader. It is worth noting that while the individual writing the prologue is purportedly not the actual author of the fables, the prologue is still titled “Prólogo del autor”, creating authorial dissonance from the outset. “Habiendo llegado a mis manos estas fábulas”, begins the prologue, and the editor then proceeds to tell the reader how the true author of these fables was “[f]orzado el poeta por uno de aquellos compromisos irresistibles, a escribir en este género” (1). Beyond piquing our interest as readers as to exactly *why* the poet had to write in this genre, Moratín implicitly underscores the existence and function of the various literary registers available to eighteenth-century authors. The editor then immediately invokes Horace’s *utile dulci* to stress the didactic nature and merit of the work; never intending for the *Fábulas* to be simply “entretenimiento frívolo”, he took care to ensure that “la moral o filosofía que se dedujese de la fábula, no fuese contraria ni a la Religión, ni al Estado, como se puede ver en el índice” (1).¹³ With this simple statement, Moratín reveals the framing device around the fables, announcing the index that contains a short moral for each tale and closes the volume. Perhaps more importantly, if we parse this statement a bit longer, we can see how it introduces a dual register within the work itself, perhaps even two possible readings and intended readers. Moratín never says that the fables themselves are in keeping with the respect owed to Church and Crown, only that the morals in the index clearly do not go against religion or the monarchy. This subtle yet important distinction becomes apparent when readers discover that the morals summarized in the index are sometimes at odds with the poems themselves, offering a slightly different reading or interpretation. It would be too facile an explanation to argue, as Deacon does, that this suggests that the morals in the index “might have been added by another hand, possibly the anonymous editor’s” (“Fábulas” 449). The “found manuscript” trope excels at inserting textual and authorial uncertainty, which is precisely its function. Much like *Don Quijote* (1605) and Cadalso’s *Cartas marruecas* (1772), or even Camilo José Cela’s *La familia de Pascual Duarte* (1946), there is no “other author,” only textual sleight of hand meant to confuse, entertain, or call into question the nature of reality or truth.

The explanation lies in the dual register mentioned earlier: the morals in the index feel different *precisely* because their role is to offer a satirical example of the sanitized, state-sanc-

¹³ The index in the 1821 edition immediately followed the prologue, but by the 1824 edition, it had been moved to the end, where it remains in the 1984 edition. I will be referring to this latter edition on the grounds that it is a more definitive, complete edition, and more likely to reflect Moratín’s original intent.

tioned rhetoric demanded by censors. As a result, Moratín offers readers of the index a concise, vaguely generic moral for each fable, and in so doing draws attention to the difference between the irreverent, comic text and this stripped-down, sanitized version. As we have noted, the moral sometimes does not appear to match the fable itself, but this is due to the fact that Moratín uses these to offer snarky, often erudite meta-commentary. For example, Fable XXXVI, “Los casados,” is an anticlerical satire of the sexual life of the clergy based on the popular refrain, “tanta gente de bonete, ¿dónde mete? Porque dejar de meter no puede ser”. The refrain calls attention to the dissonance between the clergy’s vow of chastity and the very natural sexual impulses that all humans feel. It is also a clear critical commentary on sexual activity and even abuses by priests that have been well-documented, and Moratín’s fable contrasts this unnatural order of things by structuring it as a carefree dialogue between two married men. The summary in the index is, at first glance, only loosely related to the fable: “Cuanto más célebre es una sociedad, tanto más espuestos están los matrimonios: asi como hay más robos cuanto mayor es el número de los ladrones, dice Montesquieu” (60; vol. II).¹⁴ A learned reader, however, will see that this summary is clearly paraphrasing chapter XXIII of Montesquieu’s *Esprit des lois*, which states: “C’est une règle tirée de la nature que, plus on diminue le nombre des mariages qui pourraient se faire, plus on corrompt ceux qui sont faits; moins il y a de gens mariés, moins il y a de fidélité dans les mariages; comme lorsqu’il y a plus de voleurs, il y a plus de vols”. (“It is a rule drawn from nature, that the more the number of marriages is diminished, the more corrupt are those who have entered into that state; the fewer married men, the less fidelity is there in marriage; as when there are more thieves, more thefts are committed”. 282). As we can see, this moral in fact builds upon the jocular, vulgar message of the fable itself, but does so in a vastly more erudite fashion, and is clearly aimed at another type of reader. Instead of bluntly restating the fact that abstention from sex is unnatural, Moratín decides to focus on the social component of this dilemma, emphasizing the harm that comes to a society when the natural order of things is not obeyed.

