

Reconsidering Maximiliano Rubín from Galdós's *Fortunata y Jacinta*

Jennifer Brady
University of Colorado at Boulder

What emotions we experience as we read—emotions such as sadness, pity, hope, and intrigue—, often guide us to take part in the creation of a literary text. As readers, we fill in the blanks, tie up loose ends, and ultimately, through the act of reading, we enter into a pact with the author to create the text. In *The Pleasure of the Text*, Roland Barthes explains this implied alliance between reader and author. He writes, “[T]here is not, behind the text, someone active (the writer) and out front someone passive (the reader); there is not a subject and the object” (16). Furthermore, Stephen Gilman in his book *Galdós and the Art of the European Novel, 1867-1887* reminds us that “the reader and the writer must be understood without ontological distinction” (191). With this said, fictional characters are created within this complicated, yet mutually beneficial, relationship between author and reader.

How, then, do we react when we come across a character like Maximiliano Rubín from *Fortunata y Jacinta* (1886-87) by Benito Pérez Galdós? We may be tempted to quickly label him “foolish, pathetic and wretched” just as Arthur Carl Holmberg does in his 1978 article “Louis Lambert and Maximiliano Rubín: The Inner Vision and the Outer Man” (135). Yet, it seems a bit rash and not that productive to apply such deplorable human traits to a fictional character. Could it be that Maxi is a much more elaborate and intriguing than Holmberg leads us to believe?

Maxi is the first character that we meet in the second part of *Fortunata y Jacinta*. As the first chapter of Part Two progresses, the narrator stresses the weak physical state of the youngest of the three Rubín brothers. He writes, “Maximiliano era raquítico, de naturaleza pobre y linfática, absolutamente privado de gracias personales. Como que había nacido de siete meses y me le criaron con biberón y con una cabra” (I, 449). Maxi suffers from migraines and is often sick, and to top it all off, the narrator also highlights Maxi’s apathy and lack of intelligence, noting that

no se había despertado en él ningún afán grande ni esa curiosidad sedienta de que sale la sabiduría. . . [U]saba de su escasa memoria como de un ave de cetrería para cazar las ideas; pero el halcón se le marchaba a lo mayor, dejándole con la boca abierta y mirando al cielo. (I, 455)

Just when we think we have enough information to construct an image of Maxi, the narrator insists on giving us more description, this time underscoring with even more insistence the negative physical appearance of poor Maxi. He continues to describe Maxi in the following lines:

Era de cuerpo pequeño y no bien conformado, tan endeble que parecía que se lo iba a llevar el viento, la cabeza chata, el pelo lacio y ralo. . . Su piel era lustrosa, fina, cutis de niño con las transparencias de mujer desmedrada y clorótica. Tenía el hueso de la nariz hundido y chafado. . . [S]iempre con la boca abierta. (I, 456)

With these deplorable descriptions, readers may be tempted to write Maxi off, and we may begin to wonder if maybe Maxi is the sad character that Holmberg wants us to believe. If readers can get past the bombardment of negative physical descriptions of Maxi, however, it will become evident that the youngest Rubín brother offers much more meaning to the novel other than just his function as the pitiful counterpart to Juanito. The complex development of Maximiliano Rubín deserves a more in-depth analysis that takes into consideration his continuous observation and interpretation of the world that surrounds him which often results in the creation of alternative realities.

Let us examine the hints at his autonomy that appear very soon after the inundation of the numerous negative descriptions of Maxi's physical and emotional state. Readers should be struck at the insightfulness that the young Rubín brother shows as he ponders the world around him. This character, which Galdós first presents in a negative light, makes an astonishing observation about the process of human experience by questioning the arbitrariness of the sign (Tsuchiya 54). Anticipating Ferdinand de Saussure's ideas of semiology as set forth in his 1916 study, *Course in General Linguistics*, Maxi ponders the connection—and the inevitable gap—between the signifier and the signified.¹ In this scene, Maxi asks himself:

Verdaderamente—decía él—, ¿por qué ha de ser sueño lo del día y vida efectiva lo de noche? Es cuestión de nombres y de que diéramos en llamar *dormir* a lo que llamamos *despertar*, y *acostarse* al *levantarse*. (I, 462)

Soon after the many negative physical and mental descriptions of Maxi, this declaration reveals that he is not merely the sickly character that we were led to believe. Rather, he seems to be actively engaged in the world around him by attempting to make sense of what he perceives *vis à vis* the system of language.

