

THE ORDER/DISORDER BINARY IN STEPHEN MARLOWE'S FICTION: FROM NEUROTIC SUBJECTS TO NARRATIVE CHAOS¹

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Mental and textual disorder is a constant in Stephen Marlowe's novels and it takes many forms, from the insight of characters that inhabit an illogical reality, phases of schizophrenia, paranoia, amnesia, or simply distorted perception of factuality, to the apparent lack of structural organization in the novels. This paper explores the functions and implications of the representation of disorder in relation to the ethical positioning of two consecutive novels published by the North American author in the last decades of the twentieth century: *Colossus; a Novel about Goya and a World Gone Mad* (1972) and *The Memoirs of Christopher Columbus; with Stephen Marlowe* (1987). In this line, my essay first analyzes how *Colossus* makes use of certain notions of mental disorder in an attempt to put forth a poignant critique on the Spanish socio-political context contemporary to the novel's publication. After studying the ways in which the author's political commitment is wrought in this novel according to the guidelines set by some theorists on madness, my study then focuses on how temporal and narrative disorder are re-elaborated in Marlowe's *The Memoirs* as structural devices to tackle the ideological set-up characteristic of its time.

Starting from its very title, *Colossus; a Novel about Goya and a World Gone Mad*² revolves around the most repetitive word in the text: "madness."

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² Doubts over Goya's authorship of *Colossus*, recurrent for more than a decade and reinforced by the recent hypothesis that the picture might have been painted by Goya's disciple Asensio Juliá, do not affect the import of Marlowe's novel at all.

Presented as a historical novel that perfectly fits in the conventional patterns of the genre, the narration takes as its protagonist Spanish painter Francisco de Goya y Lucientes, historically considered to have suffered from madness during the last decades of his life. The novel recreates in a superb way both the daily life and the most outstanding events that took place from the late eighteenth century, along sixty years that marked the history of Spain –namely, the importing of European Enlightenment ideals allowed by the tranquility enjoyed during King Charles III’s reign, the subsequent invasion by Napoleon Bonaparte’s French troops aided by King Charles IV’s Minister Godoy, the War of Independence, and the not less frustrating and harsh repression effected by the repositioned King Ferdinand VII after Spanish Independence had been regained.

The protagonist is presented throughout the text as a sensitive, strong-willed, insightful artist who sticks to the ideals of peace and justice. It is when social and political turmoil emerge after Charles III’s death that Goya is suddenly assaulted by deafness and the haunting of witches whispering in his ears which monstrous scenes he has to paint. Whether or not Marlowe was influenced by Michel Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization* when writing his novel, the philosopher’s study on madness proves a most effective tool to frame and analyze the fictional rendering of both Goya as a character and the socio-political context in which his artistic career developed. Parallels are so explicit at times that the text itself seems to demand a Foucauldian reading. For instance, a clear evolution can be discerned in the protagonist’s state of mind from an initial outburst of *passion* provoked by “a horrible and unexpected sight, great grief, rage” which leave a profound impression and provoke “sudden and violent nervous symptoms” that can result in “an immobility which may reach the point of death” to a state of mania as defined by the French thinker (Foucault 84-85). It is not coincidental that Goya’s first fit of deafness occurs when his head is struck in a popular riot provoked by an edict that banned the use of some garments and fueled by the ongoing famine the population had been suffering (Marlowe, *Colossus* 81). Likewise, the subsequent temporary fits seize him in crucial moments that will determine his emotional life. The first instance comes at a time when he is overworked because he suddenly has three families to support (198-199). The second, when his baby daughter dies from diphtheria and is buried in Saragossa while, unknowingly, he is having an extra-marital affair in Madrid (233). The third and most dangerous appears when he drives under heavy rain from Cádiz to Sanlúcar de Barrameda to see his lover Cayetana de Alba; in this occasion, he becomes so seriously ill that he undergoes a temporal “general paralysis of the nervous system” (308) –his relationship with Cayetana being the event that will mark his life most deeply.

