

Cyberspace and the Cyberdildo: *Dislocations in
Cenicienta en Chueca*

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This article examines the literary representation of the forces of globalization and the neocolonial relations between Latin America, Spain, and the European Union via interactive technologies—particularly the chat room. *Cenicienta en Chueca* (Cinderella in Chueca), a collection of short stories by Argentine exile María Felicitas Jaime published by Spanish gay/lesbian press Odissea in 2003 especially lends itself to a consideration of these issues. The book traces a variety of contemporary relationships between women of various nationalities and social classes, whose encounters are mediated by spatial arrangements of all kinds. In all of the stories, the purported identity of the characters is called into question by the different spaces they inhabit and the texts they write, which emphasize the constructedness of space and identity. In the first story, “Ejecutivas” (Executives), for example, a powerful, globe-trotting Spanish businesswoman, who lets her hair down only when her work takes her to Buenos Aires, meets a woman who dominates her sexually, much as Spain economically dominates Latin America. Traveling bodies figure prominently in other stories as well, even when these are set in Madrid: in “Soledades” (Solitudes) a German and an Argentine confuse sex with love in an enduring, conflictive relationship; in “Cenicienta en Chueca,” the title character is a poor Peruvian immigrant working as a maid who has had to leave her lover behind in America; and in “Otras cartas” (Other Letters) an Argentine professor living in Madrid writes to her former lover, a French businesswoman who has moved back to Paris with her daughter. However,

the distances and approximations between characters are not only physical, but also psychological and linguistic, and these communications and miscommunications are occasionally represented by the texts they write to one another. For example, in "Cartas" (Letters) the main characters arouse each other by describing the sexual encounters they have outside their relationship, and the texts in "Otras cartas" are letters that the protagonist will never send to her ex-lover, Sylvie. In the following pages, I will focus primarily on "Chateo" (Chat) a story about cybersex between a woman in Spain and another in Uruguay who meet for an encounter in a lesbian chat room. This particular masturbatory relationship in cyberspace provides a conceptual frame within which to consider the implications of globalization and communication technologies for lesbians from a variety of different classes, cultures, and countries throughout the Spanish-speaking world.

The chat is an apt venue for exploring these issues in narrative because it is itself an elaborate fiction, complete with setting, plot, characters, and dialogue. William J. Mitchell points out that even the chat room space is an illusion created by communication technology, "just some computer software that brings the participants in the conversation together and thus—in some abstract fashion—performs the basic function of a room" (114). The physical location of the actual participants has little to do with the site of their interaction, although it might, in subtle ways, color their individual interventions and their interaction with others. Chatters, however, have no way of knowing for certain the physical location from which their correspondents are writing. Indeed, they cannot know anything concrete about their interlocutors, since the fictional elements of the chat room extend to the identities of the participants, who adopt nicknames and offer descriptions of themselves that do not necessarily correspond with reality. As noted by two characters in Mabel Galán's novel *Donde comienza tu nombre* (Where Your Name Begins 2004), in the lesbian chat room of Chueca.com, "la mitad de las contertulias eran hombres sin escrúpulos que se hacían pasar por lesbianas, y el resto, mujeres acomplejadas, inseguras u obsesionadas con el sexo, que mentían más que callaban" 'half of the chatters were unprincipled men who were passing for lesbians and the rest, neurotic, insecure, or sex-crazed women, who lied even

more than they covered up' (40).¹

The main goal of chatters also corresponds with that of fiction authors: they hope their language will have specific effects on their readers. In the sexual chat, that effect is sexual response. Sexual stimulation in the chat room, of course, is purely linguistic, with a considerable number of fictional elements, including not only the participants' description of their physical characteristics, nationality, desires, and actions, but also certain conventions of the genre. In gay chats, the key linguistic fiction resides in the description of the penis, as Leopoldo Alas points out in *Ojo de loca no se equivoca* (The Queer Eye Is Never Wrong):

Cybersex is very stimulating if you have imagination and know how to use language to excite that other about whom you only know the measurements and information that he wants to dole out, which, naturally, could be false: age, height, weight, body hair, hair color—if it's long or short—and, of course, the length of his penis, which is the fundamental information to which one generally responds, especially if it's greater than nineteen centimeters, by typing an *mmmmm* . . . that tends to raise the erotic temperature of the chat. The speakers, or cyberchatters, can be frivolous, festive and gregarious with a tendency to share secrets and draw out each other's intimacies. There are even those who send poems, as happened to me once with an Argentine from Buenos Aires . . . who had lived in Madrid and remembered it with nostalgia and in detail. (263)

Alas goes on to link cybersex with masturbation, a practice that, like writing itself, is solitary:

cybergays, solitary navigators of a space without a physical existence, seem to find pleasure in merely connecting virtually, without caring too much if the interchange of messages leads to real encounters between them. The internet is, in this sense, a masturbatory invention, perfect for an age like ours, in which chastity and abstention are disguised as lust and hedonism. But at the moment of truth, nothing at all: just words, words, words. (264)