In effect, here Maxi questions the arbitrariness of the sign, which seems to enhance and complicate the evolution of his character development. Akiko Tsuchiya comments:

Maximiliano Rubín exemplifies Barthes' [sic] *homo significans*, who is constantly making the sense of the signs in the world around him: his 'madness' represents a self-conscious process of interpretation. Maxi's role as interpreter is central to the project of the novel, which dramatizes the fictional process. (54-55)

As an interpreter of the world that surrounds him, Maxi exemplifies the intimately intertwined connection between human perception and language; that is to say, between his reflection about the world and the assigning of words to make sense of what he observes. In the introduction to Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*, Ron Harris

astutely writes, “For instead of men’s words being seen as peripheral to men’s understanding of reality, men’s understanding of reality came to be seen as revolving about their social use of verbal signs” (ix). By the same token, it is perhaps Maxi’s fascination with language that which inspires him to experiment with creation of stories that highlight the thorny line between “reality”—the narrative space within the novel and fiction—and the intercalated stories that Maxi constructs.

Maxi will, in fact, prove himself to be time and time again an active observer of the world and thus, a creator/writer of alternative realities. Barthes confesses, “I am interested in language because it wounds or seduces me” (*Pleasure* 38). It seems like Maxi is also attracted to the power of language, to both the constructive and destructive forces of words. Likewise, Tsuchiya comments, “Of all the interpreters within the novel [. . .] Maximiliano Rubín maintains the greatest consciousness of the signs around him; consequently he is better able to manipulate them to produce his own fictions” (56). Maxi is beginning to sound more and more like a Cervantine character.

If don Quijote takes cue on how to interpret and interact in the world from reading chivalric novels, it seems that Maxi examines the world that surrounds him according to the hegemonic societal norms presented in the novel. Maxi attempts to rewrite what is written in order to redefine his place in society. Tsuchiya tells us that Maxi “constantly constructs fictions in order to bridge the gap between the reality of his social marginalization and his desire to become accepted by society” (56-57). By constructing alternative fictions, Maxi continuously creates spaces where he can contemplate his identity and create alternative identities that perhaps do not fit within the societal standards.

Moreover, Kevin S. Larsen emphasizes the intertextual relationship that the works of Miguel de Cervantes—accepted by most as the first and greatest novelist—and Benito Pérez Galdós share. He writes that

[Galdós] cannot escape Cervantes, but, by the same token, Cervantes cannot escape from him. Time and again, Galdós incorporates incidents, characters, and themes into his own fiction, making “new” the “old,” reaffirming at once his condition of dependent independence and independent dependence. (ii)

The dialogue between Cervantes and Galdós’s works has not gone unstudied. While most scholars highlight the intertextual connection between the two characters don Quijote and Fortunata (Gilman, Larsen, et. al.), a comparison may also be drawn between the great *hidalgo* and Maximiliano. In this sense, don Quijote and Maxi share some similar qualities: both characters construct their own stories; both are *cuerdilocos*, which permits them to slip between reality and fiction within a world where sometimes the line is not so clear between what is real and what is not; and the two strive towards autonomy yet often fall short since they cannot escape their role as dependent characters.ⁱⁱ

Stephen Gilman points out that “Alonso Quijano is a reader of romances; they are fictional, often grotesquely fictional; yet he comes to believe that they are true. [. . .]

[T]hey seem vividly present, more real than reality” (230). Maxi frequently constructs fiction as an escapist technique, as a way to momentarily flee the reality that surrounds him. Similarly to don Quijote, Maxi’s stories often become a world of their own. So it begs to question, what is this world from which Maxi so longs to escape through the construction of alternative realities?

The world that Galdós creates in *Fortunata y Jacinta* is one that is driven by money, one that exemplifies the common phrase, “Money makes the world go ’round.” Money is a driving force in novel: some characters make it, more characters spend it, and a several characters loan it out.ⁱⁱⁱ Money also serves as a social marker, creating difference through the power of commerce and exchange. Maxi does not function within the walls of the bourgeois Madrilenian society: he resists learning a trade and it is his aunt, doña Lupe, who controls the flow of money not only in the Rubín family but also in the public sphere. She literally can sniff out money—at one point, Galdós writes, “Pero tenía doña Lupe tan fino olfato para descubrir dinero, que estaba segura de dar con los billetes si [Fortunata] los había” (II, 301)—, and she keeps detailed track of who owes her money and how much money she makes from giving out loans. Maxi seems to construct works of fiction, or alternative realities, in order to locate his identity within this world where money rules.