Goya’s transition to *mania* is marked by the influence of the witches that haunt his thoughts and creak and cackle in his ears, tormenting him up to the moment he fills all the walls in the House of the Deaf Man with the so-called *Black Paintings* (543-544). Both his state at this point and the description of

the monstrosity and deformity encapsulated in those paintings recall Foucault's definition of this mental disorder: "the maniac's imagination [...] is occupied by a perpetual flux of impetuous thoughts [...] mania deforms all concepts and ideas; either they lose their congruence, or their representative value is falsified; [...] in the maniac we find audacity and fury" (109). Yet, Marlowe's Goya retains the trait of melancholia that permits "the sufferer to predict the future, to speak an unknown language, to see beings ordinarily invisible" (96). In this audacious and furious mood, inspired by the witches' advice to work and live because "beyond the grave is nothing" (Marlowe, *Colossus* 388), Goya starts working on the *Caprices* etchings. This series includes his famous *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* and again depicts a world of monstrosity, witches, deformity, death, and nothingness. The same impetuous impulse leads the painter to work on the series called *The Disasters of War*, based on his own experience as a witness of the War of Independence against the French.

At the same time, the representation of the painter's relation to the world around him allows the reader to apprehend the rage and animality –ascribed to madness in the Middle Ages (Foucault 18)– of the social environment. The description of these traits through the barbarity and atrocities committed by the Holy Inquisition, in popular riots, in the war, and among civilians themselves, provide the reader with a backward view of eighteenth century Spanish society and government that would better befit a darker stage of civilization in the European continent. The first visible sign of this animality is the population's brutality during the riots of the *Motín de Squillace*, when the Spanish even managed to open the gates of the *Cárcel de Corte*, as the French did in the *Bastille* (Marlowe, *Colossus* 77-80). Thus, Goya's madness eventually becomes Marlowe's strategy to target the socio-political conditions of the historical period. A conversation between Goya and King Charles III foreshadows and summarizes the whole point:

“–What sort of Spain will you paint?”

“Wouldn't that depend on Spain, Your Majesty?”

The king turned on him sharply. “Then open your eyes and keep them open. You'll see a time of turmoil, of despair and anarchy, of pighead politicians leading us into wars I've tried to avoid. You'll see the dark side of the Spanish soul emerging, the bloodlust of the bullring spilling into the streets of Madrid. You'll see the land ravaged. You'll see a time of madness. Will you paint that?” (255-256)

Significantly, Goya goes deaf forever as soon as France declares war to Spain in March 1793.³ The narrator keenly insists on “the futility of war. The

³ Goya's ear problems, overemphasized as they are in the novel (Marlowe, *Colossus* 198, 199, 233, 235, 307, 339, 480, 543), could be interpreted as the “defect in transmission of sense impressions to the brain, [the] flaw in communication” linked to the delirium of maniacs (Foucault 120-121).

madness of it” (533) and deftly describes the artist’s creation of the etchings named *Disasters of War*, based on what he witnessed in the War of Independence: “He had no plan, no focus, no direction. He fought the beast with his etching needle and his acid. He fought the callous indifference of a God who did not care. Stark black and white *in a world gone mad*. The beast in us all, no one is immune” (524; emphasis added).