Alas represents virtual sexuality as a substitute for "real sex," and, in this sense, a reinforcement of the closet. It is, however, possible to frame it as a supplement, in the Derridean sense of the word, one

that is associated with masturbation. We should also remember that the desires and parameters of “real sex” are equally determined by discourse, as Foucault has explained.²

Even the cyber-phallus that Alas describes is not a physical organ, a penis, but a discursive creation on the screen, “words, words, words.” Its virtual location, its disconnection from material reality, and its circulation apart from a living body make it more akin to the dildo, in the sense that the device is theorized by Beatriz Preciado in her *Manifiesto contra-sexual: Prácticas subversivas de identidad sexual* (Counter-sexual Manifesto: Subversive Practices of Sexual Identity). As Preciado explains, the dildo is one of many technologies elaborated to control female bodies and their social relations, orienting them exclusively toward heterosexuality and reproduction, but it has been re-appropriated as a tool of pleasure for ex-centric sexualities. In the chapter titled, “Breve genealogía de los juguetes sexuales o de cómo Butler descubrió el vibrador” (Brief Genealogy of Sex Toys, or How Butler Discovered the Vibrator), she explains that the strap-on dildo derives from the vibrator and the chastity belt, technologies that are intimately tied to the modern regulation of female masturbation, orgasm and hysteria.

What we know by the name of ‘female orgasm,’ from at least the beginning of the seventeenth century, is nothing more than the paradoxical result of the work of opposing technologies for repressing masturbation and producing the “hysterical crisis.” Female pleasure has always been problematic, since it doesn’t seem to have a precise function either in biological theories or religious doctrines, according to which the objective of sexuality is the reproduction of the species. . . . Female pleasure was described as the crisis that follows from a hysterical crisis, a kind of “hysterical paroxysm” that should be produced in clinical conditions and frequently with the help of diverse mechanical and electric instruments. The orgasm, described thus, is recognized as the symptomatic crisis of an exclusively female illness, and at the same time as the therapeutic climax of a process brought on by technical efforts: massage with the hands or a vibrator, pressure showers. . . . (92)

In particular, the therapeutic climax had as its goal the orientation of the woman toward heterosexual coitus as the sole form of sexual experience, and specifically away from masturbation and lesbianism. It was in this sense a technology that sought to regulate, not

only sexual practice and sexual identities, but also gender:

The diagnosis of hysteria and the reaching of orgasm as a result of a 'hysterical crisis' were associated with a certain indifference or frigid reaction to heterosexual coitus that could be related to diverse forms of sexual deviance and above all with a tendency toward 'lesbianism.' For example, in 1650 Nicolaus Fontanus pointed out that some women who suffered from hysteria could have an equal tendency to 'ejaculate,' a symptom that, according to Fontanus, could put in danger not only the health of the hysteric but also her moral worth as a woman, given that, 'it moved the female body close to certain functions of the virile organ.' Just as a possible lesbianism could underlie every form of hysteria, each treatment of hysteria seems to include the risk of giving the hysteric a form of pleasure that could lead her to lesbianism. (90)

According to Preciado, the subversive, masturbatory use of those instruments elaborated specifically to prevent female masturbation and lesbianism serves to destabilize sexual and gender identities because orgasm and ejaculation were considered to be natural experiences for men only (90).

Preciado marks the colonial, nationalistic, and racist implications of sexual control technologies in her argument for masturbation by linking the limits of the body with the borders of the nation:

It is important to point out that these technologies of sex and gender do not exist in isolation or in only one specific matter, without forming part of a broader biopolitics that joins colonial technologies of producing the white heterosexual European body. In this sense, the new masturbatory body, threatened with an internal contamination of its own limits, operates as well as a physiological metaphor of the modern states in the midst of colonial expansion. The skin, subjected, in the same way as the border, to an immunological process of self-protection and self-demarcation, is transformed into the surface that registers the European sovereign states' new strategies of formation. The same economy of energetic regulation protects the body and the nation-state from 'deplorable solitary maneuvers' that could become a danger to its security and reproduction. (83)

This part of her argument is clearly an homage to Donna Haraway's theory of the cyborg in her classic book, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Wom-*

en: *The Reinvention of Nature*. Haraway focuses on communication, rather than sexual, technologies but notes that they have a similar goal to control through “*the translation of the world into a problem of coding*, a search for a common language in which all resistance to instrumental control disappears and all heterogeneity can be submitted to disassembly, reassembly, investment, and exchange” (164, emphasis in the original).