In fact, soon after the many negative descriptions of him, Maxi creates his first alternative reality. After observing the military students from his window, Maxi daydreams about being one of them. That is to say, he constructs a new role for himself, ultimately trying to figure out where he fits in within Galdós’s Madrid. The narrator tells us:

Algunas noches, Maximiliano soñaba que tenía su tizona, bigote y uniforme, y hablaba dormido. Despierto deliraba también, figurándose haber crecido una cuarta, tener las piernas derechas y el cuerpo no tan caído para adelante, imaginándose que se le arreglaba la nariz, que le brotaba el pelo y que se le ponía un empaque marcial como el del más pintado. (II, 457)

Fantasizing about a life different than his own, readers begin to see Maxi not only as an observer of the world that surrounds him but also as a creator of fictions. Furthermore, he modifies what he observes: here he inserts himself into the scene of the military school that he observes from his window, dreaming up altogether new fictions of his life. Maxi’s recreation of himself as a military student even compels him to follow the students as they march through town. Once again, the narrator notes:

Los sábados por la tarde, cuando los alumnos iban al ejercicio con su fusil al hombro, Maximiliano se iba tras ellos para verles maniobrar, y la fascinación de este espectáculo durábale hasta el lunes. (II, 458)

Allowing his thoughts to enter into a fantasy world, Maxi perpetuates the idea of he himself as a military student throughout the week as “completo éxtasis” (II, 458). Constructing fiction—creating mini-worlds in which he can escape the rigid society to

which he belongs—allows Maxi the space to take on, or at the least, to fantasize about taking on, different roles.

The next role Maxi takes on in the novel is one that exemplifies his autonomy to create alternative realities within the space of the bourgeois Madrilenian society that Galdós constructs in the novel. When Maxi meets Fortunata, he becomes completely love-struck. Galdós describes Maxi's reaction upon meeting the beautiful Fortunata: "Maximiliano la miró mejor. No se hartaba de mirarla, y una obstrucción se le fijó en el pecho, cortándole la respiración" (II, 465). It is immediately after meeting Fortunata—an experience that will affect profound changes in the youngest of the Rubín brothers—that Maxi creates one of his most splendid fictions in the novel: he creates a mini-detective story, casting himself and his aunt into the roles of criminal and detective respectively.^{iv}

After setting a date to meet Fortunata, Maxi experiences newly found autonomy, which will ultimately seem to persuade him to continue to create fictional stories about the world in which he inhabits. The narrator describes the change that takes place in Maxi after meeting Fortunata in the following lines:

El mismo notaba que algo se había abierto dentro de sí, como arca sellada que se rompe, soltando un mundo de cosas, antes comprometidas y ahogadas. . . Al mismo tiempo la apatía y la pereza quedaban vencidas. . . Andábanle por dentro comezones y pruritos nuevos, un deseo de hacer algo, y de probar su voluntad en actos grandes y difíciles. (II, 469-70)

Something is about to happen: Maxi feels the desire to *do* something. He carries out this desire by creating a story, even casting the characters upon arriving home.

In a world driven by money, Maxi knows that he cannot spend money on Fortunata without his Aunt Lupe finding out. Just as he has done before in the scene of the military school, he once again dodges reality and constructs an alternative reality. Through the lens of the narrator, Maxi writes a mini-detective story. When Maxi arrives home after meeting Fortunata, he grabs his piggy bank. The narrator tells us:

Su primer impulso fue estrellarla contra el suelo y romperla para sacar el dinero; y ya la tenía en la mano para consumir tan antieconómico propósito, cuando le asaltaron temores de que su tía oyera el ruido y entrase y el armara un cisco. (II, 470)

Maxi does not act right away on his notion to break open the piggy bank because he is frightened at the way his aunt may react, which reveals that Maxi still experiences the emotions of a child. Furthermore, the fact that Maxi, a university student studying to be a pharmacist, even uses a piggy bank propagates the author's infantilization of the youngest Rubín brother. As an object that a child would have, the piggy bank may make readers think that Maxi has no autonomy at all, that in fact, his aunt controls his money and metonymically himself as if he were a child and his aunt were his guardian. Once again, we are reminded of Holmberg's assessment of Maxi as "foolish, pathetic and

wretched,” yet we realize that ironic creations are part of Galdós’s bag of narrative tricks. The infantilization of Maxi is a slick maneuver on the part of the author that, at first glance, may only seem to add to the negative and pathetic characterization of Maxi. Throughout the rest of the novel it is a technique that Galdós will continue to employ to develop and complicate the delineation of Maxi. By the end of the novel, however, it becomes evident that Maxi is not as simple as previously thought.