The final rhetorical component that Moratín weaves into his prologue is a sophisticated reflection on the relationship between signifier and signified, possibly inspired by the works of Socrates and William of Ockham, but also clearly anticipating Ferdinand de Saussure’s semiotics. The result is somewhat jarring, for Moratín chooses to dive into a complex linguistic and philosophical concept almost as an exasperated coda to his foreword. Given that the author fully knows that some readers will balk at this volume, the prologue is a classic example of rhetorical prevention, designed to anticipate and defuse readerly concerns.

¹⁴ The 1984 edition of the *Fábulas futosóficas* that I am citing splits the fables into two parts, without continuous pagination. In the interest of clarity, citations will indicate which *tomo* they are taken from, using either I or II before the page number.

Claiming that he is unable to understand why some readers get offended by *reading* a word that they *hear* daily, he writes: “Mas al fin, lector, si eres de los que dan más valor a los signos que al signado; si te asusta una palabra escrita, [...] puedes leer el índice sin un grande escrúpulo de conciencia” (2; vol. I). While the prologue is quite short and ends in such an abrupt fashion, the nature of words-qua-signs is in fact the topic of the very first fable, “El poeta, Venus, el carajo y el chocho”, which was clearly intended to be read immediately after the prologue. With such a blunt title, the fable is obviously meant to provoke, but it is also a serious rumination on the nature of words, especially those deemed vulgar. Structured as a dialogue, the fable depicts the poet lamenting how Venus is being slighted by society’s prudish hypocrisy. It is at this point that Moratín introduces another rhetorical device, the use of footnotes. Reminiscent of the works of Jorge Luis Borges, these footnotes serve a variety of functions: to simply inform or clarify (as in fable XXX), to offer meta-commentary on the quality of the writing (Fable XXXII) or simply to serve up sarcastic comments. In this instance, the footnote to fable I lets the reader know that while the dictionary contains such words as “Testículo, Puta, Priapismo, Empreñas, etc, parece que el Carajo y el Chocho tienen cierto derecho a quejarse de los señores académicos” (3; vol. I). The footnote serves not only as a source of humor, but also to call into question the supposed divide between high and low, between acceptable and vulgar.

Driving this point home is the poet’s rejoinder to Venus, telling her that the solution lies in “privar a estos hombres insensatos / de lo que hasta nombrar tienen a menos; / quieren joder, que jodan con los cuernos” (4; vol. I). Venus’s answer builds upon the concept of sign and concept briefly mentioned in the prologue, and she tells the poet that “La voz no es más que un signo, y será Buena / si se conforma bien con el objeto” (4; vol. I). The poem concludes as Venus renders her judgement, forbidding in perpetuity the use of those body parts that cannot be named by “los necios / que se desdennan de tomar en plumas / lo que en la boca toman y en los dedos” (5; vol. I). This poem is a revealing choice to open a collection as salaciously titled as *Fábulas futrosóficas*, since it is neither pornographic nor particularly erotic. In fact, aside from the colloquial terms *carajo* and *chocho*, it contains no obscenity, and this fable is very much in line with the published works of Iriarte and Samaniego. Readers are again left to ponder why Moratín would choose a literary genre that almost assuredly guaranteed a very limited readership. Would it not have been more effective (and *útil* in the neoclassical sense) to choose a less vulgar backdrop for what is essentially a fable on the nature of words, meaning and literary hypocrisy, and to see that fable published? I believe that the answer is twofold. First, it is precisely because the words are both socially unacceptable and also, ironically perhaps, used virtually by everyone. Venus’s rule, that transgressors will not be able to use the body part that they cannot name, simply adds a comic and satirical element to make memorable the moral of the poem, which is neatly summarized in the index: “No siendo las palabras otra cosa que signos representativos de las ideas, parece que la palabra

por sí debe ser indiferente, y mas cuando a fuerza de oirla en toda clase de personas, ya no se hace caso” (51; vol. II). Words are signs, used by all, and usage drives meaning; Moratín’s prologue and first fable are not a lewd call to descent into sybaritic decadence, but rather a friendly reminder that we are all citizens of the same linguistic society, and that hypocrisy can lead to false morality and very real censorship.