Simultaneously, Goya is described in his awareness of the clear symptoms of his incipient insanity when he recognizes his own mirror-reflected look in the eyes of the madmen confined in the General Hospital of Badajoz, where he helps rescuing inmates during a big fire he would later immortalize in *The Fire*. At his old age, the artist sometimes recalls that madhouse, where he believes he belongs; yet “the knowing, he asked himself, wasn’t the knowing a sign that he really wasn’t mad? A madman thinks he is sane” (545). His assumption perfectly coincides with the one prescribed by the *Encyclopédie*’s definition of madness: “to depart from reason ‘with confidence and in the firm conviction that one is following it [...]’. The madman [...] *deceives himself*” (Foucault 98). Following the mediaeval literature on the madman as the guardian of truth engaged in making his contemporaries aware of “the follies of men” (Foucault 11), the painter’s alleged madness is depicted as the courage to discern and paint “the truth” of a country dominated by vanity, greed, cruelty and destruction. As the narrator puts it when interpreting Goya’s *Caprices*: “The folly of men, [...] the insanity of living in a fourteenth-century world on the eve of the nineteenth. Spain, he thought. Poor Spain. Hold up a mirror [...]. Of course they’re ugly, they’re the sleep of reason, they’re the dark night of Spain” (Marlowe, *Colossus* 382, 403). It is, in fact, the nothingness and the night of classical unreason that, according to Foucault, pervade and give birth to both Goya’s *Disparates* and his paintings in the House of the Deaf Man (266-267). The disturbing recurrence of the exclamation “nada, nada y nada” out of the painter’s despair and feeling of void (Marlowe, *Colossus* 98, 152, 233, 309, 310, 466) could actually be read as Marlowe’s acknowledgment of his indebtedness to Foucault.

In this sense, the madman’s role as guardian of truth is rendered in highly positive, nearly visionary terms. The painter’s career is portrayed as being always moved by “the magic,” a kind of inspirational creative energy whose purpose and meaning he does not quite grasp at the beginning. It is when he engages in the *Disasters of War* that he

understood the meaning of the magic finally. To show this. That one power-mad man could cause such disaster. That an army could follow him blindly, for the glory of their nation. That the people could rise from fire and blood with an unspeakable barbarity of their own. That men could do this to one another. [...] They lacked [...] a hope for all the future still to come, a feeling of humanity –any other way was madness. To show that.

To etch it. To attack the copper plates with the savage knowledge that he was right. (500)

Furthermore, this “magic” is repeatedly explained as being *fed* by the witches, which in turn are set as the essence of Goya's madness (468, 548). Interestingly enough, this parallelism seems to fit perfectly with Foucault's closing remarks in *Madness and Civilization*:

through madness, a work that seems to drown in the world, to reveal there its non-sense, and to transfigure itself with the features of pathology alone, actually engages within itself the world's time, masters it, and leads it; by the madness which interrupts it, a work of art opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer, provokes a breach without reconciliation where *the world is forced to question itself*. [...] the world is made aware of its guilt. Henceforth, and through the mediation of madness, it is the world that becomes culpable (for the first time in the Western world) in relation to the work of art; [...] yet madness is contemporary with the work of art, since it inaugurates the time of its truth. The moment when, together, the work of art and madness are born and fulfilled is the beginning of the time when the world finds itself arraigned by that work of art and responsible before it for what it is. (273-274; emphasis added)

In short, Goya's apparent mental disorder unravels as the faithful lens through which the reader, just as the people who observe his paintings, can see the madness of the historical context that made it possible, at the same time as it emerges as a different logic of reason necessary in order to survive in such a cruel, grotesque world. Furthermore, the artist's different order of reason is metaphorized in his defense of his personal style at painting. Thus, when his master Francisco Bayeu criticizes both the lines Goya draws as being “pure chaos” and his baroque excess of color in contrast with the “reason,” order and precision of neoclassical line and sobriety, the protagonist expounds his belief that Bayeu does not understand reason –since reason, for Goya, is color (Marlowe *Colossus* 105, 226). In other words, the protagonist's personal conception of order is the chaos of the neoclassic. Hence, the critiques of Goya's paintings as chaotic acquire a new, positive dimension, since this “chaos” appears as the new order of reason that enables the artist to discern and cope with the chaotic, disastrous reality he reflected in those paintings. Indeed, this different mental order could be interpreted in the light of the ideas put forth by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their work *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972). The narrator in *Colossus* marks a clear contrast between two sectors of society. On the one hand, the general population is shown to be completely thoughtless and incapable of moving out of a herd-like paralysis. This condition leads them to reclaim power for the exiled “deformed tyrant Ferdinand VII the Desired” (Marlowe, *Colossus* 495) after the Spanish victory over the French in the War of Independence, aware