With the piggy bank in his hands, Maxi constructs a mini detective story where he takes on the role of the criminal, the piggy bank is personified as the victim, and his aunt fittingly becomes the detective. Maxi quickly begins to plot a violent plan: he will purchase a piggy bank that looks like the one he owns, break open the old one, take the money, and of course, try the best he can to hide the crime from his aunt. To carry out his scheme, he employs many of the same techniques that are frequently found in detective stories. Once again Tsuchiya defines Maxi’s function in the novel as the “interpreter of signs and creator of fictions” (53) and it is certain that in the piggy bank scene, Maxi does construct an alternative reality.

In his book, *La novela policiaca española del siglo XIX*, Ricardo Landeira highlights the most prominent characteristics of the detective fiction genre, setting forth a list of just over twenty of the basic characteristics that works of detective fiction share. In the piggy bank scene, Galdós relies on at least ten of the characteristics expounded by Landeira. Let us examine the tendencies as we analyze the piggy bank scene. According to Landeira, the first two characteristics of a piece of detective fiction are:

- I.) El relato policiaco restablece el orden del medioambiente social en que tiene lugar un crimen. Lo realiza castigando al culpable y rehabilitando a su víctima.
- II.) El tema central de la literatura policiaca es una búsqueda de identidad, de la identidad del asesino cuando no de la víctima. (17)

I choose to group these two tendencies together because it seems that they function symbiotically in Maxi’s mini-detective fiction creation. Maxi attempts to rewrite the hierarchical order of his aunt’s home, the micro-social environment that he inhabits. Breaking his piggy bank to take the money inside and replacing the piggy bank with one that is similar makes Maxi not only feel like a criminal, but also it allows him to feel independent in a house where his Aunt Lupe runs the show. In a sense, it is only through the creation of an alternative reality—one where he is a daring criminal and his aunt the detective that he is trying to outwit—that Maxi is able to subvert the rules of the house. In this fictional world that Maxi creates and performs in, he calls the shots. Furthermore, Maxi exemplifies the second tendency outlined by Landeira, but perhaps in a different way than in which the author may have intended. Through the act of breaking the piggy bank and taking the money from it (it must be mentioned that it is his money), Maxi, as a supposed criminal himself, seems to be the one who is searching for his identity. Once again, we see that Maxi creates fictions as both a way to escape the reality

that surrounds him—a reality that suffocates his potential—and as a way to create space in which he can wrestle with constructing his desired identity.

Another tendency of detective fiction that Landeira outlines is that, “[e]l móvil del crimen es, con aburrida regularidad, el dinero. Ni los celos ni el odio se le aproximan como primer motivo” (19). Precisely, in a world where characters believe that money can buy love—readers will remember that Jacinta purchases the young child, Pitusín, to fulfill her urge to become a mother—Maxi thinks that his only option to win Fortunata’s love is purchase a place for her to live.^v Money, then, is his motive for the crime.

In this crime that Maxi conjures up and carries out, the piggy bank is personified as the victim. The narrator describes the scene to us, stating that Maxi “[p]ermaneció un rato sentado en una silla junto a la cama, con las dos huchas sobre ésta, acariciando suavemente la que iba a ser víctima” (II, 474). As a creator of fictions, Maxi easily slips into a fantastical world where the piggy bank is his victim and he is the assassin. In order to hide his crime, Maxi asks the maid, Papitos, to borrow the pestle to take out a nail that is stuck in his boot. The story allows him an excuse for the loud noise that occurs as he breaks open the piggy bank. The alternative reality continues as Maxi breaks open his piggy bank, metaphorically murdering his victim:

Dábale compasión de la víctima, y para evitar su enternecimiento, que podría frustrar el acto, hizo lo que los criminales que se arrojan frenéticos a dar el primer golpe para atrás. Cogió la hucha y con febril mano le atizó un porrazo. La víctima exhaló un gemido seco. (II, 475)

With his victim shattered into pieces, Maxi then scoops the coins into his pocket. Galdós describes the scene, where once again Maxi is pegged as an assassin. He writes, “Con mano trémula, el asesino lo recogió todo menos la calderilla, y se lo guardó en el bolsillo del pantalón” (II, 475). Landeira reminds us that, “[e]l crimen por excelencia en toda novela policiaca es el asesinato. Tan solo la gravedad, el riesgo y la pena conllevada por un homicidio son capaces de sostener el interés o el suspense anejos al peor de los crímenes” (19). Here Galdós, employing his cunning, ironic wit, modifies the rules to not describe the murder of a person, but rather to detail the metaphorical assassination of Maximiliano’s personified piggy bank.

The crime, which occurs in young Maxi’s bedroom, follows another characteristic of a piece of detective fiction laid out by Landeira. He writes:

El escenario predilecto del relato policiaco tradicional tiende a ser circunscrito en el espacio-tiempo. [...] En la gran ciudad será en un vecindario, un edificio de pisos residenciales, una compañía de negocios, un ministerio, un teatro, o sea *una entidad reconocible y bien definida*. El ámbito ha de limitarse en cuanto a tiempo, lugar y acción con el fin de intensificar todo lo posible las emociones del lector. Por eso se cronometra todo y a todos. (19-20, emphasis mine)

The space of the action is Maxi's room: it is space that is closed off from the rest of the house, yet it is also a space where Maxi knows that Papitos and his Aunt Lupe often enter, so he must take great care to clean up and erase any evidence of the crime scene. Additionally, the time of the crime is quick, which does cause, just as Landeira tells us, an intensified reaction in the reader.

Readers of this scene sense that Maxi is doing something wrong, that he is challenging his aunt's control of the house and thus, the hegemonic role of money in the rest of the society. Yet, readers also know that Maxi is creating fiction out of something that really does not merit such a construction. The money in the piggy bank, just like the inheritance that he will receive from his deceased aunt is his, but he only feels able to access it from within the alternative reality that he construes.

Suffering from great guilt, Maxi worries about where to hide the evidence of the messy crime. The broken pieces of the piggy bank are described as fragments of bloody human bones. Galdós writes, "Los cascotes esparcidos semejaban pedazos de un cráneo, y el polvillo rojo del barro cocido que ensuciaba la colcha blanca parecióle al criminal manchas de sangre" (II, 475). Through the lens of the narrator, Maxi wonders, "Aquellos cascotes, ¿dónde los echaría? He aquí un problema que le puso los pelos de punta al asesino" (II, 476). Maxi's concerns to hide the broken pieces of the piggy bank (or the metaphorical cadaver) make sense within the detective story that he is constructing. Landeira reminds us, "Tanto como un detective es imprescindible un *corpus delicti*. Las claves, las huellas, las deducciones, las suposiciones y las hipótesis todas emanan óptimamente del cadáver" (19). Maxi must clean up the crime scene and hide all evidence, which he does because he knows that his Aunt Lupe takes her role as detective very seriously. The narrator relates the scene to us: "El criminal se embozó bien en la capa y apagó la luz de su cuarto para coger los restos de la víctima y sacarlos ocultamente" (II, 478).

Feeling guilty for committing the crime—the narrator reminds us that "[é]l no había robado nada a nadie, y sin embargo, estaba como los ladrones" (II, 476)—, Maxi worries that his Aunt Lupe will discover his crime. "[C]uando le llamaron a comer, y fue al comedor y se encaró con su tía," the narrator writes, "pensó que ésta le iba a conocer en la cara lo que había hecho" (II, 477). Perhaps Maxi is nervous because, just as Landeira outlines, "El detective es un superdotado intelectual, siempre más listo o más lógico que la policía. A la inteligencia suelen sumarse la minuciosidad y el perfeccionismo como otras dotes caracterizantes" (17). Now, even though there is no policeman in this fiction that Maxi creates, the truth is that Lupe is an intelligent, detail-oriented character as evidenced by her careful loan transactions and her meticulous control of the household activities of Papitos and her nephews.