Having introduced his readers to the rhetorical framework of the *Fábulas futosóficas* (found manuscript trope, the use of the index and the footnotes) as well as having given them a bit of reading advice as they engage the fables that follow (words are merely signs), Moratín offers his reading public a variety of fables, some crude and comic, others far more sober and philosophical. As has been mentioned above, the first core concept that I would like to highlight in his *Fábulas* is one that makes an appearance in well over half of the fables in some fashion: the appeal to nature. The appeal to nature is generally understood to be a rhetorical argument asserting that because something is natural, it is necessarily good. While this premise certainly does not hold true all the time (when it becomes the “natural fallacy”), it is powerful enough to be in use to this day, as a quick glance at all the foods labeled “natural” on our supermarket shelves will confirm.

What is of particular interest to me here is how Moratín applies this philosophical argument, and to what end. As a first example, let us look at fable XI, “El gorrión”, which describes a sparrow mating with a virgin female, and asking her, incredulous, “¿Quién te ha enseñado, dí, esos movimientos / tan dulces y tan suaves?” (38; vol. I). Her reply takes the form of an analogy, and she answers by telling him that it is the same master who taught him to pick up sticks so agilely with his beak. A clear moral concludes the tale: “La naturaleza sabiamente / no sólo imprime leyes, sino modos de ser obedecida dulcemente” (39; vol. I). As occurs in many of the book’s fables, God and Christianity are not only absent, but they are replaced by Nature and its infallible laws. The moral also adds a key component that is repeated throughout the volume: that sex is pleasure, and that pleasure is natural and good. The rise of pleasure and the realm of the senses has been studied by many critics, but perhaps David Gies has stated it best: “la estética de gran parte de la poesía del siglo XVIII se basa en la epistemología sensualista,” and that that an eighteenth-century poet was “no sólo observador del ‘buen gusto’ de la época sino también participante en aquella buena vida” (“Sensibilidad” 26).

Moratín’s fables drive this point home time and again; fable VI, “Las liebres,” tells the tale of an argument over promiscuity between two hares. The first hare accuses the second of being a “grandísima puta, / sin vergüenza ni punto”, capable of fornicating with two hundred partners a day, indiscriminate of age, class, or status (23; vol. I). Not only does Moratín defend this hare’s promiscuity, but he also ends the fable with a brief speech on the social utility of prostitutes:

Aquel placer supremo,
alma de todo el mundo,
Toda su recompensa debe ser sólo el gusto:
Las putas lo hacen medio.” (25; vol. I)

It is because prostitutes follow the natural human tendency to pleasure, and are not like those who

... trastornan
los sabios institutos
De la naturaleza,
Movidos por impulsos
de viles intereses.” (25; vol. I)

Pleasure here is understood to be a common good, and those sex workers who make it possible are a functioning part of a healthy society, unlike those who use sex for their own schemes. Similarly, sexual pleasure is viewed as *natural* component of human existence, the “alma de todo el mundo” (25; vol. I), and therefore one that should be encouraged and celebrated. In the index that contains the clean, condensed version, Moratín refers to it as “Egoísmo bueno [...] que se conforma con las leyes o el interés común” (52; vol. II); in this instance, it appears, the promiscuous hare’s selfishness is in keeping with the common good.

