

### Ill Bodies, Diseased Texts: Writing and Reading as Contamination in Francisco Delicado's *Portrait of Lozana* and Juan Goytisolo's *The Virtues of the Solitary Bird*

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This article is a reading of Francisco Delicado's novel in the light of Juan Goytisolo's, which centers on the discourse of contagion understood as a viral relationship with the text both for the reader and for the writer. This metaphor places the analysis beyond the traditional view of literature as a terrain for influence. Here notions of contagion and contamination that invade the writing and reading process underline the material aspects of two porous texts. It is in the tension between openness and closure that the link between disease and the process of writing as contamination lies, rendering the texts both a space of community, and a fragile body that can be "penetrated" (and modified) by readers. In both cases, illness is omnipresent both at the content level and in the materiality of writing, which, in turn, sets in motion the recuperation of texts in constant dialogue.

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Juan Goytisolo envisions writing and reading as part of a process of mutual contamination,<sup>1</sup> whereby the written text appears as a body infected by a virus, which by infecting the reader in turn unites him or her with the writer. The viral metaphor allows Goytisolo to explore social, political, aesthetic and theoretical questions that resonate through several centuries of Spanish history, breaking down temporal and spatial barriers and connecting with a sixteenth-century novel by Francisco Delicado.

I would like to suggest here that, four centuries earlier, Delicado hinted at a similarly viral relationship between reader and text. In fact, in an early modern world, Delicado imagined a transgressive, boundary-breaking relationship that

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1. Goytisolo has stated this on several occasions. For example, in his novel *La cuarentena* (1991) (*Quarantine*), he refers to "el poder contaminante de la escritura" (129) or "the contaminating power of writing."

was to become more prevalent in the postmodern world of Goytisolo. In *La Lozana andaluza* (or *Portrait of Lozana*), Delicado invites his readers to take pleasure in reading his novel in the way that the main character, the syphilitic prostitute Lozana, does while reading Fernando de Rojas's *Celestina*. Here, reading is not only a source of pleasure, but a process of contagion akin to that of a sexually transmitted disease, as we shall see later on. What is at stake in both literary works is a connection between an actual physical illness and a view of literature as the terrain for contamination.

This article brings together two literary works that, although distant in time,<sup>2</sup> share a common discourse, which may be called the discourse of contagion.<sup>3</sup> Both authors use an array of techniques which perform the function of contamination in the text, conceived here as a space of viral tension. While one observes in these texts a high degree of openness and porosity, there is a parallel effort to close and to control this porosity. This type of paradoxical discourse allows one to view the processes of writing and reading as contaminating practices dealing not only with metaphorical ailments but also with real ones. I will argue that it is in this tension between openness and closure, between illness and cure that lies the complexity of both texts.

While working within Renaissance paradigms and, in particular, following in the footsteps of Fernando de Rojas's *Celestina* (a model which Delicado both adopts and surpasses), Delicado gives us a vision of a world where meanings are not quite stable. In a time period when social and religious boundaries were clearly drawn, Lozana shocks and contaminates through her lack of respect for said boundaries. It is no coincidence that Delicado chose the figure of a *conversa* prostitute (that is a Jew who has been forced to convert nominally to Christianity) as the central transgressive character, since besides her sexually transgressive comportment, she incarnates the epitome of an individual who goes everywhere and adapts to different social, linguistic and religious systems while never truly fitting in. The character of Lozana circulates in the same promiscuous fashion as the eponymous novel, which passes from hand to hand and reader to reader infecting each. Thus, Lozana (as both text and character) represents the power and the danger of contamination.

2. Goytisolo's novel *Las virtudes del pájaro solitario* or *The Virtues of the Solitary Bird* was published in 1988, while Delicado's *La Lozana andaluza* or *Portrait of Lozana* first appeared in 1528.

3. In a recent article, Rosalía Cornejo-Polar argues that medical discourse is key to a great number of Goytisolo's novels starting with *Reivindicación del conde don Julián* in 1970. Linda Gould-Levine also emphasizes the importance of contaminating illness in his narrative. Here the term "discourse of contagion" connotes more specifically the rejection of the concept of purity and the concomitant recognition of difference within the self as the result of contagion by another body (be it physical or textual).