Additionally, Lupe seems to play the role of detective very well, conforming to many of the tendencies that Landeira sets forth. To begin, Lupe is an androgynous being. Landeira notes that "[c]uando el detective es mujer, como en el caso de la entrometida Miss Jane Marple, lo más practicable es que sea vieja, solterona o asexual" (17). She is single and authoritative. Furthermore, her body is disfigured; one of her breasts was

surgically removed presumably due to cancer. Her body, then, along with her strong, masculine-inflected character, challenges the societal demands of a stereotypical woman in late-nineteenth century Spain. Also, we must not ignore Lupe's social class. Although not part of the highest social and economic class like the Santa Cruz family, Lupe does not need to work to maintain her lifestyle. She could, in fact, live solely off the interest gained by her monetary loans. Landeira highlights the fact that the typical detective "pertenece a una clase económica o social con medios suficientes como para no verse obligado a trabajar sino por afición" (17). Lupe hands out loans not because she has to make money, but rather because her affinity is money.

Maximiliano takes all of the precautions necessary so that Lupe does not discover that a crime was committed. Once again, the meticulousness of Maxi points to his role as a creator of fictions. He painstakingly thinks of every last detail. The narrator describes the scene:

Como las monedas que en el bolsillo del pantalón llevaba no eran paja, se denunciaba sonando una contra otra. Por evitar este ruido importuno, Maximiliano se metió un pañuelo en aquel bolsillo, atarugándolo bien para que las piezas de plata y oro no chistasen, y así fue en efecto, pues en todo el trayecto desde Chamberí hasta la casa de Torquemada el oído de doña Lupe, que siempre afinaba con el rumor de dinero como el oído de los gatos con los pasos de ratón, y hasta parecía que entiesaba las orejas, no percibió nada, absolutamente nada. (II, 478)

Unable to keep the secret, Maxi tells his aunt about the crime that he committed. The fact that he divulges the details of the mini-detective fiction to Lupe reiterates that he is a creator of alternative realities and that he is in control of writing his own story. Maxi confesses to doña Lupe the following:

Rompí la hucha; tenía tres mil y pico reales, lo bastante para que viva con modestia. [. . .] Mire usted, cogí la hucha vieja, después de traer ésta, que es enteramente igual. Machaqué la llena; cogí el oro y la plata y pasé a ésta el cobre, añadiendo dos pesetas en cuartos para que pesara lo mismo. (II, 537)

He describes the details of the crime to his aunt, the detective in the story. Constructing fiction seems to thrill the young Rubín brother as the narrator tells us that Maxi "[e]staba excitadísimo y tenía el rostro encendido. Doña Lupe no había visto nunca tanto brillo en aquellos ojos ni animación semejante en aquella cara" (II, 537).

Landeira posits the following intriguing statement: "La literatura policiaca reordena la realidad mejorándola como secretamente anhelamos" (16). As readers of detective fiction it is true that reading a story where order is reestablished—where the good guy wins and the bad guy is punished—brings us pleasure. Furthermore, Maxi as the author invites readers to participate in the crime as witnesses. Readers, then, as the voyeurs of the story, visualize what is revealed to them and complete what is left out. It is an enjoyable role, one that Barthes highlights as "the very rhythm of what is read and

what is not read that creates pleasure” (*Pleasure* 11). Additionally, from the perspective of fictional character, order, and more specifically the rewriting of order, may be also what he secretly desires. Creating alternative realities for Maxi seems to permit him a space to escape, even just temporarily, the reality that surrounds him.

One last piece of insight into the delineation of Maxi as a creator of his own fiction may come from the physical signs that Galdós designates to this character. If we agree with Peter Brooks that the body is often employed as the site of inscription and/or projection of meaning, Maxi’s body tells us a lot about how he functions as an interpreter of the world around him and a writer of fictional stories. In his introductory chapter of *Body Work*, Brooks expands on Barthes’s theory of the human body as developed in *S/Z*, commenting that:

Barthes seems to say that the symbolic field and the body at some point converge: that meaning, especially meaning conceived as the text’s self-representations—its representations of what it is and what it is doing—takes place in relation to the body, and that we are forever striving to make the body into a text. (6-7)

For Brooks, just like for Barthes, the human body is both “the agent and object of desire” (5). It is the site of inscription and projection of stories, so it makes sense that Maxi’s weak and sickly body would reflect the process of constant negotiation that he engages in with the outside world.