The role and place of pleasure and sexuality within a functioning society is very much on Moratín’s mind, and with his two-part fable, titled respectively “Los burros en consejo” and “Segunda sesión de los burros”, he explores satirically the role of legislators on the private sphere, and the legislation of morality or sexuality. There is little confusion as to the author’s opinion of the legislators, who are depicted as donkeys. In a mocking parody of parliamentary proceedings, “Los burros en consejo” argue as to what kind of law they should pass. Quickly shooting down a sensible plan for ensuring quality pastureland (perhaps in a nod to Jovellanos and his *Informe sobre la ley agraria*), they instead decide to formulate legislation that delineates “Cómo y cuándo / se han de tomar las burras” (44; vol. I). An old, celibate donkey offers up a solution: “publiquemos un decreto, / (y con esto está todo remediado) / que ciertos rucios se ayunten a las rucias, los negros a las negras” (45; vol. I). All donkeys will be paired up according to breed, and any extra females shall meet a grisly fate: “Y a las demás coserselo a dos cabos” (45; vol. I). The decree, being against the law of nature itself, is of course a total catastrophe, and the first to break it are the very legislators:

Todos, sin dejar uno, se lo meten
a las primeras burras que encontrarán;

siendo ellos los primeros infractores
de la ley que iba todo a remediarlo. (46; vol. I)

This fable hinges on two core ideas: hypocrisy and a transgression against the laws of nature. It can be argued that the law was destined to fail, and that the legislators would be its hypocritical violators, because it was set against the central values of Moratín's work: nature, reason, and the common good. He underscores this fact by having the burros reject a sensible plan to improve pastureland, in favor of the pseudo-moralistic decree that is issued. In the second part of the fable, "Segunda sesión de los burros", the lawmakers find themselves having to defend their ruling amid public outcry. Their solution to the sexual frustration caused by their earlier legislation is masturbation: "Que se hagan la puñeta, como yo hago, / y se ahorrarán de mil impertinencias" (79; vol. II). This ruling is again met by a furious outcry from the female donkeys, who correctly point out that this law impacts not only the male donkeys, but the other sex as well, who will be deprived, de facto, of pleasure:

Pero nosotras pobres, ¿qué anuencia,
o qué bienes en torno reportamos,
para escluirnos del placer y Gloria
de aumentar la riqueza del estado?
Tenga pues libertad todo virote. (79; vol. II)

The female donkeys' petition is met by outrage, with the public prosecutor brazenly calling them "una cuadrilla de gran putas" (80; vol. II), and more revealingly, ordering that they all be arrested and locked up. This moral of the fable is one of the more clearly stated in this collection, and notes how easy it is for lazy magistrates to pass laws "sin reparar que choquen sus decretos / con la naturaleza y el estado" (80; vol. II). The juxtaposition of nature and society here is again center stage; good legislation should follow the laws of both society and nature, and as was illustrated, sexuality is clearly a natural part of life. Superficial decrees and prohibitions not only are ineffectual; they also run the risk of harming the progress of the country. This two-part fable highlights the challenges that lawmakers and governments faced as the public and private spheres interact in a world where the traditional roots of power, morality and order, church and crown, are eroding.

Moratín's use of the appeal-to-nature rhetoric is not limited to matters of sex or pleasure. He also uses it as a technique to question social norms and cultural beliefs, as we can observe in "El capador y el cerdo" and "El dios Priapo y los caballos". In the first fable, completely devoid of humor or sexuality, he paints the brutal tale of a young pig about to be castrated, who eloquently asks the *capador* why it has to be this way. His argument is structured entirely

around the appeal to nature, and he opens by asking: “¿La naturaleza cria / cosa inútil por ventura / con tanta sabiduría?” (6; vol. II), before listing the distinct uses for all of his body parts. The eyes are to see with, the legs to walk, and so what a great miracle it is that with his testicles he can “cual Júpiter tonante / de un sólo golpe criar / otro animal semejante?” (6; vol. II). His protests are no use, and the *capador* lets him know that “esta es la ley de tu señor.” While a modern reader might interpret this as a fable principally decrying animal cruelty, Moratín’s message comes into view in the last stanza: and again in the summarized morals of the index.

