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THE BODY AS WEAPON IN *INSOLACIÓN* BY EMILIA PARDO

Recent literary theories define the body as a cultural product, as an entity, or as a source of profuse meanings. Regardless of the genre examined, these contemporary literary theories assert that the body functions as a key to unlock the textual message. The body, in its most sweeping semantic definition, can simultaneously become one or several things, replete with meaning and representative of a multiplicity of genres; in literature, for instance, one finds the heroic body, the tragic body, the sacred body, as well as the historic and the mythical one.

Many of the studies on the body, whether in poetry or in narrative, are informed by psychoanalytical theories advanced by Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein, and Jacques Lacan as they assert that the body offers the foundation of the symbolic and even of language itself. These psychoanalytical theories conceive of the body as being part of a cultural crux with itself and with its other; paradoxically, the body then becomes "something" external, residing out of written language but that all the same language itself strives to transmit. According to these theories, the body, be it one's own or that of another provides not only pleasure ("jouissance") but also knowledge and power.

Still, other critics assert that the body-as-text is a concept that in recent years has been disseminated with ever-growing interest, especially by cultures already marginalized. Essentially, mainstream critics assume that marginality theorists presume, too readily, when they define identities according to the external appearance of the body; furthermore, most traditional critics presuppose that peripheral authors appropriate the body to express intimate aspects of desire, of passion, of emptiness, or of solitude and that they do so in an attempt to redefine their own subjectivities. These same critics argue that scholars concerned with culture on the margins arbitrarily interpret the body, and they assign to it the capacity of being read as a text, a book, a song, a painting or any other media upon which one writes but also one from which one can derive meaning through the act of reading. That is to say, mainstream criticism accuses cultural critics who deal with peripheral culture of deeming the body to be a cultural space already inscribed with meaning, and which others need to read so as to understand their own marginalized subjectivities.

In reality, there are several ways in which one could approach the study of the body as text. The first reading describes the inscription of *SCRIPTA MEDITERRANEA*, Vol. XXVI, 2005, 27

an individual upon birth by markers such as race, color, kinship or other immutable aspects. These corporeal inscriptions do not acquire great meaning until they begin to be interpreted or read by another, when in fact they become cultural prescriptions. Subsequently, these cultural meanings begin to attain positive or negative cultural annotations. This line of thought reveals that more often than not these inscriptions are displaced on to the theme of sexuality; in fact, these corporal inscriptions almost exclusively translate into sexuality. However, rendering the diverse inscriptions of race, color, etc. as sexuality thus devalues many other aspects of the individual's vital experience like level of education, socialization, intelligence, socio-economic influence or other essential characteristics.

Not surprisingly, the twenty first century brings forth many unusual forms of body-writing that are meant to alter the body, for instance, tattoos, mutilations, piercings, as well as possible alterations in skin texture and pigmentation, hair color, and so forth. It is a conspicuous and visual form used to inscribe one's own body with the expectation that others will read and interpret it. One may want, and may need at times, to alter or to modify the physicality of one's features; nonetheless, no one can ensure that her own bodily inscription will be interpreted as it was at first intended. On the contrary, the social order typically will rewrite and interpret the "editorialized" bodily text in ways that truly may depart from the original, deliberate individual inscription.

As of late, the study of the body has acquired great currency mostly because of new schools of thought that try to reincorporate the theme of the subject in theoretical productions, that is to say, to render the subject's body as language, in the sense that covers various systems of differentiated signs: the notion of the textual body and the body as an compilation of various texts, either cultural, literary, artistic, ecological-environmental, or socio-economic. The body-as-text, to a large extent derives from feminist theories (Butler 1990 Jaggar and Bordo 1989). The considerations of body-as-text has also influenced anthropological theories of recent decades, particularly in the interpretive schools of postmodernism. What is more, the body-as-text, as it is applied to genre, is presented through different analyses with symbolic meanings that mostly conform to a given historical context; the body becomes a medium for possible symbolic, ideological constructions of the socio-economy at hand.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, when patriarchal culture predominated, the textual inscriptions of the female body could be interpreted as aggressive, graphic texts, however veiled, and made available to a culturally prescribed reader. However, these texts still demanded, through cultural signs that were offered as disguise, as subterfuge, a different reading, as is the case of *Insolación* (1889) by Emilia Pardo Bazán (1851-1921).