as they were that he would instantly restore both his absolute power and that of the Inquisition while sentencing to death those who wrote a Constitution for him to sign (520-528). On the other hand, those few influenced by the Enlightenment –and Goya most acutely of all– appear as a minority which can neither fit in nor stand the social context and popular masochism. It is in this sense that the painter can be seen as an embodiment of Deleuze and Guattari’s figure of the psychotic as a person who escapes and rebels against the oedipalization process that turns people into socialized, undifferentiated elements of the neurotic mass –fascist by necessity– that needs and desires the figure of a dictator to lead their steps and legislate life. The standpoint of the novel on this issue is clearly reinforced by the convergence of different voices on the view of Spanish society in general as a neurotic mass. Thus, while Jovellanos and his *Junta* are writing a constitution borrowing from the French and the American ones, the omniscient external narrator expounds that “the people wanted Fernando. They did not understand a country without a king” (501). The narrator’s stance is supplemented by the opinions of characters that may be considered as outsiders in the Spanish paralysis. Hence, it is the English Duke of Wellington who, discussing the constitution of the revolutionary government with Antonio Francisco, Goya’s fictional bastard son –brought up and educated in France after Enlightenment ideals– says that the people want Ferdinand, who will tear up the constitution and throw it to their faces.

The neuroticism of the Spanish population is reinstated by the behavior of a group of blacksmiths, who read the proclamation that contains information on King Ferdinand’s new repressive measures and start shouting: “Death to the constitution! Death to liberty! Long live the Inquisition! Long live Spain and the king!” (528). Witnessing such an outrageous spectacle, Antonio Francisco complains: “‘The people. We fought and died for them. We fought and died for Fernando. The Desired. [...] It’s what the people want. They don’t know. They don’t understand’” (528). Indeed, the import of Antonio Francisco’s dying thoughts, quoted below, reinforces the significance of his presence as a fictional character in the novel:

It is no longer worth it, even if we could rally our old people. Let Fernando reign. Let him take Spain to hell with him. Perhaps it is what Spain deserves. [...] Hated the French because they corrupted their own ideas. Mother taught me. Good ideas. Enlightened, and then the corruption. We could use a little of that enlightenment down here. I thought it would be simple. [...] The people aren’t ready. Perhaps they never will be ready. Show it, father. No one can show it the way you can, the way you had to. (534, 539)

The link between Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the neurotic and Antonio Francisco’s visionary apprehension of the Spanish population’s desire for subjugation under a tyrant’s regime becomes central for my argumentation

here. Moreover, his questioning whether Spaniards will *ever* be ready for enlightenment and self-government suggests a further preoccupation with the lack of democracy in the country. In other words, Marlowe's rendering of a neurotic Spanish society is by no means coincidental or restricted to the historical period represented in the novel. As literary critic Avrom Fleishman states on the ideological commitment of historical novels,

only the novelist with a coherent conception of his own world can look back to a past age and see it as a coherent system. The historical novel, like all historical writing, is engaged with—if it is not necessarily compromised by—the present. [...] The reflection from the present to the past is completed when the historical novelist reaches not the present from which he began but the constants of human experience in history—however these may appear to him in his time and place. (14)