The notion of contamination as it relates to language is concomitant with the instability of meaning and the lack of unity, key points of deconstruction theory. Difference is at the core of the question of contamination in both of the texts that concern us here. For Jacques Derrida, words do not possess a stable meaning since they always point to different signifiers in a never-ending process. Here is where the notion of contamination lies, as Derrida points out in *La voix et le phénomène* (*Speech and Phenomena*): “le signe discursif et par suite le vouloir-dire est toujours enchevêtré, pris dans un système indicatif. Pris, c’est-à-dire contaminé” (20-21).<sup>4</sup> The contamination of the sign and the instability of meaning are also the product of the breaking of binary oppositions, which Derrida seeks to undermine. In his essay “La pharmacie de Platon,” (“Plato’s Pharmacy”) Derrida, while analyzing Plato’s dialogue *Phaedrus*, highlights the ambiguity of writing by exploring the contradictory meanings of the Greek word “pharmakon.” But, eschewing Plato’s binary oppositions, Derrida claims that these meanings do not negate each other but, rather, are simultaneously active: they are both cure and poison.

The inside-outside distinction, which is one of the binary oppositions that Derrida wishes to undermine is particularly interesting for the notion of contamination. In fact, one of the principal reasons why contagious diseases are viewed as dangerous and frightening is that they erase the distinction between outside and inside; they respect no social, religious or national borders and thus put essentialist notions of identity in peril. This undermining of essentialism is shared by deconstruction theory and postmodernism which both question difference while recognizing the impossibility of unity and stability. According to Ihab Hassan:

[P]ostmodernism veers toward open, playful, optative, provisional (open in time as well as in structure or space) disjunctive, or indeterminate forms [...] Postmodernism veers towards all these yet implies a different, if not antithetical, movement toward pervasive procedures, ubiquitous interactions, immanent codes, media languages. (283)

As Hassan states, some of the terms to describe the artistic production of postmodernism are “ambiguity,” “discontinuity,” “heterodoxy,” and “pluralism,” which, as we will see, are at the core of Juan Goytisolo’s *The Virtues of the Solitary Bird*, and, in some degree, in Francisco Delicado’s *Portrait of Lozana*. The concept of difference (and its various avatars) is key to the notions of illness, disease and contagion that Goytisolo and Delicado developed, though

4. “The discursive sign and consequently the meaning [vouloir-dire] is always tangled up, caught in a system of indication. That is to say that it is contaminated” (all translations into English are by the author).

its meaning must be nuanced in each case. Whereas in Early Modern Spain the concept of identity itself depended upon a notion of purity whereby one belonged to a single clearly defined racial, ethnic, linguistic, social and religious group, "difference" in any of these categories was necessarily a source both of anxiety and conflict. Unitary and essentialist concepts of identity like those in favor at the time in Europe depend upon a notion of the "other," whose essential difference supports one's own notion of self (defined as "not other").

While the postmodern, in which Juan Goytisolo's novel participates without being completely defined by it, also relies upon a concept of difference, here the notion of the unitary, essential self has been abandoned in favor of a fragmented, "contaminated," multiple self that has neither a stable center, nor any easily locatable "home." Yet, it is important to note that the postmodern elision of what may be seen as the sharp edge of difference as tool of oppression remains in many ways a theoretical construct that, though prevalent in the world of literature, has not changed the fundamental ways that societies function. The rejection or marginalization of those who are racially, socially, linguistically, religiously or sexually different (or in fact of those who are different by virtue of the fact that they are ill) remains a potent force in all societies, and it is the continuity of this reality that Goytisolo decries both by describing the modern day predicament of the AIDS patient, and by referring to a literary model from four centuries earlier that had already dealt with a similar problem. Thus, while the literary and social worlds that the two authors lived in differed enormously, it is the constant of "difference" as a socially unacceptable trait that both authors examine.

Both novels present texts permeated by diseases (Syphilis in Delicado's and AIDS in Goytisolo's), and share several aspects in common. Not only are the main characters of both novels ill but also, in each case, language becomes a disease and the text a body infected by it. According to Edward Said, one of the main points in common between Foucault and Derrida is that both deal with textuality while attempting to render it "visible" (Said 88). I will argue that not only Goytisolo, but also Delicado perceived the text in a similar fashion. Derrida equates reading with writing in the sense that the reader constructs and deconstructs the text with each reading. The main question for Derrida is what the text is hiding, thus he defines textuality in the preface to "La Pharmacie de Platon" by its hiding mechanism: "Un texte n'est un texte que s'il cache au premier regard, au premier venu, la loi de sa composition et la règle de son jeu. Un texte reste d'ailleurs toujours imperceptible" (*La Dissémination* 71).<sup>5</sup> The

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5. "A text is only a text only if it hides the law of its composition and the rule of its game from a first glance, from the first reader."

text is an organism that takes on new life with each reading while never settling upon a stable meaning.