As aforementioned, the body has its own language and it is a vehicle with the potential to communicate itself to a given cultural milieu. Ordinarily, it tries to communicate notions that are somewhat difficult or impossible to articulate openly or through conventional methods. The body requires that the reader explore it as a text; in fact, as a text that stands as a symbol of that which itself cannot or should not be articulated with clarity. It is the reader's task to extract the unspoken states of anxiety, emptiness, frustration, desire, whose open and direct articulation would not be acceptable in a literary society that represses the female, a literary society that keeps the woman writer "in check" and thus a victim of a double standard of a social or political nature. Many anthropologists, among them Drawing, (Davis and Low 1989, Jankins, 1996) have concluded that a great spectrum of psychosomatic and physiological symptoms exist simply as a means by which the body reveals that which in itself cannot be expressed by the subject: pain, fatigue, anxiety, and fear. These somatic expressions become then another dialect, and in the case of Pardo Bazán's *Insolación*, other articulations are represented: drowsiness, dizziness, infirmity, fainting, and nausea. Pardo Bazán's character, Asís, Marquesa de Andrade, experiences each of these somatic agonies, which are only readable through her narrating body-text.

The skill of reading the body and physiology was already considered a science in the eighteenth century. This was a science that interpreted human character and individual personality by virtue of being able to analyze a person's physical appearance, righteousness, and even intelligence. This science was based on the belief that external body signs would reveal the internal condition of an individual. Thus, eighteenth-century science claimed that by observing external characteristics one could ascertain elements that resided within the subject, such as an individual's passions and desires. The body acted as a reliable metaphor and as a fundamental conduit of the human experience. Therefore, one must consider this skill of reading the body as an intimate system that the narrator uses to establish a sort of mute dialogue, not necessarily abstracted but rather more tangible, as if it were an incarnation of the mind/body dichotomy. The narrator reveals her physical experiences by means of her body, its reactions, its gestures, and its emotions. One will find that Asís tries to narrate through her somatized body, thus re-creating a text that one actually experiences, in the flesh, and one that could very well be described as a "somatic text."

Emilia Pardo Bazán faced enormous challenges as a writer. It was especially difficult for a woman to write at the end of the nineteenth century; in fact, it had not been easy before her time as it would not be later either. For instance, Pardo Bazán's contemporaries, Benito Pérez Galdós, Leopoldo Alas "Clarín", and José María Pereda, among others,

did not approve of women authors, especially one such as Pardo Bazán who defiantly dared to undertake what they considered perilous themes. Social pressures and the overt censure Pardo Bazán received from her literary peers resulted in an authorial anxiety that was directly related to gender concerns.

It is imperative to re-read *Insolación* as bloodhounds, as tracking detectives, and as *reading* detectives who seek textual tracks and traces over Asís' body; reading between the lines, reading between spasmodic and vague textual traits that serve as both underlining and superscript. Hence, one finds a text that has as crux an interaction of mind, body and text; indeed, it is a body-text that acts as a "medium" which transmits information at times through signs and at others through symptoms.

Emilia Pardo Bazán fashions her central female character, Asís, in relation to Asís's own body, which also acts as a metaphor; Pardo Bazán thus establishes a peculiar connection between author-body-text in order to reveal her character's vital sexuality. The author achieves this through different literary techniques such as irony, humor, and through the majestic use of several narrators, each with a different voice, and all of whom claim a different "I". All this conceals a subversive yet subtle subtext that traps the heroine in *Insolación* inside her own womanly body.