In this line, the novel seems to bear a resemblance with the approach of “new historians” like Herbert B. Addams, J. H. Robinson, Carl Becker and Charles Beard, who insisted that only those aspects of the past that are directly relevant to the present and can explain a present state of affairs are worthy of study (Wesseling 71). In fact, *Colossus* is pervaded by references and parallelisms that shed light on a subtle underlying critique against the Spanish reality contemporary to the writing of the novel—which the author witnessed when he was living on and off for ten years in Spain gathering material on Goya, as acknowledged in the Afterword section of the book. In this sense, the depiction of the flourishing of Enlightenment ideas during the peaceful, liberal reign of Charles III clearly recalls the atmosphere of intellectual freedom, and the institutionalization of public education for the poor enjoyed in the country in the years of the democratic Second Republic (1931-1936) previous to the Civil War (1936-1939) and the subsequent repressive, fascist, dictatorial regime (Aguado & Ramos 154-302). As happened during Charles III's reign, the Second Republic was by far the most creative period in twentieth century Spain in terms of literature, culture and fine arts—so much so that these years came to be known as the “Silver Age” of Spanish culture. Furthermore, the link between Franco's dictatorial regime (1939-1975) and the dark periods of repression and decline comprehended in the book—Godoy's and Ferdinand VII's rules—becomes clear when the narrator conspicuously refers to Godoy as “virtual dictator of Spain” (384), “a mockery of a generalissimo” (428), with a “generalissimo's uniform” (429, 467). Bearing in mind that Stephen Marlowe was to write two other novels of Spanish theme and that he was to live in the country for some more years, it is easy to understand why these straightforward references are rare in the book since over-strict censorship was one of the characteristics of Franco's times, together with prison punishment for those who dared speak against the regime. Nevertheless, this did not prevent the author from subtly displaying his outsider's view and bittersweet criticism of a country that, like Goya and Antonio Francisco in the novel, he loved in spite of itself.

The Memoirs of Christopher Columbus; with Stephen Marlowe centers on the life and adventures of another historical personage who repeatedly suffers from amnesia, hallucinations, and paranoia. A clear example of these features is the recurrence of two Pynchonesque motifs throughout the book that embed some of the most outstanding deeds in the discoverer's biographies in a frame of paranoia and feverish hallucination. First, the protagonist's paranoid fear of a secret society of assassins – "the Brotherhood of the Golden Stag (or Hind)" – acts as the engine for the succession of accidental events that lead a runaway Columbus in all his steps towards the discovery of the New World. And second, "the Whole Sick Syndrome" that Columbus suffers from noticeably recalls the "Whole Sick Crew" from Thomas Pynchon's *V*. This illness makes the protagonist hallucinate and "get ahead of [him]self" (Marlowe, *Memoirs* 423) in his anachronistic re-counting of events while producing Christ-like stigmata on his hands.

Yet, the significant element in the passage from *Colossus* to *The Memoirs* is the shift from a different logic of the mind, to a different logic of discourse. For a start, the autodiegetic narrator Christopher Columbus experiences time in a way that recalls Fredric Jameson's explanation in terms of Lacan's theory of schizophrenia understood as a language disorder: since, for Lacan, the experience of temporality is an effect of language and the schizophrenic has not properly entered the realm of speech and language, he or she lacks the experience of temporal continuity and instead "experiences a fragmentation of time, a series of perpetual presents" (Sarup 134). The narrator, indeed, is but "a decontextualized postmodernist figure" (Collado-Rodríguez 110) who frequently flies "off the map of time" (Marlowe, *Memoirs* 75, 356) and is capable of commenting on issues concerning centuries after historical Columbus's death as well as of criticizing what his future biographers would write about him. The use of anachronistic references is a defining feature of the novel. By way of example, he states at one point in the narrative that he "was the worst thing that happened to Italy until Mussolini" (14). The narrator also mentions Joan of Arc's sanctification in 1920 (24), and the fact that "the world would see nothing quite like it until Cape Canaveral and the race for the moon" (39). In a more self-conscious mood, the narrator states at one point:

Me: Sometimes I feel like Don Quixote tilting at windmills – the futility of it all. (Note that Cervantes wouldn't publish the first part of his masterpiece until 1605. So this couldn't have been precisely what I wrote on my scrap of paper in the olive press room. But it captures the flavor admirably). (125-126)

However, the import of anachronism is most self-evident when it is deployed to undermine the objectivity of historical and biographical accounts, demonstrating that, as the narrator states, "History flows not into but from the pen of the historian" (21). This is the case, for instance, when he states:

my own son [...] Fernando, unwilling to spring from the loins of a semi-literate nobody who ran off to the sea at fourteen, sent me in his biography (a book I don't recommend) to the University of Pavia so I could become a suitable father for the illegitimate son of the Admiral of the Ocean Sea." (6)