Derrida reminds his readers that, in Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates compares writing to a *pharmakon*, both medicine and poison, that penetrates the body of the text. As with Roland Barthes' "jouissance," the *pharmakon* draws the reader into a visceral relationship with the text. For Derrida, the seduction of the text lies in what it is hiding, in what is absent, which is represented by the written word as the substitute for presence. Thus, the text is viewed as a contaminated organism that is situated in an unstoppable chain of meanings. The *pharmakon* and thus writing, according to Derrida is the space of difference: "Le *pharmakon* est le mouvement, le lieu et le jeu (la production de) la différence. Il est la différance de la différence" (*La Dissémination* 146).<sup>6</sup>

Thus the *pharmakon* is the illustration of the breaking with binary oppositions. The text is inoculated with the *pharmakon* that constitutes its ailment, its suffering but also the source of cure and pleasure. This is how one can equate physicality with textuality (illness, disease and text): "Cette douloureuse jouissance, liée à la maladie tout autant qu'à son apaisement, est un *pharmakon* en soi" (113).<sup>7</sup> The power of the *pharmakon*, according to Derrida, is precisely its ambiguity. But this ambiguity is also found in the spoken word preferred by the Sophists and Socrates. Both the written word and the spoken word are viewed as *pharmakon*, but while the Sophist's is poisonous, Socrates' is the antidote. In both Delicado's and Goytisolo's texts illness is related to the question of the purity or impurity of blood and language, thus, textuality and corporality share a common ground.

In the case of Delicado's novel *Portrait of Lozana*, a "contaminated" Castilian language retraces both the cosmopolitan atmosphere of early sixteenth-century Rome and the actual syphilis epidemic, crossing borders between countries and social groups. Goytisolo's novel uses a language that breaks with the norms of punctuation and the limits of syntax in order to forge a text that reproduces the fragmentation and the transmission of the virus that causes AIDS.

Although the work of Saint John of the Cross constitutes one of the primary points of reference in Goytisolo's text, that latter's language is immersed in an analysis of illness that links it with the work of Delicado. It is that link which is privileged here. Thus, this article offers a rereading of Delicado's *Portrait of*

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6. "The *pharmakon* is the movement, the locus and the play (the production of) difference. It is the différance of difference."

7. "This painful jouissance, linked as much to the malady as to its cure, is itself a *pharmakon*."

*Lozana* in light of *The Virtues of the Solitary Bird*, and an interpretation of Goytisolo's fragmented novel through an understanding of the discourse of illness in *Portrait of Lozana*. Syphilis is present in *Portrait of Lozana*, not only as a historical reality (and an element of Delicado's biography, since he suffered from this ailment), but also as a stylistic technique, which constitutes one of its primary discourses.

As I have argued, the lines between writing and reading are blurred as are those between physical and textual bodies. Here, the notions of illness and disease are important as they are closely tied to those of physicality / textuality, objectivity / subjectivity and identity.<sup>8</sup> Though the lines separating health and disease are not always easy to draw, it is necessary here to reflect upon these notions, since they provide us with a framework for the study of the discourse of contagion in these two novels. In *Examen de ingenios* (1575), the Spanish physician Juan Huarte de San Juan reminds us of the Hippocratic tradition, according to which disease is associated with disorder and lack of harmony (168). As the Hippocratic treatises state, disease is the consequence of an imbalance in the humors.<sup>9</sup> The recuperation of a healthy state would therefore mean the restoration of equilibrium and order.

This notion of health as order triggers the struggle for control over the ill self and lends additional meaning to its loss. Sander Gilman shows that the notion of control is key for the concept of illness when he states that: "[I]llness is a real loss of control, that results in our becoming the Other whom we have feared, whom we have projected into the world" (4). Here Gilman identifies the question of illness in society as a problem of exclusion. Thus, to promote a state of order (sameness) against elements of disorder (difference), it is necessary to identify those who are ill (the Other) in order to keep them at a safe distance.

