

Personalized and Depersonalized Discourses: Irony and Self-Consciousness in Bécquer's *Rimas*

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... the romantic-ironic work sustains two ideas without reconciling them,
... without privileging the one over the other.

—Ann Mellor

English Romantic Irony

Critics have yet to chart the significance of the irony and artistic self-consciousness informing Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer's *Rimas*. In his 1989 essay "Schlegelian Philosophical and Artistic Irony in Bécquer," Eugene Del Vecchio convincingly cites Bécquer's use of the *tale within a tale* device as evidence of Schlegelian romantic irony and artistic self-consciousness in the *Leyendas* (222-23). Nonetheless, Del Vecchio's analysis of the *Rimas* is less persuasive, for the critic fails to show how Bécquer's poetry echoes the artistic concerns. Hence the present study begins where the earlier essay ends. Studying the *Rimas*, as does Del Vecchio, within the context of romantic irony, I trace the artistic self-consciousness of the *Rimas* to a tension which, imitative of the *tale within a tale*, plays itself out within the opposing frames of Bécquer's poetry.¹ The poetic expression of the *Rimas* alternates between representing the "story" of romantic idealism—the notion of a seamless unity between self and universal consciousness—and commenting upon the poetic technique that sustains such titanic illusions. This shift in what one might call the "scenes" of Bécquer's poetry is tied to a shift in the po-

etic speaker's point of view. In many of Bécquer's poems the speaker employs opposing, personalized and depersonalized, perspectives. While the depersonalized point of view conceals the persona of the lyric subject and suggests the transferable nature of the poem's "story," the first person perspective calls attention to the finite and limited origins of "poetic" experience and expression, to the arbitrariness of the poem's language. In sum, the speaker's first person point of view marks the limits of poetic idealization and questions the authority, even the authenticity, of the poem's more idealized claims. Moreover, the manner in which Bécquer's poetic discourse alternately conceals and reveals the poetic persona of a lyric subject circumscribes a poetry conscious of its own nature as artificial construct.²

Critics invariably note the intractable dualities marking Bécquer's poetics, the idealism and realism, the enthusiasm and skepticism that surround his notions of poetry and the poetic word. Nonetheless, they have not reconciled these tensions with the double-minded *praxis* of Bécquer's poetry.³ To my mind, such an oversight stems from an inattention to this poetry's ironic interplay of idealized and limited, depersonalized and personalized perspectives. Critics neutralize the power of irony within Bécquer's poetry in several ways. Some privilege one impulse of Bécquer's poetic practice over another. For example, New Critics such as Dámaso Alonso emphasize an idealist Bécquer and read him as a proto-symbolist poet whose work anticipates the pure poetry of Juan Ramón and Jorge Guillén. In contrast, Philip W. Silver prefers the historian Bécquer over the poet, the realist over the idealist, and has recently read Bécquer as a conservative writer whose texts recall an eighteenth-century sublime.⁴ Others critics such as Díaz (345-54) and Del Vecchio recognize the opposing poles of Bécquer's artistic world but fail to grapple with their ironic interplay; their work recognizes ineffability, or the gap between idea and word, as a central theme of Bécquer's poetry and poetics but falls short of explaining how language's shortcomings affect, even enrich and enhance, the poetic practice of the *Rimas*.⁵ Such readings have given us widely divergent, even contradictory readings of the *Rimas*. However, when we note the conflict between the perspectives adopted by the poetic speaker of the *Rimas* and consider how the speaker's oppos-

ing points of view correspond to the tension between the ideal and the real, the idea and the word (“hymn and cipher” ‘himno’ and ‘cifra’), a more coherent Bécquer, a tie between poetry and poetics, begins to emerge. Moreover, this approach addresses the paradox of Bécquer’s art and explains how an inadequate word might produce a highly efficacious poetry. Bécquer is an artist who, mindful of the difference between the way things are and the way things may seem in language, plays with the slippage between art and experience and paradoxically converts such slippage into the bedrock of creative power. Aware of the divide between epiphany and expression, Bécquer the romantic ironist is free “to create and identify with many, masks, make and unmake . . . myths” (Kirkpatrick 12, 22).⁶

As a writer Bécquer is open to the diverse influences—French, German, Spanish—of his time (Benítez 13). Neither his poetry nor poetics is simple or single-minded but grounded in paradox, in what has been called art’s central problem, that of containing a “free, creative, intuitive power” in a “limited, finite capacity” (Rigg 29). There is no literal reference to romantic irony in Bécquer’s work, but his paradoxical poetics (“I know a strange, gigantic hymn/But in vain is the struggle; for there is no cipher/capable of containing it . . .” [Phenix 5] ‘Yo sé un himno gigante y extraño / . . . / Pero en vano es luchar, que no hay cifra / capaz de encerrarlo . . .’ 401) and the particular tensions that mark his work point to the romantic ironic spirit of his texts and to an accompanying artistic self-consciousness.