Haraway claims that communication technologies, developed in the interests of particular nations, governments, and industries, can also be re-appropriated by subversive, liminal practices that interrupt the control supposedly embedded in the code itself and thereby blur the borders (150).³ The Internet is one of those communication technologies, as Erkki Huhtamo explains:

Automation emerged in the context of military and industrial applications, and also became prominent in the vast field of administrative applications that came to be known as ADP (automatic data processing). In his overview in 1967, John Rose listed four categories of applications: control (from various industries to traffic and air defense), scientific (from engineering design and space travel to economic research and military logistics), information (from accounting and tax records to medical diagnosis and retrieval of information), and others (including pattern recognition and problem-solving). (100)

To the extent that sexual chats fall outside these applications, they serve to interrupt the logic of the codes that underlie communication technologies.

It is not too far a stretch to extend the definition of communication technologies to include the code of language, particularly in the case of a language like Spanish, which was an important instrument in the colonization of the Americas, and, indeed, of the Iberian Peninsula itself, as Catalans, Basques, and Galicians have pointed out. The Spanish language (that is, Castilian) is still purportedly controlled by a Royal Academy housed in Madrid, the former imperial center of the Spanish-speaking world. The ludic distortions and disruptions of Spanish in a variety of cultural texts from within and outside the recognized boundaries of Spain for at least a century have challenged both the borders of the nation and the cultural hegemony of Castile in Spain and in what Castilianists

like to denominate “Spanish America,” a name that simultaneously denies inhabitants throughout North, Central, and South America the right to name themselves and erases the indigenous populations, thereby illustrating the imperialist implications of the Spanish language itself. Disruptive texts like *Los ríos profundos* by José María Arguedas, *Tirano Banderas* by Ramón del Valle-Inclán, or *Mulata de tal* by Miguel Angel Asturias sought to reinscribe cultural and linguistic heterogeneity into the literary canon. The recent hegemony of Spanish editorial houses in publishing Spanish-language texts—a power owing primarily to globalized market forces—however, has foregrounded the extent to which the former empire can still control not only publication, but, even more importantly perhaps, distribution and marketing, that is, what gets read and where.⁴ What is more, the language of literary texts, and occasionally the content as well, are subject to correction by an editor (often a Spanish one) prior to publication—that is, a text’s conformation to linguistic norms can be a condition of its circulation. If we consider that the newspapers that review literary texts are owned by the same multimedia conglomerates that control the major publishing houses, it becomes clear that the possibilities for linguistic/cultural subversion in the traditional media have been curtailed in the global age. This linguistic hegemony, in turn, both underlies and propagates Spain’s current economic imperialism in the former colonies.⁵

The chat room, and especially the sex chat, however, can largely evade these linguistic controls. It puts different variations of Spanish into dialogue with one another in a space where none of them can dominate the others, where none is more “correct” than the other, because the value of the linguistic performance lies elsewhere, in its ability to arouse the reader, and because there is no moderator akin to the editor or the Royal Academy to police grammar, vocabulary, or the incorporation of foreign words. Linguistic performance in the sex chat rooms is akin to the masturbatory re-appropriation of dildos in this sense: it uses the very communication technology developed to control bodies within and between nations—Spanish—for the sole purpose of disseminating non-reproductive sexual pleasures in clear defiance of the rules and conventions, the grammars and dictionaries, associated with the language.

All of these elements—communication technology, post- and

neo-imperialism, language, fiction, chats, and masturbation come together in the story "Chateo." The protagonist is an attorney who recounts an experience she had one night while researching legal information from her home computer. Bored by the slow internet connection, or so she says, she succumbs to curiosity and clicks on the "chat" button on the screen, but not before asking herself, as any conventional husband might, "how unfaithful could it be to chat with a few chicks?" (132), and, indeed, one of the primary themes of the story is the critique of conventional, monogamous sexuality. The pop-up includes chats of all varieties, so that the medium itself highlights the multiplicity of identities and possible relationships, in contrast to the single possibility of heterosexual, procreative marriage that predominated before Spain left Franco behind and entered modernity in the mid 1970s. The protagonist takes the nickname of "fulanita," an ironic move given that the term typically denotes a public woman, one who does not conform to the sexual mores of a heterosexist society; under Franco, women who pursued careers over marriage were also seen as "public women."⁶ She is initially bored by the inanity of most of the young, uncultured chatters, so she invites someone to debate "serious" themes, such as "the role of lesbians in alternative families." This sign of her intelligence quickly attracts a similarly articulate interlocutor, "Tania," who invites her into a private chat, not to debate, but to "follar" (fuck). The protagonist wants to meet in person, but "Tania" points out that "fulanita" may be in Spain, but she is in Uruguay, a distance which makes it impossible for them to meet, but not for them to "follar" by chat, which they proceed to do after the protagonist sheds her last traces of heterosexist guilt over "cheating" on her sleeping girlfriend, Alejandra. Given that, under the law, even women who did not exercise lesbian sexuality but merely behaved in a masculine fashion were previously condemned as sodomites (Sullivan 3), the lawyer's upholding of masculinist heterosexist moral values becomes even more ironic. We should remember as well that even the education of women in western society was a controversial subject until quite recently, because it was thought to produce mannish women.