Indeed, the study of the body as language comprises various systems of differentiated signs and the textual body assembles several socio-economic texts within a given configuration of time and space. In *Insolación*, Asís's textual body speaks through a series of signs that transform into a series of somatic codes: the sharp pain that she feels in her temples, the asphyxia that suffocates her and in which she seems to drown, the dizziness that invades her, the blackouts that blind her, drowsiness, nausea, the tremendous sense of aimlessness, as if she were adrift in the high seas, in an enormity of open waters without having a single thing to which she can cling in order to steady herself. However the Marquesa de Andrade feels obliged to explain that all her symptoms come as a result, without a doubt, of an overexposure to the sun, to which she is not accustomed, or perhaps of the delicious wine that she consumes with Pacheco at the fair of San Isidro near the Manzanares River. These are new times and new spaces unbeknownst to this Galician woman, who finds herself far away from her native land, Galicia, and in peripheral spaces never before explored by a lady Marchioness.

At first, Asís is infringed upon by conservative mores, yet she gradually surrenders to her own desires, while at the same time she disrupts the canon established by her patriarchal society. She succumbs to the irresistible attraction she feels for the man from Cádiz, whom she barely knows. Pressed by her own sensuality, she leans her head on Pacheco's shoulder as she allows him to lead her down winding paths

at the seemingly never-ending fair. In reality, she feels transported by his touch, his unique and unmistakable smell, and how it feels to have her hand in his. Asís seeks an excuse for her sexual conduct and she finds it in the sun, which becomes a mediated sign of her desire.

Since language is a crucial aspect of intelligence, and the processes of understanding and reading a text are a system of coherent interpretation, as a good detective, as the tracking bloodhound, the reader of *Insolación* has to discover those implicit signifiers to make them explicit; the body's language thus becomes the semiotic course by which one can penetrate the textual message. Pardo Bazán creates a female character, Asís de Taboada, widowed, marchioness, thirty something, and rich, who abandons her native Vigo for a Madrid that is seductive, distant, full of possibilities, and where she finds herself surrounded by unfamiliar and strange people. Her trip to Madrid is already in itself a metaphor of her break with the canon; it is a journey on which she must embark in order to experience her own life. It is precisely in Madrid, far from her beloved Vigo, where Asís will meet a charming man from Cádiz, a social inferior who will end up seducing her and loving her. He is an Andalusian whom, by a twist of fate, she meets in the parlors of yet another Marchioness of Sahagún; a man who, despite not conforming to the social constraints to which she is accustomed, transforms her life. Asís gradually frees herself from her own shackles while her own body, sensual and sensitive, finds its own space inside and outside of itself. Nevertheless, her mind cannot easily diminish or rationalize what has happened as she constantly seeks excuses to explain her conduct to Father Urdax, her spiritual father in Galicia.

Clearly, the body exists as an integral element that straddles between the conscious existence and the material one. What the theorist Elizabeth Grosz (1990) calls "the metaphor of the textualized body" not because the body is itself inscribed but rather because its gesture, movements, postures and other physical expressions exhibit power within a specific culture.

Insolación was written at a moment in history when literature was greatly influenced by the rules and norms introduced by naturalism. When Emilia Pardo Bazán creates her female character, Asís de Taboada, Marquesa de Andrade, she debates with herself, her thoughts constantly oscillating between dichotomous notions, between reason and passion, between mind and body, always bipartite elements, binary opposites in nature. Asís herself states:

[...] lo que no sucede en un año sucede en un día. No hay que darle vueltas. Tú has sido hasta el presente una señora intachable; bien; una perfecta viuda; conforme; te has llevado en peso tus dos añitos de luto (cosa tanto más meritoria cuanto que, seamos francos, últimamente ya

necesitabas alguna virtud para querer a tu tío, esposo y señor natural, el insigne Marqués de Andrade, con sus bigotes pintados y sus achaques, fistulas o lo que fuesen).¹