Practiced by a wide range of authors (including Shakespeare, Cervantes, and Sterne) long before Friedrich Schlegel coined the term, romantic irony finds its roots in the intractable conflict between the ideal and the real (Behler 146-53). Hence romantic irony carries what Susan Kirkpatrick has called a “double message” (12). On the one hand this irony displays an innocent faith in the power of language and imagination to reconcile the real with the ideal; at the same time, the romantic ironic text (which Schlegel calls “universal” or “progressive”) must reveal the underside of such reconciliation: its unstable and fictive nature. The romantic ironic text deconstructs art’s idealizing power by exposing the latter’s finite and limited origins, or as Schlegel writes, “it portray[s] the producer along with the product, . . . embrace[s] in its transcendental

thoughts a characterization of transcendental thinking . . ." (145).

The artistic process of romantic irony "must be one of simultaneous creation and de-creation: a fictional world must be sincerely presented and sincerely undermined, either by showing its falsities and limitations or, at the very least, by suggesting ways of responding to it other than whole-hearted assent" (Mellor 14). Such questioning of the text's authority often depends upon a personage who, like the harlequin figure of the *commedia dell'arte*, contributes to the argument but steps beyond the frame of *histoire* to reflect upon the work and its artistic process (Schlegel 126, fragment 42). As the harlequin moves from his role of character to that of critic, from one who advances the *histoire* to one who "goes against its grain," he calls the spectator's or reader's attention to conflictive frames of discourse within the text, causing him or her to perceive the work as self-questioning and critical rather than straightforward or resolute. Invading one frame of discourse in order to appropriate its elements for "falsification" in another, mimicking the actions and parodying the speech of other characters, the harlequin shatters the illusion of art as a "sacred object." His irreverent, mocking stance foregrounds art's limited, relative nature and encourages the spectator or reader to continue the *harlequinisque* process of questioning (while alternately accepting) the text's authority. The poetic speaker of "Rima LXII" imitates the harlequin, abruptly changing "faces" or points of view. Adopting multiple "masks" or personae, this speaker displays the *hovering, harlequinisque* attitude of the romantic ironist:

First it is a quivering, vague whiteness
 a ray of restless light that cuts the sea
 then it sparkles and grows and expands
 into a burning explosion of brightness

The shining light is joy;
 the gloomy shadow is sorrow:
 Alas! in the dark night of my soul,
 when will it dawn? (Phenix 38)

Primero es un albor trémulo y vago	1
raya de inquieta luz que corta el mar;	2
luego chispea y crece y se difunde	3
en ardiente explosión de claridad.	4

La brillante luz es la alegría;	5
la temerosa sombra es el pesar:	6
¡Ay! en la oscura noche de mi alma,	7
¿cuándo amanecerá?	8 (442)

Even upon a first reading, we are struck by the differences of thought, imagery, and tone that distinguish the poem's final verses (vv. 7-8) from the previous ones. At its most literal level, the poem's expression juxtaposes images of light ("luz") and dark ("sombra") in order to contrast Nature's capacity for wholeness ("explosion of brightness" 'explosión de claridad') with the inadequacy of the self-conscious, fallen soul ("dark night of my soul" 'la oscura noche de mi alma'). While initial images ("dawn," "light," "explosion of clarity" 'albor,' 'luz,' 'explosión de claridad') refer to light and an expanding illumination, subsequent images conjure up notions of darkness ("dark night" 'la oscura noche') and despair ("el pesar"). Other changes in tone and point of view mark an even richer mix of concerns, thematic and artistic, within the text. The abstract and depersonalized language of verses 1-6 gives way in verse 7 to the emotive tone of "Ay!" and the personalized stance of "my soul" 'mi alma.'