The story ends with the protagonist, not "follando" again, but "haciendo el amor" (making love) with her partner; after signing off, she goes to bed and wakes her girlfriend, heating her up with

language similar to that she used in her cybersexual encounter with Tania. She comments in the concluding paragraph that:

Quizá lo mejor del sexo virtual es que te alienta para el real, que si tu pareja te tiene un poco harta a fuerza de rutina, primero te follas a una por Internet y luego llegas a su cama a hacer el amor; que, como dijo la uruguaya, no es lo mismo pero está requetebién. Mañana a la misma hora . . . con otra, y mi pareja deberá a hacer el amor todos los días, costumbre que la rutina nos ha robado. Hasta mañana, amor. (140)

Perhaps the best part about virtual sex is that it gets you hot for the real thing, that if your partner has you a bit bored because of the routine, first you fuck one on the Internet and then you go to bed to make love, which, as the Uruguayan said, is not the same thing but still delicious. Tomorrow at the same time . . . with a different one, and my partner will have to make love every day, a custom that routine had stolen from us. Until tomorrow, my love.

But where is the “real” sex in this fiction? Isn’t it all, as Alas said, “palabras, palabras, palabras” (words, words, words)? And where, for that matter, is the “real” cybersex in this printed (not virtual) short story?

The conventions of traditional fiction, placed in contrast to the interactive fiction of the chat room, highlight that all sex—“real,” virtual, fictive—is a function of discourse: “sexuality is not natural, but rather, is discursively constructed. Moreover, sexuality . . . is constructed, experienced, and understood in culturally and historically specific ways” (Sullivan 1). That is, the fact that all of the sexual acts described in the story are linguistic performances allows us to examine the fictionality of sexual stimuli in general and place into dispute certain binary oppositions such as fictive/real, public/private, homosexual/heterosexual, perverse/natural. The interactions between “fulanita” and “Tania” and between “fulanita” and “Alejandra” are framed by a first-person narrative in which the protagonist addresses the reader directly through a series of meditations and exclamations regarding the post-modern condition. In the first paragraph, she calls herself, “Una romántica del siglo XX” (a twentieth-century romantic) and, indeed, the tone in those lines reflects a romantic temperament, a nostalgia for “a written letter, with a stamp, from faraway places, a letter that we anticipate before slowly

opening it, using the sense of smell to perceive the aroma of ink, of paper” (131). Opening a letter, in other words, is like reading the exposition of a story: it creates the mood and sets up the reader’s expectations.⁷ The exposition of this story does not end with the letter, however. The second paragraph reveals that a false expectation was created in the reader’s mind by the opening lines: we are no longer romantics limited to hand-written snail-mail exchanges. We have moved on to both the endless possibilities of the Internet and its endless miscommunications now that we are “modern, very modern” (132), a modernity that extends to the protagonist’s legal profession, which would have been denied her in the romantic age. The narrator’s meditations on the pros and cons of electronic communications lead to the narrative complication, when the communication technology slips from its function of facilitating professional information that helps to maintain social structures (legal research) to its uses for pleasures (sex chats) that put the boundaries and moral underpinnings of those structures into question.

The story to this point has been recounted in a first person narrative, but once the protagonist and “Tania” meet on-line, it is largely developed through dialogue meant to mimic “real” internet exchanges. The content, of course, is not the same as in the chats that Alas describes; this is, after all, a lesbian chat, not a gay one. Unlike the latter, it does not go straight for the genitals, but rather begins with considerable tongued foreplay, and it does not end after the first orgasm. Part of the game, of course, is the description of the effects the prose is having: as in porn videos, the participants need to provide a “come shot,” in which they “prove” to their audience (their reader, in this case) that they have had an orgasm: “I’m coming, Uruguayita . . . Ahhh . . . I can’t hold back any more” (138). All they have really proved, however, is their ability to describe climax and orgasm in a convincing fashion. As a supplement to these dialogues, then, the author provides occasional first-person interludes, in which the narrator describes what happens before she learns the rules of the game, as well as what she is thinking and what is going on in her apartment while she is chatting with “Tania.” She describes the “reality” that “Tania” cannot see, including the details of her masturbation and orgasm, and what happens after she signs off.