Maxi not only suffers from hereditary syphilis but also frequently experiences degenerating migraines. His bouts with pounding headaches last throughout the entire novel. Could these headaches be physical signs of him trying to process and make sense of the world? If his body is the site where meaning may be constructed, it seems that his strong migraines could, in fact, point to his sensibility towards interpreting the world that surrounds him and his desire to reinterpret what he observes—to write stories of what he sees—in order to create his own space.

Also making the connection between Maxi’s susceptibility to debilitating headaches and his sensibility to the world around him, Ángel Garma comments:

El que fuese en Maximiliano especialmente la cabeza la parte del cuerpo que reaccionaba así, recibiendo intensamente las agresiones de estímulos exteriores provocadores de emociones perjudiciales, era debido a la importancia que en él tenían los procesos intelectuales, orgánicamente localizados en la cabeza. (89)

Maxi’s head—the space of his body that suffers from awful migraines and the space where he also construes fictional stories—offers insight into the complex delineation of his character. Furthermore, Maxi himself recognizes the power—both destructive, as seen in his headaches, and constructive, as seen in his ability to create alternative realities—of his head. His head, then, may just be the site where he wrestles with locating and defining his autonomy. In one instance, Maxi ponders this auto-control, stating, “¿Para qué quiero estar cordura que ahora que tengo? Con mi cabeza me

gobierno yo solo” (II, 422). Once again stressing the autonomy of self *vis à vis* first and foremost his thoughts (that is to say, the fictions that he creates) and thus, metonymically via his head, he exclaims, “Mi cabeza es un prodigio de claridad y raciocinio” (II, 423). For Maxi, then, his physical body and his inner mind share an intimate relationship. His physical body and his interior thoughts seem to weave a web of intricate correspondences, which are reflected within Maximiliano’s physical body often in the form of migraines and weakness.

In the last part of *Fortunata y Jacinta*, Segismundo Ballester discovers that Maxi is reading *La pluralidad de mundos habitados*, a nineteenth-century book that outlines the possibility of life on Mars (II, 271). We can take this as a sign that Maxi’s ability to distinguish between reality and fiction has become foggier. The narrator tells us that Maxi “vivía en sí mismo, y todas sus ideas y sentimientos producían de la elaboración interior. La impulsión objetiva era casi nula, resultando de esto una existencia enteramente soñadora” (II, 273). Yet, even though Maxi fluctuates between bouts of insanity and bouts of lucidness throughout the novel, it is only when Maxi thinks that Fortunata is dead when he becomes lucid once again and blames his craziness on jealousy (II, 480).

As the novel ends, both Fortunata and Maxi meet their fate. Ballester escorts Maxi to the insane asylum, Leganés, and Maxi seems to accept being confined within the walls of the mental hospital. Standing in front of his future home/prison, he exclaims to himself:

¡Si creerán estos tontos que me engañan! Esto es Leganés. Lo acepto, lo acepto y me callo, en prueba de la sumisión absoluta de mi voluntad a lo que el mundo quiera hacer de mi persona. No encerrarán entre murallas mi pensamiento. Resido en las estrellas. Pongan al llamado Maximiliano Rubín en un palacio o en un muladar. . . lo mismo da. (II, 541-42)

Maxi succumbs to his will by entering the asylum, yet unlike characters such as Antonio Azorín and Fernando Ossorio from the philosophical novels of 1902—*Amor y pedagogía* by Juan Martínez Ruiz (Azorín) and *Camino de perfección* by Pío Baroja, respectively—, Maxi maintains his autonomy as he promises to continue to express his thoughts. It is worth reiterating his declaration: he exclaims, “No encerrarán entre murallas mis pensamientos.” It seems, then, that Maxi—unlike Antonio Azorín who cannot write, think or create once he succumbs to his will of marrying Iluminada—will, in fact, continue to interpret signs around him and create alternative realities even once he has been locked within the walls of the hospital.

Just as the study began, so will it end, with a brief commentary about the experience of the reader. How we interpret the ending of *Fortunata y Jacinta*, whether we believe that Maxi will continue to construct alternative realities or whether we think that his tendencies towards insanity will overtake him, offers insight to how we conceptualize signs. Paul Julian Smith writes that words, fittingly, just like money, only exist in circulation (180). Reading, writing, buying, selling, and so on, are processes in

constant motion, which Barthes defines as the “limitless process of equivalences, representations that nothing will ever stop, orient, fix, sanction” (*S/Z* 40). This is part of the “novelistic consciousness” (Gilman 194) that Galdós expresses in his literary works, which allows us to realize that reading and writing—within a text or within the sphere of reality—are intimately entwined and mutually beneficial.