Verses 1-6 contain no hint of the poetic speaker's, that is, the lyric subject's, persona or identity; their depersonalized perspective conforms to and fosters romantic idealism's "message" of an unbroken world where self and non-self coalesce in a larger "reality." The language of these verses, centered on the notion that a single spirit inhabits all life (Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*), disregards the boundaries normally thought to separate humanity's self-conscious world of emotion from the non-self-conscious realm of Nature. Humankind—represented by the synecdoche of emotion ("joy," "sorrow" 'alegría,' 'pesar')—is here one with Nature. Such poetic idealization reaches its zenith in verses 5-6 where metaphor feigns a perfect correspondence between humankind and Nature ("the shining light is joy;/ the gloomy shadow is sorrow" 'La brillante luz es la alegría; / la temerosa sombra es el pesar'). Nonetheless, the poetic expression of verse 7 twice discovers the short sightedness and insufficiency of this idealized view. First, the religious overtones

emanating from verse 7, from the intertextual reference to San Juan de la Cruz's poem "Dark Night" 'Noche oscura,' point to an order whose sacredness surpasses that of the idealized world of verses 1-6. San Juan's mysticism, as does romantic idealism, points to an indwelling of the infinite in the finite, but the theological implications of San Juan's thought distinguish it from romanticism's secular system. Bécquer's phrase "in the dark night" 'en la oscura noche' moves the language of "Rima LXII" beyond the discourse of an earthly or pantheistic paradise (vv. 1-5) and taps into the theological underpinnings of San Juan's poem. The intertextual reference to "Noche oscura" (foreshadowed in verse 6 by the references to "sombra" and "pesar") suggests the shortcomings of the earthly harmonies described within the poem and questions the sufficiency, even the authority, of the earlier idealized yet profane scene (vv. 1-5). Secondly, the speaker's abrupt move in verse 7 to a subjective point of view—evident in the phrase "my soul" 'mi alma'—calls attention to a self-conscious, limited world and thus to a space overlooked by the depersonalized, idealized world of the earlier verses. The emergent "narrower" point of view opposes and challenges poetic idealization and, in an ironic twist, foregrounds what such idealization must obscure: the "hand" of a limited, finite creator. The sudden emergence in verse 7 of this subject as *dramatis persona* bursts the poem's illusion of self-sustaining authority and points to the limited origins and relative nature of the ideas presented in the poem. The poem's speaker uses metaphor to foreground similarities between disparate entities in apparent disregard for their differences, but such idealized language is less than adequate, for it excludes the world beyond its own selective eye—in this case, the more private, self-conscious world of the speaker. On the one hand, the poetic expression of "Rima LXII" shuns a limited first person point of view as it participates in a romantic idealization that subsumes subject within object (vv. 1-6). Through this "wider" perspective the poem advances the universalist notion of a seamless empathy between self and non-self, between internal ("joy" 'alegría') and external ("dawn" 'albor,' "light" 'luz') worlds. On the other hand, the representation of the lyric subject ("mi alma") within the poem undermines the authority of the very idealization the text has helped to promote. In a role not unlike that of the harlequin in the *commedia dell'arte*

the lyric subject, emergent within the final verses of “Rima LXII,” calls attention to an arbitrariness inherent to poetic idealization. At the same time the intrusion of this subject paradoxically amplifies and enriches the text, as it self-consciously comments upon the very process of the poem’s production.

“Rima II” contains a similar moment of shifting perspectives evoked by a first person speaker whose self-conscious stance contradicts the poem’s earlier depersonalized point of view:

A flying arrow
 passes, shot at random,
 without anyone’s guessing where,
 quivering, it will fix itself

a leaf that the gales carries off
 dead from the tree
 without anyone’s finding the furrow
 where it will fall to rest;

a gigantic wave that the wind
 ruffles and propels on the sea,
 and that rolls and goes by, and does not know
 what shore it is seeking;

a light that is quivering rings
 shines, close to dying,
 no one knowing which of them
 will be the last to shine;

that is what I am, who by chance
 pass through the world, without thinking
 where I come from, or where
 my steps will take me. (Phenix 5)

Saeta que voladora	1
cruza arrojada al azar,	2
sin adivinarse dónde	3
temblando se clavará;	4

hoja que del árbol seca	5
arrebata el vendaval,	6

sin que nadie acierte el surco	7
donde a caer se volverá;	8
gigante ola que el viento	9
riza y empuja en el mar,	10
y rueda y pasa, y no sabe	11
qué playa buscando va;	12
luz que en cercos temblorosos	13
brilla, próxima a expirar,	14
ignorándose cuál de ellos	15
el último brillará:	16
eso soy yo, que al acaso	17
cruzo el mundo, sin pensar	18
de dónde vengo, ni adónde	19
mis pasos me llevarán.	20 (402)