I was reading what the Uruguayan was writing and masturbating like crazy . . . with my girlfriend just a step away . . . I stuck two or three fingers in my pussy, pulled them out, stuck them back in with force, I wet my tits with what I drew from down there, passed my wet fingers over my lips, flattened one breast while my other hand rubbed against the silk of my pajamas at the level of my labia. (138)

Leopoldo Alas argues that Internet chats function as closet substitution for real acts and that they keep homosexuality in narrow private spaces; however, passages like the one above actually make lesbian sexuality (still a mystery to those who believe in female sexual passivity) visible. And, of course, this story is not a chat itself, but part of book that is bought and sold in public places and occasionally discussed in conference papers or articles like this one, so it actually performs the opposite function of the one imagined by Alas—it brings homosexuality, and, in particular, lesbian sexuality and sexual practices, into the public sphere.

The sexual acts described in the first-person narration, however, are no more real than those presented in the dialogue that mimics internet interactivity. They, too, are no more than “words, words, words” designed to stimulate the reader, perhaps to induce her to masturbate as well, and to convince her that the orgasm was real. The extension of the stimulating discourse to the reader through this first person narrative highlights again the notion that what we call the “real”—in this case, not only the experiences of “fulanita” in the story but also the erotic reactions of readers of this book—is conditioned by discourse. This connection between reality and fiction extends to the reader’s gender just as it does to the gender of “Tania” and chat room participants in general: in neither case does the writer have any way of knowing exactly who the reader will be. The production of erotic discourse in all cases is independent of the “real bodies” to which they ostensibly refer, but rather conforms to culturally-determined codes of sexuality.

It is significant that not all of the “words, words, words” of this story are in Spanish: as the title of this story makes clear, one by-product of globalization is the proliferation of English, which is the primary language of informatics. The Spanish Royal Academy has insisted on finding Spanish equivalents for any *extranjerismo* in an attempt to maintain “linguistic purity”—an absurd concept for a

language with so many words derived from Arabic and indigenous languages. It could be said, however, that this reaction to the “invasion” of the Spanish language by foreign words is part of a larger response to the country’s status from the 1950’s on as a kind of colony in relation to the economic empires of the most powerful NATO states. The Royal Academy, however, has been unsuccessful in policing the daily usage of foreign and hybrid words, particularly during the post-Franco era and in the sciences and computer technology. This situation is reflected throughout the story by the numerous Anglicisms, although their foreignness is still highlighted by the use of italics: “*e-mail*,” “*footing*,” “*mobbing*,” “*emilios*,” “*chat*,” and “*nick*.” I should note that the use of “*footing*” for “*jogging*” predates the computer age and comes, not from U.S. English but, from Great Britain. Likewise, the concept of becoming hooked, “*enganchada*,” is not necessarily American: “*es que cuando una comienza con esto, pareciera tener personalidad adictiva: cada día estás más enganchada*” ‘it’s that once one begins this, she seems to have an addictive personality: everyday she is more hooked’ (132). In fact, drug use in post-Franco Spanish popular culture is associated primarily with the aesthetics of the *movida madrileña*, whose roots were more in British punk than in any music originating from the U.S. The idea of having an addictive personality, however, is clearly more American than European.

As I noted above, the attempted regulation of American Spanish, from the critiques of García Márquez’s fiction to recent efforts to police Spanglish, also reflects the country’s anxiety regarding its own lost power, its lost imperial status. In “Chateo,” the power relations between the former imperial center and the former colonies is reversed, as the Uruguayan woman educates her Spanish counterpart on how to arouse a woman with words; that is, the American demonstrates greater linguistic skill and control. The Spaniard is inexperienced, in part because she maintains a Franco-era connection between sex and love and is, in this sense, not “modern”:

—¿Nunca lo hiciste?

—No, la verdad es que soy nueva en esto . . . y no me parece que se pueda hacer el amor por chat.

—Yo te propongo follar, no hacer el amor. (133)

—You’ve never done it?

—No, the truth is that I’m new to this . . . and it doesn’t seem to me that you can make love by chat.

—I’m proposing we fuck, not make love.

This supposedly higher moral ground—monogamy, the linking of sex and love—is ironic, given that lesbian relationships are considered perverse in the mainstream imagination. It soon becomes clear, however, that the protagonist’s reticence to engage in loveless sex and her scorn for those who practice it come more from fear than a sense of ethics:

—This seems crazy to me; virtual sex has no charm.

—And how do you know if you’ve never done it? Try.

—Are you really desperate?

—I’m horny and alone and I wish there were someone next to me to take away my horniness.

—Well, I have my girlfriend just meters away, very absorbed by her book.

—Well, then?

—And . . . it’s just that I’m very shy and I don’t know how to do it.

(134)

From here, the lessons begin, with the Uruguayan leading the way as she would with a woman having sex for the first time: very slowly, but insistently, she instigates the narrator to perform as well and not just receive her partner’s verbal caresses. The Spaniard does so, imitating “Tania’s” style, and becoming increasingly excited, even as she worries that she is somehow being unfaithful, although “there was an ocean between us” (135). The Uruguayan remains in control: “And my hand went down between my legs without my authorization, the silk of my pajamas was wet, and the contact of my fingers was spectacular” (135). The narrator really starts to heat up, however, when “Tania” speaks to her in “American.”