Notes

ⁱ Saussure states it clearly when he writes, “The link between signal and signification is arbitrary. Since we are treating a sign as the combination in which a signal is associated with a signification, we can express this more simply as: *the linguistic sign is arbitrary*” (67).

ⁱⁱ Both characters are dependent first and foremost on the reader to construct them.

ⁱⁱⁱ To understand the guiding force of money in the novel, readers only have to remember Barbarita and Estupiñá’s daily shopping sprees. Sarah King notes that, “Barbarita is so steeped in the bourgeois value system of acquisition and material possession that she not only can buy her happiness, but rather, her happiness quite literally is buying” (82).

^{iv} It must be mentioned that Galdós may have been influenced by great pieces of nineteenth-century detective fiction such as “Una antigualla de Sevilla” (1833) by Ángel Saavedra, the Duke of Rivas, “El testigo de bronce” (1833) de José Zorrilla, and *El clavo* (1853) by Pedro Antonio de Alarcón. Additionally, he shared a romantic relationship with Emilia Pardo Bazán, who also wrote first-class pieces of detective fiction: her 1911 novella *La gota de sangre*, along with many short stories, incorporate characteristics specific to the genre of detective fiction. The relationship between Galdós and the then married Countess lasted from the summer of 1888 until the beginning of 1890 (Landeira 81). Galdós himself also published a collection of fictional reports about a true-life crime in the volume entitled *El crimen de la calle de Fuencarral* between 1888 and 1889. It comes of no surprise, then, that Galdós would incorporate bits and pieces of detective fiction into his works even before the publication of *El crimen de la calle de Fuencarral*. Furthermore, it is appropriate that Galdós would employ a fictional character like Maxi—a character who observes the world around him, ponders its meaning, and frequently constructs mini-stories to alter what he sees—to create a miniature piece of detective fiction.

^v Of course, as readers quickly realize, money is not what guides Fortunata. Madly in love with Juanito Santa Cruz, she refuses to accept his money for she only desires his reciprocated loyal love. It must be mentioned that in some cases, however, she does accept money—from Sr. Feijoó and from Maxi, for instance—but she never accepts money as a substitute to what she considers true, honorable love.

Works Cited

- Barthes, Roland. *The Pleasure of the Text*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Noonday P, 1975.
- . *S/Z*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1974.
- Brooks, Peter. *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1993.
- Galdós, Benito Pérez. *Fortunata y Jacinta*. 1886-87. Vols. I and II. Madrid: Cátedra, 2002.
- Garma, Ángel. "Jaquica, pseudo-oligofrenia y delirio en un personaje de Pérez Galdós." *Ficción* 14 (1958): 84-102.
- Gilman, Stephan. *Galdós and the Art of the European Novel, 1867-1887*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1981.
- Harris, Roy. "Translator's Introduction." Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics*. 1916. Ed. Charles Bally, Albert Sechehaye, and Albert Riedlinger. La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1992.
- Holmberg, Arthur Carl. "Louis Lambert and Maximiliano Rubín: The Inner Vision and the Outer Man." *Hispanic Review* 46.2 (1978): 119-36.
- King, Sarah. "Food Imagery in *Fortunata y Jacinta*." *Anales Galdosianos* 18 (1983): 79-88.
- Landeira, Ricardo. *El género policíaco en la literatura española del siglo XIX*. Alicante: U de Alicante, 2001.
- Larsen, Kevin S. *Cervantes and Galdós in Fortunata y Jacinta: Tales of Impertinent Curiosity*. Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen P, 1999.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics*. 1916. Ed. Charles Bally, Albert Sechehaye, and Albert Riedlinger. Trans. Roy Harris. La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1992.
- Smith, Paul Julian. *The Body Hispanic: Gender and Sexuality in Spanish and Spanish American Literature*. New York: Oxford UP, 1989.
- Tsuchiya, Akiko. "Maxi and the Signs of Madness: Reading as a Creation in *Fortunata y Jacinta*." *Hispanic Review* 56.1 (1988): 53-71.