Here, once again (as in “Rima LXII”), poetic expression idealizes experience, suspends natural law, and asks us to believe that the artifact (“arrow” ‘saeta’), Nature (“leaf” ‘hoja,’ “wave” ‘ola,’ “light” ‘luz’) and humankind (“I” ‘yo’) are identical the one to the other (“that is what I am” ‘eso soy yo’). If animate and inanimate beings are normally thought to belong to separate realms of being, the poem’s expression erases any division between the two worlds. The inert artifact “arrow” ‘saeta’ is endowed with an energy and vitality appropriate to the spirited world (“A flying arrow/passes, shot at random” ‘Saeta que voladora / cruza arrojada al azar’ vv.1-2); and Nature, anxious for its destiny, resembles humankind (“a gigantic wave that the wind/ruffles and propels on to sea,/. . ./and does not know/what shore it is seeking; a light that is quivering rings/shines, close to dying” ‘gigante ola que el viento / riza y empuja en el mar, / . . . / y no sabe / qué playa buscando va’ vv. 9-12; “luz que en cercos temblorosos / brilla, próxima a expirar / ignorándose cuál de ellos / el último brillará’ vv. 13-16; emphasis added). Moreover, deprived of will, humankind (“who by chance/pass through the world” ‘que al acaso / cruzo el mundo, *sin pensar*’ vv. 17-18; emphasis added) moves mechanistically through time and space as do “arrow” ‘saeta,’ “leaf” ‘hoja,’ “wave” ‘ola’ and “light” ‘luz.’ In sum, the poem’s surface argument leads us to believe that animate and inanimate worlds are

inextricably linked and equally vulnerable to the caprices of a brutal, unthinking destiny.

In his masterful analysis of the poem's parallelistic structure, that is, of the repetitive ordering of syntactic and semantic units, Carlos Bousoño argues that the mention of "I" 'yo' in verse 17, as well as the poem's entire final stanza, grounds and provides a common reference point for the earlier, more evocative images. In Bousoño's words, "The concrete plane of the four images (<<arrow>>, <<leaf>>, <<wave>>, <<light>>) contained in the poem is always the same (the poet's person)" "El plano real de las cuatro imágenes que la rima contiene (<<saeta>>, <<hoja>>, <<ola>>, <<luz>>) es siempre el mismo (la persona del poeta)" (211). Yes. But by emphasizing the unanimity of Bécquer's poetic expression, Bousoño may obscure what is important to a less mythopoetic reading of the poem. I refer to the poem's abrupt shift from a depersonalized to a personalized perspective. In contrast to Bousoño I would argue that the emergence of a self-conscious speaker in the poem's final stanza does more than narrow the cosmic crisis of temporality outlined in stanzas 1-4 to the confines of an individualized biography, for "yo" introduces a new level of interest, a change of register, within the poem's expression. The emergent persona of the lyric subject—whose presence within the poem has been covert until that point—complicates and enriches the poem and circumscribes an artistically self-conscious commentary upon the text's own process of production. By introducing the persona of the lyric subject into the poem, the text represents not only what is represented, the subject's lyric message, but the medium who represents it as well: not only the created but also the creator. In short, the abrupt introduction of the lyric subject bursts all illusions of the text as a self-sustaining object and offers a glimpse of the artistic "hand" behind the poem.

In stanzas 1-4 the speaker (echoing the technique adopted by the speaker of "Rima LXII") taps into a sort of *Keatsian negative capability* that melds self with non-self, with the contemplated object.⁷ Metaphor converts subject into object and locates an analogue for the speaker's personal crisis within the "larger," physical world. But the focus of the poem's final stanza, verses 17-20, is the lyric subject. The subject's "narrower" point of view opposes the "wider" depersonalized world of stanzas 1-4, calls attention to the limited

origins of this poetic representation, and suggests that the order and ideality of the world represented in the poem may be nothing more than the artificial construct of a finite, limited mind. With a gesture that echoes the artistic technique of the *Leyendas* and the use of the tale within a tale device (see Del Vecchio), the emergent first person point of view casts a shadow over the poem's more idealized pronouncements and calls into question their authority as well as authenticity.