In the case of Delicado's novel, *Lozana* is marked as marginal with the visible traces of an ailment. Her forehead bears a mark in the shape of a star, which reminds the reader of her Jewish roots, thus making her doubly marginal.

8. In *At the Will of the Body: Reflections on Illness*, Arthur Frank explains the distinction that the English language makes between "illness" and "disease." According to Frank, the term "disease" refers to the visible aspect, the objective perception of the malady, its usage performs a reduction of the body to its physiological attributes. When a person suffering from a malady adopts the language of disease, he or she loses a sense of self as individual. "Illness," on the other hand, refers to "the experience of living through" the malady (13). For Frank, medicine treats only the "disease," not the "illness." Thus, "illness" refers to the subjective experience of an individual suffering from a malady. However, though this distinction is very useful, it is not often adopted by well-known critics such as Susan Sontag in her book *Illness as Metaphor*, and I will use the two terms here interchangeably.

9. See Laín Entralgo 94.



In addition, she has lost her nose to syphilis leaving her with a gaping hole in its place. Furthermore, she is a foreign prostitute, in keeping with the profile of the syphilitic stereotype common in Spanish Golden Age literature. Examples that exploit this stereotype in a misogynistic vein can be found in the works of Cervantes, López de Úbeda and Quevedo, among others. This image of women as carriers of disease continued on into the Early Modern period and beyond. Gilman states that through the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, the dominant image of the syphilis patient was the female, especially the female prostitute, viewed not as the victim but as the source of the ailment (254-56). In Delicado's novel the woman is seen as a corrupt being and the immoral representative of vice, the source of pollution, while men are her victims, never the source of illness. In this view, the female prostitute is seen as an insidious intruder who threatens to fracture society.

Gilman insists upon the stigma created by society to identify the syphilis sufferer (as also occurred when the first cases of AIDS were detected in the early 1980's). The result of this is to associate the disease with immoral, deviant or perverse sexual behavior. These two novels exploit the construct of social stereotypes (the AIDS sufferer in Goytisolo's novel is a male homosexual) in order to subvert or surpass them. In *Portrait of Lozana*, Delicado confronts the reader with two faces of the syphilis epidemic by representing the author both as a victim of the disease and the source of contagion. This doubling could be understood as a method to surpass the fear and loss of control caused by the disease. Writing is thus a way to project the illness out of the self into the text, while the text "reinfests" the reader. Here, as we saw with Derrida's notion of the *pharmakon*, the text appears both as illness and cure while textuality becomes corporality, engaged in what may be termed "infectious healing" (that is, a healing process that relies upon infection, contamination and penetration by difference).

The artistic creation reflects on the one hand the disease itself (the ill body) and, on the other, the therapeutic instrument whereby the writer distances himself or herself in order to regain the control lost through illness. This is in keeping with a traditional view of literature as a source of consolation or as therapy not only for the reader (upon whom Delicado insists greatly) but also for the writer. Here, the ambiguity lies in the fact that the same healing element (the text) also constitutes the reflection of a vulnerable, ill body, thereby also being a vehicle of contagion. This means that illness has a double meaning. It can be negatively seen as disorder, chaos and collapse and positively viewed as a process of learning and exploration of the subjectivity of the individual. In terms of textual creation, contagion is valorized as contact with what is different. Yet, Delicado's novel is a highly ambiguous text in which the social ramifications of

the figure of Lozana remain to a large extent unclear (though she is a positive, valorized character, she is the source of illness and finally rejects her own profession). It must be stated that, interestingly enough, Lozana herself appears as a figure, who like the novel that bears her name, functions as a double-edged *pharmakon*, and it is in the very hesitation, the refusal to choose that the *pharmakon* represents, in this very ambiguity, that we see difference penetrating and investing the space of sameness, thus fundamentally undermining any “socially acceptable” or “useful” reading of the text. Thus, it may be affirmed that Delicado valorizes difference (the doubling up of ambiguity), yet does not defend any claim that difference must be *socially* integrated rather than rejected. It is in this social sense that Goytisolo wishes to take his own novel, taking the step that Delicado did not.