Cuando veo algún cantor
y a otros inhabilitados,
me acuerdo del capador,
y maldigo a los malvados
autores de ese rigor. (7; vol. II)

He then underlines it in the summarized morals of the index: “Execrable práctica que hay en algunos países de castrar a los niños” (58; vol. II). This fable might seem incongruous for the collection; there is after all no sex, pleasure, nor obscenity. It is a sober condemnation of the practice of castrating boys in order to preserve their singing voice, turning them into *castrati*. This fable illustrates the hodgepodge of topics and themes represented by the *Fábulas futrosóficas*; unlike Samaniego’s reliably sexual *El jardín de Venus*, Moratín’s text is more of an anthology of heterodox thoughts.

The second fable, “El dios Priapo y los caballos”, is similar in that it attempts to denounce a particular practice, in this case, the cultural belief that erectile dysfunction was caused by witchcraft or curses. The two horses in the fable call to the god Priapus to answer their question:

¿Quién la indigna será vil hechicera
que con sus malas artes
a situación tan triste y lastimera
reduce nuestras partes? (1a; vol. II)

The divinity’s response cuts right to the point, telling them that it is always easier to place blame on “motivos estraños, / cuando su origen es naturaleza” (1a; vol. II). In addition to essentially stating the moral halfway through the fable, the author also inserts a footnote stating that ascribing impotence to witchcraft was so common that it made its way into canon law (which is historically accurate). This spirit of this fable is very much rooted in the dispelling of common myths and the pseudoscience that characterized the eighteenth century, and echoes the tireless writings of Benito Jerónimo Feijoo and his *Teatro crítico*

universal. The manner in which Moratín uses the naturalistic argument is also in keeping with the spirit of the time, borne out of empiricism and skepticism and an emancipation from stodgy scholasticism and pseudoscientific folklore. Returning time and again to the appeal-to-nature argument, Moratín's fables drive home a number of clear lessons. The first is simply that sexuality is natural, pleasure is healthy, and neither should be abrogated or restricted by morality or legislation. Second, Moratín's fables cast the laws of nature as inherently superior to those made or invented by men, as can be seen in the ridiculous legislation passed by the donkey of "Los burros en consejo" or "Las liebres".

The second rhetorical axis around which the *Fábulas futrosóficas* operate is often tangentially related to the appeal to nature, and focuses on the hypocrisy and abuses by those in positions of power. Some critics have simply categorized much of the *Fábulas futrosóficas* as examples of the anticlericalism commonly found in erotic compositions.¹⁵ I believe that Moratín's satire is both more subtle and more inclusive. While there certainly are fables that focus on the less-than-saintly behavior of the clergy, they are part of a larger discourse, one aimed at the rampant hypocrisy of authority, be it ecclesiastical, governmental, or simply cultural. The *Fábulas futrosóficas* repeatedly denounce abuses by those in a position of power, as well as the two-faced rhetoric that tends to accompany them. Similarly, Moratín takes aim at misguided cultural practices and beliefs and the concomitant hypocrisy that surround them, as seen in fables like the aforementioned "El capador y el cerdo".

Another of the aforementioned fables, "Los burros en consejo", takes aim not only at the ineffectual and misguided legislation of sexuality, but also at the hypocrisy of the lawmakers themselves, who were the first to break their own law: "Siendo ellos los primeros infractores / de la ley que iba todo a remediarlo" (46, vol. I). At the heart of Moratín's critique is the intersection of public and private spheres, and time and again the hypocrisy and abuses of power that he denounces arise from the difficult conjugation of these two realms. Government's role in the eighteenth century became circumscribed by the notion and ideal of enlightened absolutism, whereby rulers and lawmakers were expected to work toward the benefit of the people and the nation. The donkeys in Moratín's fable clearly serve as a satirical representation of those who would abuse their power, and rule only for themselves, or worse, not at all. In "La tigre y su hijo", Moratín describes a republic obsessed with honor and social class, replete with so many laws and norms that even reproduction is not acceptable. A mother tigress, obsessed with her family's honor, tells her son that "tú vas a ser mi dicha y mi consuelo, / vas a dar ornamento a tu prosapia, / serás el *non plus ultra* de tu estirpe" (35; vol. I). The