—¿Cómo son tus pelos?

—Rojos, abundantes, enredados y se mojan tanto como mi cosita. . .
¿Cómo llaman en España a la cosita? (136)

—What are your hairs like?

—Red, abundant, curly, and they get as wet as my little thing. . . .
 What do you call the little thing in Spain?

And later, she says, “Me estoy hamacando en la silla, tengo la concha al aire y me refriego contra el tapizado” ‘I’m rocking in my chair, with my conch in the air, and I’m rubbing it against the upholstery’ (137). The narrator, in contrast, speaks of her “coño” (cunt), and at a crucial moment yells out, “¡Joder, joder, joder!” (Fuck, fuck, fuck! [in Spain]) (139), before “Tania” signs off: “Chau, española. . . . Como decimos nosotras: que cojas bien y a fondo” ‘Ciao, Spanish girl. . . . As we say, may you screw well and deep.’ (139).⁸ This interchange of regional sexual vocabulary takes on a different charge, however, when after signing off, the narrator applies the lessons she has learned from the Uruguayan on her girlfriend. She wakes her and asks, “¿Sabes como [sic] se llama esto en el sur de América? La cosita” ‘Do you know what they call this in South America? The little thing’ (140). The Uruguayan’s words become resignified as “exotic” and “erotic” signs that add spice to the stale domestic arrangement as the narrator begins to exercise the linguistic control that the American taught her; they are, in this sense, a form of “Orientalism,” as Edward Said figured it. We are left, then, with an important question: does this mimicry signify the submission of Spain, Spaniards, and Spanish to the superior creativity of Latin Americans, or does it represent the ways in which the imperial power adopts skills from the colonies in order to perpetuate control?

Part of the answer may be found in the story, “Ejecutivas,” which deals more explicitly with the neo-imperial relations between Spain and Latin America. In this story, Paula, an ultra-powerful international banking executive from Spain, seems to surrender sexual control to her colonized subjects in Argentina, but the masochism is in fact a further exercise in control, as Gilles Deleuze has explained (20). Critics of gay male culture have examined this masochistic desire for the colonized subject (particularly those of the British empire) at length, but their observations have rarely been applied to lesbian relations, particularly in the Hispanic world.⁹ The protagonist of this story is certainly a prototype of the powerful imperial subject, albeit one that uses a simulacrum of femininity to overpower her male peers in the Spanish banking world:

Paula is attractive, seductive, active, intelligent, elegant, and good-looking besides. She is the director of major accounts of the most important bank in this country. She lives hanging on the phone, climbing onto planes, with an agenda that leaves her no time even to see her mother, whom she has put up in the most expensive locale in Madrid and for whom she pays a round-the-clock assistant to take her place. Anything to avoid complications. She doesn't have time, and the time she has she wants to keep for herself.

She answers only to the owner and general director of the bank; she's chummy with him, and they decide institutional policy in Latin America, the drop in the stock market, even how much they can afford to lose. . . . She knows that part of her success is her person, her way of dressing, her way of moving, her skirts just long enough, which distract the men and provoke the envy of women, her pastel-colored suits, her authentic silk hankies, glasses that are unnecessary for seeing but indispensable for her ultrasympathetic sincerity. (9-10)

She relishes the power of her position and her power over men, but her work and her image are revealed to be elaborate closets; she can only come out in Argentina and among a very different circle of friends—different from her colleagues and different from her because, although they are also powerful women, they do not live in the closet. Paula loves Buenos Aires: “In spite of its crises, in spite of its decadence, in spite of its night-time bookstores that are no longer open, Buenos Aires was a second home for her: there she was comfortable and let her hair down, twelve thousand kilometers managed to relax her, make her forget she was an executive” (11). The irony, of course, is that the crisis she mentions resulted in part from the business practices of Spanish firms in Argentina, including banks like the one where Paula herself works. What she loves about Argentina is its exoticism: “speak to me in Argentine, your language fascinates me” (16). This fascination, however, does not preclude her from seeing the country as a colony, a provider of natural resources (including lovers) and business opportunities, which she will leave devastated when she returns to the “madre patria” (motherland).

The banker Paula's relationship with Argentina, and with Argentine women, parallels the relationship between Spanish banks and their Latin American counterparts. This economic imperialism was the subject recently of a special issue of the journal *Quórum* dedicated to the “Internacionalización de la economía y la empresa

española: El caso latinoamericana” (Internationalization of the Economy and Spanish Business: The Latin American Case). In an article titled “La expansión de Santander Central Hispano en Iberoamérica” [The Expansion of Santander Central Hispano in Spanish America], Juan Manuel Cendoya writes: “In Spanish America we find, definitively, a zone with a great potential for growth in the banking sector and where the cultural affinity with Spain, together with the knowledge we have of the principal markets where we were already present in specialized businesses, gave us a competitive advantage over European and North American competitors” (78). Cendoya goes on to point out the advantages of this investment for Latin Americans, who benefit from the technology and modern business practices that Spanish enterprises brought with them. As Pablo Tovar makes clear in the same issue, however, Spain’s investment in Latin America was not an act of beneficence but of economic necessity, one that took advantage of the economic crises throughout the former colonies.