[...] whatever might not happen in a year happens in a day. One must not give it too much thought. You have been until now an impeccable lady; well; a perfect widow; compliant; you have carried with dignity your two years of mourning (something with much more merit since, let's be honest, as of late you were in need of some virtue to love your uncle, husband and master, the well-known Marquis of Andrade, with his painted moustache, his ailments, his sores, or whatever those things may have been.) (46)

The reader is drawn into Asís Taboada's conscious world as she attempts to free herself from her own taboos. When Asís, instead of going to mass, as she had initially intended, decides to go to the Fair of San Isidro with Pacheco, Asís is spellbound by a social space to which she does not belong. The buggy ride allows the Marchioness to observe a bona fide parade of folkloric figures that seem to belong in a Goya painting. *Majos* and *majas*, brawls, knives being thrown, gypsies, all of it merging with the smell of fried buns, fritters, and jasmynes seem to affect Asís in a manner akin to the loss of her senses and everything becomes bewildering, blurry, not only for her but also for the reader. As Asís explains: "mis pupilas destellaban lumbre, y en mis mejillas se podía encender un fósforo," "sólo experimentaba una animación agradable, con la lengua suelta, los sentidos excitados, el espíritu en volandas y gozoso el corazón", ["my pupils were ablaze, and my cheeks were so hot that a match could be lit on them" "I only experienced a pleasant liveliness, my tongue had loosened, my senses were delighted, my spirit in flight and joyful my heart."] (81). A little further on, the protagonist confesses: "Notaba yo cierta ligereza insólita en piernas y pies; me figuraba que se había suprimido el peso de mi cuerpo, y en vez de andar, creía deslizarme sobre la tierra" ["I noticed a certain unusual lightness in my legs and feet; I reckoned that my body had become weightless, and, instead of walking, I felt myself gliding"] (84).

A good detective/reader recognizes the inscriptions of a text-body-text when Asís Taboada declares: "se me puso en la cabeza que me había caído en el mar, mar caliente, que hervía [sic] a borbotones, y en el cual flotaba yo dentro de un botecillo chico como una cáscara de nuez" ["what came to mind was a sensation that I had fallen into the sea, a hot sea that boiled impetuously and in which I floated, inside a tiny vessel as small as a nut shell."] (84). At this juncture in the narrative, Asís's body unleashes a challenge; through a somatic manifestation, her body speaks against the suppression of the woman's mark. In other words, her body deplores the social, cultural, and literary canonical suppression of the feminine; Asís's body reveals how the woman's

inscription has been suppressed, remaining silent, null and void within a society, a culture, and a literary canon that refuses its mark.

Indeed, the act of writing and the subsequent act of reading are ways by which a woman documents her body. It is imperative that the readers identify and consider these traces of the body in women's writing as a transhistorical phenomenon, particularly if one is to take into account the era in which Pardo Bazán's novel appeared. For instance, when Asís, feeling happy in the company of Pacheco, rests her head on his shoulder, she looks at the setting sun in the distance, and reacts abruptly:

No tuve tiempo de reflexionar en situación tan rara. No me lo permitió el afán, la fatiga inexplicable que me entró de súbito. Era como si me tirasen del estómago y de las entrañas hacia fuera con un garfio para arrancármelas por la boca. Llevé las manos a la garganta y al pecho y gemí." 89. ["I did not have time to reflect, finding myself in such a strange situation. Preventing me from doing so were the feelings of unrest, the baffling fatigue that suddenly invaded me. It felt as if someone were pulling me by my stomach and yanking my bowels in an outward motion, as if to rip both from my body, with a hook, and through my mouth. I covered my throat and my chest with my hands, and I moaned. (89).