The oscillating movement of personalized and depersonalized points of view characteristic of "Rima X" is similar to that observed in the other poems, albeit somewhat heightened:

the invisible atoms of the air
palpitate and become inflamed round about;
the sky melts into rays of gold;
the earth shakes in exhilaration.

I hear, floating on waves of harmony,
the noise of kisses and beating of wings;
my eyelids close . . . What is happening?
It is love going by! (Phenix 13)

Los invisibles átomos del aire	1
En derredor palpitan y se inflaman;	2
El cielo se deshace en rayos de oro;	3
la tierra se estremece alborazada.	4
Oigo flotando en olas de armonía	5
rumor de besos y batir de alas;	6
mis párpados se cierran. . . ¿Qué sucede?	7
¿Dime? . . . ¡Silencio!. . . ¡Es el amor que pasa!	8
(411)	

Here language once again compares a private sentiment that takes place within the mind or spirit of the lyric subject—the emotional quickening of "love" 'el amor' (vv. 5-8)—with the awakening of day that occurs within the public world of nature (vv. 1-4), thereby feigning to link the respective worlds of subject and object, of humankind and nature. In his *Cartas literarias a una mujer* Bécquer tells us that "love" and "poetry" are synonymous ("Love is poetry" 'El amor es poesía' 631); moreover, that "love" is the originating

principle of all life and energy, including poetry.⁸ Using the *Cartas* as an intertext, one could interpret “Rima X” as a commentary on the poetic process itself (Díaz 372). The “story” might go something like this: the lyric subject transforms poetic experience—inchoate, in the beginning (“The invisible atoms of the air” ‘Los invisibles átomos del aire’ v. 1), but subsequently extant within the physical world (“the sky melts into rays of gold” ‘El cielo se deshace en rayos de oro; / la tierra se estremece alborazada’ vv. 3-4)—into poetic expression, as this subject moves beyond an absent word (“Silence!” ‘¡Silencio!’ v. 8), relinquishes sight (“my eyelids close” ‘mis párpados se cierran’ v. 7), and garners the insight tantamount to “poetic” naming (“It is love going by!” ‘¡Es el amor que pasa!’ v. 8). But the poem’s complicated structure and nuances of expression tell us that we must do more than extract a simple or straightforward message from this text.

To my mind, the “story” comes to us in two parts, although one might argue that the closing utterance (“It is love going by!” ‘¡Es el amor que pasa!’) constitutes yet another “episode” within the “tale.” First, there is the periphrastic description of daybreak (vv. 1-4) told from a perspective devoid of any context or personalization and then, the portion of the tale presented from a first person perspective (vv. 5-8) that includes, I believe, the subject’s final statement. At the level of semantics, the metaphor, “It is love . . .!” ‘¡Es el amor. . .!’ (v. 8), overlooks all difference between the depersonalized (vv. 1-4) and personalized experience (vv. 5-8) described within the poem, between the highly subjective, derealized experience described in verses 5-8 and the potentially shared experience of observing a natural phenomenon that is described within the poem’s initial verses. One might argue that the metaphor’s “cold” or objectifying language recalls the idealized perspective of the poem’s initial verses and thereby distinguishes this final utterance from the adjacent verses and the lyric subject’s limited perspective; that the metaphor, by presenting a “wide” and universalist perspective, accommodates and resolves the disparate tensions of the text. In short, the metaphor might be interpreted as signifying a triumph over the ineffability alluded to in the poem’s final verse (“Silence” ‘Silencio!’). It is true that metaphor’s language of sameness and shared characteristics distinguishes this utterance’s perspective (“It

is love!" '¡Es el amor. . .!') from the first person limited expression of the neighboring verses. However, the exclamation marks surrounding the poem's closing expression contextualize this expression and tie it to the intuitive and personalized discourse of the adjacent verses. In other words, at the level of semantics the metaphor ("It is love going by!" '¡Es el amor que pasa!') speaks of a sameness that extends across the speaker's sensing of physical and spiritual worlds; nonetheless, the exclamation marks that foreground the metaphor's emotive tone work to isolate this utterance from the depersonalized perspective of the poem. The metaphor's exclamatory tone forces it to live within the limited perspective of the lyric subject and undermines its unifying or idealizing power.⁹

At the same time, the exclamation marks enclosing the metaphor ("It is love going by!" '¡Es el amor que pasa!'), as insignificant as they may seem, offer a self-conscious commentary upon the metaphor's as well as the text's own process of poetic production. Imitative of the harlequin's role within the *commedia dell'arte* or that of the narrator within the tale, these exclamation marks point to an emotive presence behind the words, foregrounding the presence of the lyric subject: a presence that the metaphor's cold language would conceal. This emphatic punctuation suggests the presence of a creator within the created and the finite origins of the text and offers a self-conscious commentary upon the very process of poetic production.