If we understand the state of illness as the transformation that takes place after the rupture of unity in a body, due to the arrival of pathogens, the equivalence of this process in Delicado’s *Portrait of Lozana* (as in Goytisolo’s *The Virtues of the Solitary Bird*) is clear in its chaotic structure and contradictions. The lack of unity manifests itself in Delicado’s novel in different ways such as its linguistic diversity and the proliferation of the voices of more than one hundred characters that escape the author’s grip. Thus, the text’s contamination and the figure of weakened authorial control (Delicado himself appears as an ill character in his novel) weave a tangible textual body that is vulnerable and wounded. In order to show this, it is necessary to demonstrate how illness is represented in the materiality of the writing process.

The contaminated or diseased text is presented to the reader both as a tool for infectious pleasure and a medicine for his or her ailments. In the second prologue (known as the “Argumento”), Delicado invites the reader to enjoy or *gozar de* “Lozana,” this is both to enjoy reading *Portrait of Lozana* and to enjoy the woman herself (the subtext always being that of infection since Lozana has syphilis). In the dedication of the text (to an unnamed “illustrious Lord”), Delicado writes similarly:

Y pues el retrato tiene necesidad de barniz, suplico a vuestra señora se lo mande dar, favoreciendo mi voluntad, encomendando a los discretos lectores el placer y gasajo que de leer a la señora Lozana les podrá suceder. (170)

And since the portrait needs some varnish, I beg you order it to be provided, in accord with my wish, by conferring upon my discreet readers the pleasure and enjoyment they may find in reading the lady Lozana.<sup>10</sup>

If we consider the invitation of the author to enjoy (or here to “read”)

10. All English translations of *Portrait of Lozana* are my own.



Lozana, one can see that he is presenting her not only as a source of intellectual pleasure but also as source of visceral pleasure, which reminds one of Roland Barthes' idea of "draguer le lecteur" (seducing the reader). In *Le plaisir du texte* (*The Pleasure of the Text*), the distinction that Barthes makes between "plaisir" (pleasure) and "jouissance" (bliss or extreme pleasure) is one of degree of participation with the text with which one develops a visceral relationship. Pleasure is produced through recognition of what is known, a text that does not break with the traditional codes and norms. Jouissance is only attainable through transgression, and thus it is more similar to discomfort and loss (he talks about it producing an "état de perte," or a state of loss, close to a state of ecstasy). For Barthes, the process of writing and reading is one of seduction and desire in which the reader is an active participant. In fact, because of its sexual connotation, the term "jouissance" is much closer to the Spanish term "goce" (the noun derived from the verb "gozar," to enjoy, which Delicado invites the reader to do) than to the English "bliss" which connotes a more passive and less explicitly sexual relationship of enjoyment.

In the case of Delicado, it is clear that reading is equivalent to having sexual intercourse: the contagion through words becomes a surrogate for penetrating physical contact. The text and its character are clearly identified as two ways to experience pleasure (physical and intellectual enjoyment). This is the beginning of a whole series of semantic associations: literature as remedy for illness and reading as the synonym of the sexual act. Since words are both a source of contagion and a remedy, illness and cure are situated on the same terrain.

Delicado develops an equally paradoxical relationship with his text. First he lends his authority to an unnamed person of a higher social status (the seigniorial "vuestra señora" of the dedication) and subsequently to the anonymous reader. The "varnish" is both the protection needed for the author and a moment where someone other than he adds an element to the body of his text. This can be seen as a way of relinquishing control over the writing process. However, as critics have pointed out, this novel is characterized by its contradictions,<sup>11</sup> one of which relates to this very issue of control.

Indeed, after the dedication and right before the novel proper begins, the author intervenes, as we mentioned above, to guide the reading of his book by stating that "solamente gozará d'este retrato quien todo lo leyere" (171).<sup>12</sup> Here we see an interest in reaching a certain coherence and closure on the part of the writer. It is essential to arrive at this closure to fully benefit from the text, which

11. See the introductory notes to the text by Claude Allaigre where he points out the different contradictions of Delicado (8).

12. "only he who reads the portrait in its entirety will enjoy it."

is composed of different fragments that make up the portrait.