Such descriptions seem to evoke the methods used during the Inquisition. The reader is not given much more information, and if he wants to know more, she must deduce it because the protagonist only offers cut-off phrases:

me dominaba una modorra invencible." "En medio de mi sopor empecé a sentir cierta comezón...entreabrí los ojos y con gran sorpresa vi el agua del mar, pero no la verde y plomiza del Cantábrico, sino la del Mediterráneo, azul y tranquila. Las pupilas de Pacheco, como ustedes se habrán imaginado" ["an unshakable drowsiness overwhelmed me" "In the midst of my stupor I began to feel a certain itch...I half-opened my eyes and with great surprise I spotted the sea water, but not the green and gray one of the Cantabrian, but that of the Mediterranean, blue and tranquil. Pacheco's pupils, as you will probably have guessed. (90).

In this way, Asís's body language, which is predominantly somatic, becomes textual and the text itself becomes corporeal; her mind is bound by her body.

According to theories advanced by Foucault, Helene Cixous and Jacques Derrida the body can be read as an axis of intersections of different discourses and of linked transformations; their theories revisit the Cartesian division of body/mind, both soul and mind imprisoned within the body. In Asís's case, imprisonment becomes release, and her body speaks through a multiplicity of imagery that defies a socio-historical moment that suppresses the feminine, that erases a woman's

trace. Thus Pardo Bazán positions her character on a crucial path to cultural irruption, Asís fulfills a desire/need to position herself as a corporeal presence, to leave a mark, a trace in regions of claimed sexuality that have been until now veiled and forbidden by an autocratic patriarchal structure. Writing, then, becomes an aesthetic space of resistance, of rupture, and of subversion. Asís's expressions of pain, sicknesses, dizziness, and asphyxia are, in reality, an aggressive textual incision that articulates her erotic desire and the irresistible attraction she feels for Pacheco. Transhistorically, woman has been socialized first to be a good daughter and second to be a good wife and mother. Yet it is precisely the woman who should negotiate her preferences and her limitations in a suffocating patriarchal world. Some have argued that the mere act of writing already is an act of desire that provides the possibility for change (Cixous 1976). Still, writing is done in binary terms: body/text, knowledge/experience, theory/practice.

Both Nietzsche and Freud present theoretical structures that challenge one another regarding the binary relation of mind/body. Freud relies upon neuro-scientific speculations while Nietzsche supports his philosophy with language and metaphorical signs. One of the most important aspects in Freudian studies is the interpretation of dreams. Narrated in the third person, a segment in *Insolación* tells of one of Asís's dreams; it brilliantly illustrates the relation body-text: "Bregando con la imaginación y la memoria se quedó traspuesta. No era dormir profundo sino una especie de sonambulismo, en que las percepciones del mundo exterior se amalgamaban con el delirio de la fantasía. ["Coping with her imagination and her memory, she remained transposed. It was not a deep sleep but rather a sort of somnambulism, in which perceptions of the exterior world became amalgamated with an elated fantasy] (162). Soon after, the narrator invites us to enter another of Asís's dreams:

El tren adelantaba unas veces bufando y pitando otras con perezoso cuneo. [...] El polvillo de carbón entraba en remolinos, o en ráfagas violentas, cegando, desvaneciendo, asfixiando [...] Mientras la señora gemía, el inmenso foco de sol ardía más implacable. [...] ¡Que me abraso! ¡Que me abraso! ¡Oh deleite!, manantiales, cascadas, riachuelos, mientras allá abajo caudaloso y profundo corre el río Sil. ["The train advanced, at times snorting and whistling, at others lazily rocking from side to side [...] Coal dust came in swirls, or in violent gusts, blinding, dissolving, suffocating [...] While the lady moaned, the immense beam of sun burned much more implacably [...] I am on fire! I am on fire! Oh sweet delight!, springs, cascades, streams, while down at the bottom the River Sil gushes large"] (164).

The imagery is indisputably sexual: a train that penetrates the tunnel, the rhythmic swaying, and finally a refreshing spurt of rain that

floods Asís's body with utter pleasure and joy. Hence, the Marchioness of Andrade's relaxing dream is pregnant with erotic connotations; it allows the reader to apprehend Asís' sexual desire, her anxiety, and her behaviour when faced with the circumstances brought about by "southern" Pacheco. All kinds of nonverbal communication propel an important system of negotiated signs so that the reader can interpret a new text through Asís's sexualized body.