¹⁵ For more on anticlericalism, see Matthieu Raillard, "El jardín de Venus: Samaniego's Arcadia of the Senses." *Dieciocho*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2005, 7-22.

son offers a rational rebuttal, stating that true honor lies in procreation and propagation of a family line. And besides, he asks, “¿Mas que he de hacer con esta patarata, / que sin poder yo, madre, remediarlo, / y aun sin quererlo yo, se me levanta?” (35; vol. I). The mother’s reply is clearly meant to be read as a satirical condemnation of the extremes to which some go in the name of honor: “Mil chochos hay que le darán entrada / ... / y métemelo a mí si te da gana” (36; vol. I). The moral of the fable makes clear the object of the satire:

¡Cuántas madres indignas hay como esta,
que más tigres que tigres de la Hircania
violentan a sus hijos de mil modos
que el pudor, la razón y amor profanan! (36; vol. I)

The obsession with honor and her society’s hypocritical cultural norms leads the mother tigress to an incestuous transgression of nature’s laws, and according to the moral in the index, is representative of the “violencia que suelen hacer los padres a sus hijos en la elección de estado” (53; vol. II). The obsession with the power and prestige associated with one’s social standing—honor—are so important that ironically an incestuous sexual relation is not out of the question. This can be read as a commentary on the monarchy’s efforts to maintain lineage through royal intermarriage, a practice that had probably resulted in inbreeding, most notably in the case of Carlos II, *el hechizado*.

As was often the case in these erotic compositions, the clergy was another common object of satire and criticism. At the heart of most strains of anticlericalism was the belief that priests and monks were hypocrites who did not practice what they (literally) preached, but also that they abused their relatively privileged position in society. As such, Samaniego’s *El jardín de Venus* is populated by sexually frustrated men and women of the cloth, who lie, manipulate and cheat in order to seek sexual gratification. Moratín offers readers a similar take on the clergy in his fable “El perro gordo y el perro flaco”. The first dog serves a lion, who “renunció la corona / en más inmediato, el cual hizo ministro a su antiguo criado” (17; vol. I). The Lion is represented as a clear embodiment of the “hombre de bien” ideal: he devotes himself tirelessly to others, helping “miles de importunos” (18; vol. I), his time wisely divided among his many responsibilities, yet still finding time for play and love. The second dog serves a priest, who spends his days kneeling in prayer, or “murmullando palabras que decía / como los papagayos” (19; vol. I). He renounces sex and feeds his dog half a bone. The fable concludes with an apostrophe: “Decid, ¡hombres devotos! / ¿Cuál de los dos es santo?” (20; vol. I). With power comes responsibility, and while the Lion embraces helping others and goes so far as to renounce his throne in order to do so, the clergyman is locked in solipsistic activities that are of no benefit to society. Moreover, his repudiation of sex further marks him as outside the natural order of things, a man whose saintly appearance in fact masks a selfish existence.

“El abad, el mon[gle] Alberto, y la paya” is another fable mocking the hypocritical sanctity of the clergy. As in other fables, Moratín makes clear from the onset that the conditions in which the monks choose to live are against nature:

Y todo todo a los placeres muerto.
De este modo estas ánimas benditas,
aisladas del común de los mortales,
los gozos aguardaban eternas” (24; vol. II)

The fable tells the relatively predictable tale of a young monk who brings a young woman to the monastery and has sex with her. The abbot, intending to discipline the young man, instead sleeps with the young woman as well. The tale concludes with the abbot admonishing the young Alberto for his conduct, and instructing him to never bring her back to the monastery. But, he adds, if she does come back, he wants to be informed: “le mando que me avise, si es que viene” (28; vol. II). This fable thus makes use of both of the major rhetorical tacks: the author satirizes the unnatural practice of removing one’s self from society and denying all pleasures, but also lambasts the hypocrisy of the clergy (in this case personified by the lecherous abbot), which can be read as a natural consequence of such an isolated existence. The abbot’s name, revealed in the last verse, is “abad fray Sancho el Craso”, would also seem to play on the common trope of well-fed clergymen, further highlighting the hypocrisy of the church.