This desired cohesion is represented at the end of Lozana's narrative, when she is determined to leave the city of Rome for the island of Lipari (in Chapter 66). Yet, it remains unclear whether Lozana actually makes this trip and thus, I would argue, Lipari constitutes an ambiguous, utopian space of health. The image of the island is accompanied by another: a Solomon's knot ("el ñudo de Salomón"). Lozana wants to go to Lipari to escape the city's ailments and its imminent sack by the troops of Charles V of Spain. In Lipari she hopes to find peace as she tells her lover Rampín:

[Y] si veo la Paz, que allá está continua, la enviaré atada con este ñudo de Salomón, desátela quien la quisiere. (480)

And if I find Peace, which is eternal there, I will send it bound up in this Solomon's knot: those who wish to obtain it must untie it.<sup>13</sup>



Figure 1

The island and the knot (another *pharmakon*) could be interpreted as symbols of the novel's status as illness and cure as well as the impulse for coherence and control. These images can be juxtaposed with the apparent disorder of the text and the previous images of the text as an open, uncontrollable body.

The great paradox in the novel that many are unable to reconcile is that of the monstrous aspect of the noseless Lozana and her tremendous power of attraction over men. Here, illness and cure occupy the same body. Lozana's desire to go to Lipari, where she hopes to find a cure for all her ailments, has many implications, not all of which are positive. As Delicado points out in a final note after the novel, Lipari is the destination of convicts condemned to a life sentence. This negative destination only complicates further the meaning of Lozana's trajectory.

It is important to note that both the island and the knot can be presented as images of control. However, they can also signify stagnation and death. As a double of the text that we read, the knot symbolizes also a great challenge for the reader whom Lozana invites to untie it. This is an almost impossible task, taking into account the intricate nature of the knot. This image symbolizes a body with no fissures or holes whereby illness can penetrate. It is the *desired* body of Lozana in sharp contrast with the fissured body she actually has.

In terms of illness and control, the knot represents the desire of the sufferer to control his or her body, the empowering of the subject through the

13. Delicado includes this image in the 1528 Venetian edition of his text.

recuperation of a lost control. It also represents the tension created by the desire to enjoy (*gozar de*) the text in its totality (as the author suggested) and the difficulty to do so. It is interesting to note that the very “enjoyment” or “jouissance” of the knot requires its destruction. In the complexity of the knot’s folds one can see the same type of self-protection mechanism established by the figure of the labyrinth. Thus, viewed from the standpoint of its maker, the knot is a symbol of strength, whereas viewed from the standpoint of its receptor the knot is a source of fascination and unending desire. This principle of contradiction applies to Lozana and to Lipari, which is both a space of ideal peace and of punishment.

This final struggle for control is related to one of the issues that have interested critics: the interventions of the author in the text, not only in different paratexts but especially as a character who suffers from syphilis.<sup>14</sup> His position in and out of the text creates a tension between a desire to control and the loss of that control. However, far from guaranteeing the coherence of the text, these interventions imply a moment of rupture, the creation of a space of ambiguity and contradiction. A clear example of the contradictions that reveal the uncertain status of the author lies in his invitation in the postface to the reader to add what he or she wishes:

Mas no siendo obra, sino retrato, cada día queda la facultad para borrar y tornar a perfilarlo, según lo que cada uno mejor verá. (491)

But since it is not a work but a portrait, every day it may be erased and given a new form, according to each person’s wishes.

This postface explicitly states the opposite of what the author affirms in the second prologue, where he defends the status of the author as the only person who can modify the text:

[C]ada uno dice su parecer, mas ninguno toma el pincel y emienda, salvo el pintor que oye y ve la razón de cada uno, y así emienda, cotejando también lo que ve más que lo que oye. (172)

Each person states his opinion, but nobody takes up the brush to fix the painting, beside the painter who listens to each person, decides who is right and gives more importance to what he sees than to what he hears.

The contrast between the invitation for reader participation in the postface and the excessive control of the second prologue only adds to the text’s inherent tension which is reflected in the challenge to untie the impossible knot. The tension created by the paratexts reflects its double function that allows the author to observe both from the inside (positive vision of illness) and from the

14. For further reference see Imperiale (1991).

outside (moralizing discourse of society) the ill person's body. These two visions are in conflict; one does not destroy the other; rather, they are juxtaposed. The presence of these differences creates a text that is, nonetheless, fundamentally open due to the multiplicity of views it offers. *Portrait of Lozana* is composed mainly of a succession of dialogues with almost no narrative intervention. The author himself becomes just one more voice upon entering as a character. Thus, by leaving the reader with a mass of competing, undirected voices, the writer furnishes us with raw dialogue, and language's power to propagate itself becomes a central theme.