Isolación is an excellent example of textual/corporeal language: at times there are gestures, a turn of the head, postures, looks, glances, hand movements, and at other times there are dreams. The protagonist's body is an effective catalyst by which the reader enters and interprets the text, the narration. From the beginning of the novel, one realizes that Emilia Pardo Bazán creates a character in which the body's significance is well established. And she does so writing within a culture that erases the materiality of a woman's body, which gives precedence to the projected image to the detriment of a woman's corporeality. In Asís, Pardo Bazán offers the reader a woman already transgressing the time-honoured canon: her character freely travels, alone, from Vigo to Madrid with the only company that her trunk and her maid provide. Behind her she has left her much-beloved Spanish countryside but, above all, she leaves behind her relatives and her daughter of whom she seldom speaks and when she does, only alludes to her fragile nature, and her poor health that demands special care.

When the Marchioness of Taboada arrives in Madrid, she fully transforms her outward image and begins to inscribe her body with new texts. She has no use for tattoos, piercings, mutilations or Botox injections with which to inscribe her body, but does so with what was available to her at that time. She dresses differently, and changes her hairstyle. She moves in new geographical spaces that did not correspond to her social standing. Her transgression surpasses all limits when she chooses to befriend a man, Pacheco, who readily admits to being an indolent, womanizing, wandering good-for-nothing. Indeed, when Asís asks him: "¿De modo que no te avergüenzas de ser un hombre inútil, un mequetrefe, un cero a la izquierda?" ["so, are you not ashamed of being such a useless man, a busybody, a good-for-nothing?"] Pacheco immediately responds, "¿Y a ti qué te importa eso lucerito? ¿Soy inútil para quererte? ¿Has resuelto no enamorarte sino de tipos que mangoneen y anden agarrados a la casaca de algún ministro?" [And why would you care about that, lucerito? Am I useless when loving you? Are you determined to fall in love only with men that meddle and cling to the uniform of some public servant?"] (136).

The protagonist breaks with all of her society's established norms. Pacheco knows how to read her body well, even better than she can, and he reads her as both subject and object, and as easily as one would

a legible and accessible text; Asís's body is decipherable, intelligible not only to Pacheco, her lover, but also to the reader. Asís's somatic articulations spell out her desires and her symptoms are codes by which the reader deciphers her sexuality. Therefore, traits such as desire, impulse, or motives, not always easily discernible, but they are for Pacheco and the good bloodhound, the good detective/reader of *Insolación*.

Insolación invites a careful reading and an understanding of the relation between reader-body-text that necessitates an emotional, intellectual, and above all, a cultural interpretation of the text. Irony and humour will be the principal tools that Pardo Bazán utilizes in order playfully to disguise and unveil her protagonist. While striving to interpret Asís's body-text, the reader is implicated. The combination of mind/text is analogous to the point of convergence of the text (written material) and the reader. The author's strategy is risky: offering as her main character a woman that resists the cultural codes of her era was, undoubtedly, a courageous attempt by the author. Especially since she had been censured for not respecting the moral principles of her times. Her male contemporaries, who considered her work to be a rebellious attempt and a threat to the canon, criticized her work harshly.

As readers, what is required of us is to have sufficient imagination and to possess the ability to suspend our belief in our own world in order better to enter the world that the author offers. Nevertheless, imagination also requires the use of referents. A good reader must recognize the socio-historical referents that restricted the literary creation. Not to do so would be tantamount to transposing 21st century values to Pardo Bazán's 19th century text. This peril is made easy by the ruses the author uses, which easily make the reading contemporary. As well, when the referent is a woman's body that is represented inside a text, the body-object is understood through the body-image the reader assigns it, thus forming a map of communication where the axes of sensations and actions are bound and intertwined. Emilia Pardo Bazán's novel, *Insolación*, offers its readers, regardless of their cultural, socio-political, or historical contexts, this wonderful opportunity.

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