Duplicitous and more complex than the sum of its words, the metaphoric utterance ("It is love going by" '¡Es el amor que pasa!') is in turn a metaphor for the poetic process at work here and in Bécquer's poetry at large. Embedded within the limited perspective of the lyric subject, the metaphor represents, rather than overcomes, the poem's irreducible dualities. The double-mindedness of this utterance compels the poem to live in the gap between the ideal and the real and speaks of a poetic process whose efficacy stems not from the poetic word's ability to overcome language's insufficiencies, but from the manner in which such ineffability paradoxically enriches this poetry. The presence of the lyric subject within the *Rimas* and the manner in which this figure's expression foregrounds the limits of poetry's idealizing power allows the *Rimas* to comment upon their own nature as an artificial construct.

I began this essay complaining about a disregard for the irony that informs Bécquer's poetic practice and a failure to reconcile the opposing tensions of Bécquer's poetry with the conflictive notions outlined in his poetics. In his 1991 article "Jorge Guillén and the Insufficiency of Poetic Language," Jonathan Mayhew comments upon Guillén's New Critical reading of Bécquer and isolates what he considers Guillén's blind spot toward Bécquer: "Guillén's New Critical exclusion of intentionality . . . blinds him to the potentially productive force of an author's poetics. The theory of the language implicit in the work becomes, in Guillén's account, a poetically inert biographical circumstance. Guillén presents the success of Bécquer's poetry as a virtual disproof of Bécquer's poetic theory" (1149). To my mind, Mayhew's comments are applicable not only to Guillén's but to numerous readings of the *Rimas*. Nonetheless, a recognition of the ironic impulses at work in Bécquer's poetic practice reveals the rich power of the poet's intentionality and the full significance of the statement "Cuando siento, no escribo" (622). Typical of writers from the Romantic period forward (for example, Schlegel and Poe; see Díaz 344-45), Bécquer separates the imaginative from the writing process, and the opposing poles of his poetic practice mirror the poet's intent. The irreducible duality of depersonalized and personalized perspectives observed in "Rima LXII," "II" and "X" embodies or represents within the poetic text the intractable gulf between the ideal and the real described in Bécquer's theoretical statements on the poetic art. If the depersonalized perspective of these poems points to the nature of the ideal and its undifferentiated state, the personalized perspective of the lyric subject conjures up notions of a differentiated, hence limited world. In a dramatic confrontation with the poem's more robust claims, the emergent lyric subject and this subject's expression foreground the underside of poetic idealization and point to the ineffability that is for Bécquer inherent to the writing process. The limited utterance of the lyric subject sets itself over and against the depersonalized discourse of the ideal and yet it is, paradoxically, this limited word that enriches the text by questioning the authority of the poem's more idealized claims and adding a self-conscious dimension to the text. Furthermore, it is this limited word of the subject that, in a *harlequinesque* move, rescues subject and word, author and poem, from a blind in-

toxication with illusion (“When I feel, I don’t write” ‘Cuando siento, no escribo’) and concomitantly frees them to create again and again. To view the struggle with language embodied in the personalized and depersonalized perspectives of Bécquer’s poems in this light is to see Bécquer’s skepticism of language not as incidental, not as an involuntary by-product of a self-sustaining poetic process, but as a complex poetic phenomenon that arises from the intentionality, from the “hand,” of a subject, an author.

Notes

1. Numerous critics, including Del Vecchio, document the reverberations of Schlegel’s poetics within Bécquer. If the Sevillian poet knew Heine’s lyric with its blatant form of romantic irony, as he surely did (see Díez-Canedo, Alonso), he was well acquainted with this irony’s artistic technique. H.C. Turk cites traces of Schlegel’s work in Bécquer’s legend “La pereza” (48-50). J.P. Díaz (as does Gómez de las Cortinas 81-82) documents Schlegel’s influence upon Bécquer’s literary mentors, Pablo Pifferer and Augusto Ferrán, hence upon Bécquer (230-31).