Furthermore, the contact with Lozana generates new discourses, new stories to tell. Physical contact is linked here to linguistic contact. One can relate this to the sixteenth-century fascination with the tongue as an organ with wings, independent from the rest of the body, both poisonous and beneficial.<sup>15</sup> Like the text, the tongue is linked with the transmission of disease as well as its cure. In Delicado's novel the tongue has great power, as eloquence is one of Lozana's tools of seduction.

Delicado breaks with a significant barrier: the linguistic unification of the Spanish empire. He searches for his own linguistic ideal, which is by definition impure, the language of the street, in constant movement and constantly contaminated by other tongues. As a prostitute, Lozana symbolizes this tongue that Delicado searches for. Language in this novel is characterized by instability, constant change, but it is also an attempt to break with the hegemonic power that destroys difference. It reflects life in perpetual movement as it comes into contact with other languages, cultures and people. In other words, it is a valorization of contagion.

In the end, Delicado not only recuperates a lost cultural atmosphere (as Goytisolo points out in his essay "Notas sobre *La Lozana Andaluza*"), but also gives voice to marginal people, here a sick female prostitute. Nonetheless, this fragmentation is also linked to a desire for a new unity (symbolized by the knot), thus, creating an unresolved tension that will play an important role in Goytisolo's *Virtues of the Solitary Bird*.

Since the work of Saint John constitutes the most obvious intertext or "contaminating" element in Goytisolo's novel, critics have concentrated on it. Goytisolo's novel reflects a desire to recuperate a lost past buried by an authoritarian society while simultaneously reconstructing the lost (destroyed) text of Saint John, entitled *Las propiedades del pájaro solitario* (*The Properties of the Solitary Bird*). Its mysterious disappearance and references to the solitary Sufist bird that can be found in the mystic poet's work, has led many critics to

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15. See Mazzio 53-79.

believe that it was a controversial treatise containing ideas contrary to Catholic doctrine and traces of the Islamic tradition, long viewed (along with the Jewish tradition) as Catholic Spain's Other.<sup>16</sup> Thus Goytisolo's project of rejoining what had been sundered ends up re-centering the Islamic heritage in Saint John. Fusing different traditions, the author combines the two main themes of the novel, mysticism (Sufism) and AIDS into one last flight of the bird, signifying liberation but also death. The result of this combination is a highly hybrid text.

Without denying the importance of Saint John's intertext, I propose here to use Delicado's novel to help interpret Goytisolo's, a novel which depicts the destruction of a community of homosexuals with the arrival of a new disease: AIDS. In fact, there is a strong parallel between the devastating irruption of syphilis in Rome as it is recounted by several characters in *Portrait of Lozana* and the phantasmagoric arrival of AIDS as presented by Goytisolo.

*The Virtues of the Solitary Bird* begins in Paris with the figure of AIDS as a "Pajarraco," an ugly bird, descending into the old and decrepit public baths where homosexuals gather. The destruction created by the epidemic reminds the narrator of that of Delicado's Rome. Entering Lozana's world, Goytisolo's narrator states:

dónde son los galanes, las hermosas que con una chica fosa en diez días cobriste y encerraste dando fin a las favoridas, decía la Lozana después de la epidemia y saqueo (15)

where are the elegant young men, the beautiful women whom you covered up and locked in a shallow ditch, killing off the courtesans in ten days, said Lozana after the epidemic and sack<sup>17</sup>

Here the author unites two disparate times and marginal characters in the undefined space of the text. Without a real clarification of where the characters are, we find out that this community of "rare birds" (as they are called) is sent to what is referred to as a "resort" that is transformed into a hospital room from where the main narrative voice — a moribund AIDS patient — narrates the events in a space from which there is no escape. The space is also transformed at times into a library where the rare birds, now appearing as academics, gather to study the influences of Islam in the work of the Spanish sixteenth-century mystic Saint John of the Cross. Ultimately this space becomes Saint John's prison cell where we see him receiving the visit of one of the scholars (named

16. Luce López-Baralt studied the Muslim heritage in San Juan's "solitary bird." She is one of the many authors that Goytisolo acknowledges in a list at the end of his novel.