Banks were the leading Spanish investors in Latin America, driven by the fall in returns from the Spanish market resulting from the saturation of the market and the fall in the differential between loans and deposits. . . . Banking’s solution was to diversify its investments, geographically (investing in new markets) as well as in its areas of activity (the energy sector and telecommunications). Its expansion in Latin America was favored by the openness and liberalization of the Latin American banking market, which followed the banking crisis of the 1980s. What is more, Spanish banks found little local competition, and they had important comparative advantages. On the one hand, many local banks found themselves faced with closure during the crisis, and others ended up seriously weakened. On the other hand, the liberalization of banking in Latin America increased the competition among all financial institutions (not only banks) for the provision of every type of financial and banking service, breaking the monopoly that banks traditionally held as savings institutions. (136)

The “apertura y liberalización” ‘opening and liberalization’ are represented in “Ejecutivas” as sexual freedom and open lesbianism, which irresistibly attract Paula. As a closeted lesbian, she can exploit but cannot fully participate in this freedom and openness.

We see this acquisitive side of the love story between Spain and
<https://newprairiepress.org/stcl/vol30/iss1/7>
 DOI: 10.4148/2334-4415.1617

Latin America even in the description of Paula's "transformation" into a lesbian as she changes her clothes after her business meetings are over: "every time she took off her executive clothing she lost little by little her feminine manners, and began to feel like a seducer: she liked the game of seduction between women because she felt that she occupied a dominant position, that her attractiveness inhibited them; and to counteract the effect, she acted a bit masculine, earthy" (14). If we recall the fate of Don Juan's women, we know that this does not bode well for the women who sleep with Paula, and our suspicions are soon confirmed. Sexually, Paula wants to lose control, to play the game of submission, and she meets a young woman in Buenos Aires who dominates her sexually and linguistically. Clara tells Paula to bite her:

—Te gusta morder . . . Mordé . . . , me gusta que me muerdan.

—Mordé . . . Mordé . . . , me gusta tanto este dialecto . . . , me gusta tanto tu ciudad, tu país. Los argentinos no sabéis lo que tenéis.

—Vos mordé, que yo te cuento. Tenemos unos gobiernos de mierda que se roban todo y un pueblo de mierda que los deja. (18-19)

—You like to bite. . . . Bite ["mordé" is an Argentine conjugation of the verb] . . . , I like to be bitten.

—Bite . . . Bite. . . , I like that dialect so much . . . I like your entire city, your country. You Argentines don't know what you have here.

—*You* bite, and I'll tell you what we have. A Shitty governments that steal everything and a shitty populace who lets them.

Paula, the Spaniard, presumes to see more and better the riches of the country, including their dialect of Castilian Spanish, but Clara points out that Paula's attitude simply exoticizes the American other, performing a kind of Orientalism. The sense of superiority is clear, but it does not last. When Clara orders her to kiss her, Paula obeys: "And she obeyed docilely, kissing her with an open mouth, her tongue reaching down to her throat" (19). This submissiveness, however, will only last as long as Paula remains in Buenos Aires with her lesbian friends. When she leaves for Spain, she goes in her executive guise and forbids Clara to come to the airport. When they see each other again in Spain, Paula is too busy to dedicate much time to Clara, and it is obvious that she prefers to keep her lesbian identity distant, and, preferably, in exotic America: "They agreed to

meet a few months later in Rio de Janeiro, without the agenda and without the executive pose" (26).

In "Ejecutivas" the forms of Spanish neo-imperialism are reflected linguistically in the battle between two forms of Spanish. The Spanish woman sees Argentine Spanish as a dialect of Spanish in general, by which she means Castilian Spanish, which would then be the mother tongue. The dialects are her children, and they may very well be charming, but they are still subject to her pedagogy, her control. Or they could be her lovers, her other tongues, that service her and reassert her centrality. American dialects, however, are *mestizos*, bastard children, like Donna Haraway's cyborgs, and their superior musicality—a quality that thoroughly seduces the Spaniard—is akin to the superior insight that Americans might have into the workings of their own societies, as Clara points out, despite the apparent omnipotence of Spanish business.