The aforementioned “El capador y el cerdo”, where a pig mounts a logical argument against his impending castration, “¿De que sirve un animal / sin facultad de hacer otro?” (7; vol. II), is another example of the harm that can be perpetrated by those in positions of power. The pointless mutilation is presented as an affront to nature’s creation, but also as a representation of unchecked authority. The capador’s defense, “Por más que a mí me lastime, / esta es la ley de tu señor”, indicates that he is but an instrument obeying a cruel master (6; vol. II). It is in the closing stanza that Moratín makes clear that this fable is a condemnation of the practice of castrating young singers to preserve their voices (the term “capón” was often used to refer to castrati). There is a clear undercurrent of anticlericalism in this fable as well; castrati were highly sought after by the church, not only because of their vocal range, but because women had been banned from church choirs in the sixteenth century, in accordance with Corinthians 1: 34: *mulieres en ecclesiis tacean* (let women be silent in the church).

In addition to his sustained satire of clerical hypocrisy, Moratín tackles the decidedly eighteenth-century topic of pseudoscience in “Los monos médicos”. The fable tells the tale of monkeys so ignorant that even their physiology (in this case, male genitalia) is a deep mystery to them. A pedantic doctor, mockingly referred to as “Simio Galeno”, pontificates on the topic of the male anatomy of a monkey, who reveals that she is in fact female: “a todos hizo

ver que era muy madre” (62; vol. I). This fable is one of the few in which the author concludes with a clear, explicit moral (another example is the “Capador y el cerdo”), as if he were worried that his readers would not understand its significance. In this instance, he writes: “¿Quién no advierte y lamenta en este caso, / en las útiles ciencias nuestro atraso?” (63; vol. I). The summarized moral in the index essentially restates the same point, “La ignorancia en las ciencias naturales suele traer consecuencias perjudiciales a la moral” (56; vol. II). As with his indictment of clerical power and hypocrisy, Moratín laments the inaction, or worse, the ignorance of those in positions of authority. He was a true enlightenment thinker, who placed progress, utility and social good as essential goals for a modern society. Readers of his plays *La comedia nueva* (1792) or *El sí de las niñas* (1806) will recall the characters of Pedro and Don Diego, both prototypical enlightenment “hombre de bien” figures, who teach, admonish and sacrifice for the common good. Not unlike Don Hermógenes in *La comedia nueva*, whose broken watch symbolizes Spain’s lack of progress, the primitive monkey society shows misplaced faith and trust in a pedantic blowhard, the abovementioned, ironically-named “Simio Galeno”. As in Moratín’s plays, or even Cadalso’s *Eruditos a la violeta* (1772), false erudition is presented as an exploitation and prostitution of power, one with very serious social consequences. Spain’s lack of progress relative to other European nations was a very real issue, and finds a humorous and snarky home in the *Fábulas futrosóficas*.

Nineteenth-century readers brave enough to read (or own) the *Fábulas futrosóficas* might have been disappointed if in fact they were expecting a tawdry, pornographic text. Instead, they would have discovered a work that attempted to marry eighteenth-century ideals with an irreverent, at times ribald narrative style. The result is a motley selection of fables that continue to push the same enlightened agenda found in Moratín, Cadalso, Feijoo and many others —debunking myths, chastising pseudoerudition, calling out hypocrisy and abuses of authority— albeit in a more jocular, vulgar register. Unfairly relegated to the realm of literary marginalia, the *Fábulas futrosóficas* should be read instead as a ludic exploration of style on the part of Moratín, one in which human sexuality is portrayed as a natural, even rational, component of life. In so doing, Moratín follows Spinoza’s notion that “for whatsoever is contrary to nature is also contrary to reason, and whatsoever is contrary to reason is absurd, and, ipso facto, to be rejected” (88). As a result, sex is stripped of its purported obscenity, and reframed as another sociopolitical arena in which humans engage with each other. Two hundred years after its publication, to continue to label the *Fábulas futrosóficas* as pornographic or devoid of merit is, ironically, to blindly follow the interpretation of eighteenth-century censors.

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