2. The poetic persona of the lyric subject and the narrator of the “frame” tale exercise analogous functions within their respective texts. These *dramatis personae* expose the limited origins of the text and foreground the unreality of the work of art.

3. Bécquer endorses notions of poetry’s transcendent power (“There may not be poets; but always there will be poetry” (Phenix 8) ‘Podrá no haber poetas, pero siempre / ¡habrá poesía!’ 405) and yet his notion that language is inadequate to the task of poetry casts a shadow over such enthusiasm (“for there is no cipher/capable of containing it . . .” (Phenix 5) ‘. . . que no hay cifra / capaz de encerrarlo . . .’ 402; between the world of idea and form there exists an abyss” ‘entre el mundo de la idea y el de la forma existe un abismo’ 39). Translations of Bécquer’s poetry are from Phenix. Other translations are my own.

4. The New Critic Guillén writes, “Along with the Bécquer who is sentimental . . . there is concealed a very pure poet” (153). Other critics who foster this approach to Bécquer include Alonso, Bousoño, Ciplijauskaitė, Zardoya and Blanc. In his recent book *Ruin and Restitution: Reinterpreting Romanticism in Spain*. Silver argues against Bécquer’s canonical identity as

a proto-symbolist poet who ushers in contemporary Spanish poetry and claims that Bécquer was “neither a high romantic nor a proto-symbolist poet, but the proponent of a religiously tinged national-romantic sublime” (73; see also Silver “Towards a Revolutionary Theory”). According to Silver, the coherence of Bécquer’s *oeuvre*, prose and poetry, rests on the poet’s employ of this rhetoric observed in Bécquer’s *Historia de los templos de España* (ch. 3).

5. Other critics who fall into this “camp” include Aguirre with his well-known notion of an “evanescence” in Bécquer and Brant Bynum who speaks of an “indefinite quality” (19) in his work. For an overview of this criticism see Bynum (19-21).

6. Bécquer’s writings suggest the poet’s awareness of the paradoxical manner in which the limits of art’s medium enhance, rather than diminish, creative power. Schlegel admonishes the poet anxious to translate majestic thoughts and feelings into words to distance himself from the soarings of the high romantic imagination. In fragment 37 of the *Lyceum* he writes, “As long as the artist invents and is inspired, he remains in a constrained state of mind, at least for the purpose of communication”(124). Bécquer likewise recognizes self-restraint or the reduction of the high romantic imagination as essential to poetic efficacy. In the second of the *Cartas literarias a una mujer* Bécquer issues the famous phrase “when I feel, I don’t write” “cuando siento no escribo” (622), echoing, as Guillén notes (137), the Schlegelian concept of artistic “self-restraint.” In this “letter” Bécquer repeatedly links poetic efficacy with a certain disinterestedness or “self-restraint” on the part of the writer, with a discontinuity between epiphany and its expression. Within Bécquer’s poetics, as in Schlegel’s, “self-restraint” checks the poet’s enthusiasm for illusion (“recalls the lost poet back from his creative illusions” Del Vecchio 224), releases the artistic consciousness from a blind intoxication with self-styled illusions and compels it to create anew. For salient commentary on the positive power of linguistic insufficiency in contemporary poetry see Mayhew.

7. “Negative capability is Keat’s phrase for a power of sympathy and a freedom from self-consciousness which peculiarly characterizes the artist . . . in particular, the artist’s curious attentiveness to other persons and things, like that of the chameleon or ventriloquist . . .” (Princeton 824-25).

8. In the third of the *Cartas Literarias* Bécquer writes, “I can only tell you that it (love) is the supreme law of the universe . . . : God—is, at the same time, the origin of those unknown thoughts, that are all true and spontaneous poetry” “Yo sólo te podré decir que él [el amor] es la suprema ley del

universo . . . : Dios es, a su vez, origen de esos mil pensamientos desconocidos, que todos son poesía verdadera y espontánea . . .' (629). López Estrada (151-3) offers a detailed analysis of the intertextual relationship between "Carta III" and "Rima X."

9. Other aspects of the poem's expression point to the unresolved tensions of the text. There is, for example, a disparity between the images used to describe the concrete and the more intuitive experiences portrayed within the poem. Whereas images of light and color represent the apprehension of the shared physical world, references to sound and music connote the subject's awareness of a less differentiated spiritual world. Correspondingly, the opposing perspectives that are the subject of this essay mark the discrepancy between these worlds and the experiences that they invoke.

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