17. Since Lane inexplicably skips this passage in her translation, I'm offering my own.

Ben Sida, which reminds us of the Spanish acronym for AIDS, “sida”) who “contaminates” him with the Muslim tradition. At the end, all these rare birds—apparently figments in the mind of the ill narrator—are isolated from society. When the AIDS patient dies, his own transformation into a bird takes place and he arrives at a sort of discovery of himself and the others, thus joining a community (and acquiring what he refers to as “the language of the birds”). At the end of the novel he finds a garden (which, like Delicado’s Lipari, might also be a prison) where he recognizes himself in the other birds.

Goytisolo uses intertextuality as a sort of valorized contamination, which is linked to the vindication of a whole group of literary texts that have been marginalized in Spain for centuries, including Delicado’s *Lozana*. It is this previously rejected tradition that Goytisolo wishes to inscribe himself in.

The discourse of contagion helps us understand the concept of literary creation that Goytisolo deals with in this novel: a process by which the author is contaminated in order to contaminate later on in an infinite chain. In this sense, the work is an unfinished process that the author abandons in order for it to continue producing effects. Furthermore, the way it produces these effects is by transforming itself into a different entity, through its destruction (like the undoing of Solomon’s knot). That is how one can interpret the last few lines of his novel:

sólo tuvo tiempo de copiar aprisa sus versos  
 en soledad vivía / y en soledad ha puesto ya su nido / y en soledad la  
 guía / a solas su querido / también en soledad de amor herido  
 antes de volar con las demás aves y cerrar definitivamente las páginas  
 del libro ya compuesto (170)

all he had time for was to hurriedly copy his verses:  
 she lived in solitude / and in solitude has made her nest / and in solitude  
 is guided / by her beloved, alone as well / in the solitude of wounded love  
 before flying with the other birds and closing once and for all the pages  
 of the book finally written (*The Virtues* 156)

Here, like the juxtaposition forged by Delicado between an open textual space and a closed one represented by the knot, there is a sharp contrast between the open space created by language in the novel and the closed spaces of entrapment and control where the characters find themselves. Therefore, it seems that this closed threatening physical space (of the “aviary,” the prison cell, the library or the hospital room) is liberated and opened by way of the text and textuality. In the last lines the text is penetrated by a stanza of *The Spiritual Canticle* by Saint John. Furthermore, *The Virtues of the Solitary Bird* ends with the image of a closed space broken by the absence of full stops. With the incorporation of the words of Saint John, the voice of Goytisolo is contaminated;



he opens a new space that he subsequently abandons in order to allow it to be penetrated or contaminated by other voices. This image of escaping the body of the text is represented by the bird's final flight.

Goytisolo links different epochs and spaces in order to give meaning to the past. As Walter Benjamin posited in "Theses on the Philosophy of History": the moments of the past become meaningful when the traces they leave become visible in the present. According to this, objects or events acquire fuller meaning when they are taken out of their context, out of their temporality and they are transported into a different temporality and context. This is how Goytisolo gives meaning to the rise of AIDS, through a process of recognition. Links between different time periods that have in common intolerance are established in the novel mainly through an analysis of society's reaction to AIDS patients and homosexuals which finds its roots not in the actual moment but in a repetition of the past (of other moments of intolerance). In the open space of the text, characters are able to move back and forth between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries almost incessantly. This chaos is organized in the common ground that unites the characters: their marginality.

As there are no full stops separating one sentence from another in the entire novel, the porous text appears as a fragile body that can be penetrated by others. The visibly open space of writing is the site of an unconscious process, in which traces of the past can be found. Thus, this is the space of recuperation but also that of a contamination by an infinite community of authors, including Delicado, each of whom participates in the writing of a single book. The novel ends with an open space lending an incomplete air to a seemingly finished piece of work as we saw in the final lines of the text. This allows the writer to link disease with the process of writing by means of the idea of contamination by which the text becomes the space of community but also the fragile body that can be penetrated by readers.

Like Delicado, Goytisolo vindicates the sick person by using the language and the stereotypes of the oppressor: the prostitute with syphilis and the homosexual suffering from AIDS. In both texts illness is omnipresent both at the content level and in the materiality of writing. At the same time, writing is a process of constant recuperation of texts in unstoppable dialogue; texts are bodies whose internal flux is communicated by contamination, which produces new challenges for the reader who is confronted with them.

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