Other stories in *Cenicienta en Chueca* sound similar linguistic chords. In "Soledades," for example, the fissures of the European Union appear in the imperfect control that foreigners exercise over the language. In "Cenicienta en Chueca," we see that the exotic Latin American is not always prized in Spain; social class, ethnicity and education enter into Spanish reception of Latin Americans. A "white" Argentine executive or a Uruguayan chat mate who is interested in politics is clearly more prized than a woman like the protagonist, a poor, mestiza Peruvian immigrant who had been a nurse but is forced to work as a maid when she goes to seek her fortune in Madrid. The first part of the story describes how the protagonist discovered her lesbianism with her friend, then lover, Susana; how the two struggled to pursue careers and live together; how they felt isolated, with no gay/lesbian community to support them. The protagonist is forced to leave her country, and Susana, behind because the devastating effects of globalization on the economy have made it impossible to find work and live without the protection of a man: "But the crisis worsened: they fired her from the shop, they couldn't support themselves, there was no work, the violence was daily, constant. Lima was a hell, Peru and all of Latin America, a tinderbox that pushed everyone into exile" (182). She hopes to work as a nurse in Madrid, but prejudice makes it imposible, especially for a woman with indigenous physical traits: "Spain, the motherland, felt a cer-

tain phobia toward Peruvians! They didn't have the good fortune to be European and white, even if they were Western and Catholic, they were from the Third World" (182). She ends up as a maid working for an elderly Spanish woman typical of the Franco era, and her attitudes toward Latin Americans—"ésta que sólo quieren dinero pero trabajar nada de nada" "they just want money, but they don't want to work at all" (182)—reveal the prejudices of that regime. The woman's granddaughter, Charo, however, is able to see the queen beneath the protagonist's current image. She falls in love with her and rescues her from her miserable life:

She put her arm around her waist and brought her to the dance floor. They had barely put their arms around one another when she kissed her. . . . They left, got into Charo's car and went to her house. Finally, she was no longer fucking, but making love. She felt that . . . anything was possible, even to make it in this city. Charo made her leave her grandmother's house; then she rented a little apartment two streets away from Charo's, got a semi-legal job in a clinic, waited patiently to be awarded her title, and lived happily ever after. (190)

This story, which closes the collection, has a happy ending, but the very language used to describe it suggests that it is no more than a fairy tale.

By representing the communications and miscommunications in some transnational lesbian relationships that pass through Chueca, *Cenicienta en Chueca* lays bare the intersections between gender, economics, race, "modernity," and nationality in contemporary Spain. The text, with its allusions to communications technologies and globalized capital and its imaginative recreation of women's worlds, sexualities, and relationships, seems to fit nicely Haraway's definition of the cyborg:

A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction. The international women's movements have constructed "women's experience," as well as uncovered or discovered this crucial collective object. This experience is a fiction and fact of the most crucial, political kind. Liberation rests on the construction of the consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and

so of possibility. The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century. This is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion. (149)

Cenicienta en Chueca reminds us that language itself is a communication technology and that, even if print texts do not circulate in exactly the same way as words in cyberspace, literary fiction can still mark and disrupt the free—and sometimes, the costly—flows of resources, people, identities, and words across the new boundaries of the globalized world.

Notes

1 In his subsequent discussion of MUDs (Multi-User Domains) and MOOs (MUD Object-Oriented), Mitchell explains that the online participants in fantasy games like *Dungeons and Dragons* jointly create and modify an elaborate fiction: "These participants enter textual descriptions of imaginary places that others can visit, and of objects and robotic characters that populate those places, awaiting scripted interaction with future visitors. The underlying software ties all the descriptions and scripts together to create a single, continually evolving environment and provides an opportunity for you to meet and interact with other participants within that environment" (114).

2 Although some of my comments apply to various forms of cybersexuality, my focus in this article is limited to linguistic intercourse because I am comparing the verbal recreations of sexuality in the chat and the collection of short stories.

3 "By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation. In the traditions of 'Western' science and politics—the tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the productions of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other—the relation between organism and machine has been a border war. The stakes

in the border war have been the territories of production, reproduction, and imagination. This chapter is an argument for *pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction" (150).

4 For more on this topic, see my essay, "Globalization, Publishing, and the Marketing of 'Hispanic' Identities" and Mario Santana's *Foreigners in the Homeland*.

5 Juan Manuel Cendoya writes: "In Iberian America the Spanish banks have the advantage of language and a tremendous cultural and social proximity" (78).

6 There is a lesbian bar in Chueca called "Fulanita de tal."

7 It is interesting to note that letters figure prominently in several other stories, including "Cartas" and "Otras cartas." They are, however, only one form of discourse highlighted in the collection as a whole.

8 "Ciao" is used primarily in those Latin American countries—Argentina and Uruguay—with the greatest influx of Italian immigrants, but it has not traditionally been used in Spain. Likewise, "coger" is the Latin American equivalent of "follar," but it does not have that meaning in Spain.

9 I am grateful to Robert Richmond Ellis for pointing this out to me at the MLA Convention in December 2004.

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