In addition to the straightforward undermining of the traditional notion of time as a stable, one-directional category, the narrator's a(na)chronistic stance may thus be seen as a parodic game with the belief of the philosophers of history B. Croce and E. H. Carr that "all history is contemporary history" and that "great history is written precisely when the historian's vision of the past is illuminated by insights into the problems of the present" (Carr 21, 37). On the other hand, it is essential for my purposes here to recall that, as Francesca Benedict words it, "the strong opposition of postmodernism to universalism has rendered the questions of time and space (chronology and geography) of prime importance in a culture which is in the process of redefining its links to History and to the world" (117-118). Just as the explanatory and/or emancipatory efficiency of the other master narratives was being radically questioned, thus the teleological or progressive character of History is being challenged by postmodernist historiographic metafiction –both in itself and as the foundations of traditional, realist, historical novels.

Nevertheless, where the different order –the seemingly anarchic disorder– of discourse is most literally materialized is in the apparently random (dis)organization of the various narrative levels and intertextual references that characterize the novel. *The Memoirs* is an example of what Linda Hutcheon denominates "historiographic metafiction" (5) –the thorough historiographic research on which its accurate display of historical data is grounded provides the narrative with a weighty appearance of reliability. Yet, this appearance is directly undermined by the constant blending of historical and fictional material. Together with this, overt metafictionality recurrently calls the reader's attention to the interplay of chance and necessity in the development of events⁴ and, more significantly, to the chaotic structuring of the multiplicity of styles, registers, genres, and intertexts whose interaction produces a variety of multi-layered, ever-expanding scales of interpretation. Before going further into this issue, it might be convenient to recall that chaos theory, complex systems, and literary studies became associated as a result of a series of steps that ended up in a metaphoric parallelism drawn between thermodynamic processes and information theory through the concepts of

⁴ According to thermodynamicists Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers' research on the behaviour of supramolecular structures, "self-organization processes in far-from-equilibrium conditions correspond to a delicate interplay between chance and necessity," i.e., between the fluctuations or random elements that appear before the bifurcations provoked by contact with an external element, and the deterministic laws that regulate the space between bifurcations (176).

entropy and *noise*. Entropy was coined in the 1860s by Rudolf Clausius to refer to the decrease of energy available for work that occurs in any heat exchange as enunciated in the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Claude Shannon devised a *probability function* that he identified with information when heat losses in heat exchanges were associated with molecular disorder –i.e. the faster molecules move the more mixed up they become. For Shannon, the more random a message is the more information it conveys. Shannon decided to call the quantity of randomness or disorder calculated by the function the “entropy” of a message (Hayles 223). The idea of a probability function in a message therefore implies the existence of unexpected elements in combination with a quantity of elements that are easy to predict. The alliance between entropy and information thus came to be effective only when information was associated with novelty instead of with meaning: the less probable an element is to appear, the more information it conveys. In other words, a noisy message will be more surprising and hence will convey more information. What Shannon’s probability function measures was called the “complexity” of a message. Chaotic or complex systems, Katherine Hayles concludes, are

disordered in the sense that they are unpredictable, but they are ordered in the sense that they possess complex recursive symmetries that almost, but not quite, replicate themselves over time. The metaphoric joining of entropy and information was instrumental in bringing about these developments, for it allowed complexity to be seen in information rather than deficient in order. (224-5)

As Paul Davies states, it is only recently that scientists have started to understand how complexity and organization can emerge from featurelessness and chaos. Their research in “areas as diverse as fluid turbulence, crystal growth and neural networks is revealing the extraordinary propensity for physical systems to generate new states of order spontaneously” (Davies 1).

Also essential for my purposes here is Paul Davies and John Gribbin’s distinction between two types of systems in physics: first, they describe a linear system as “one in which the whole is equal to the sum of its parts [...], and in which the sum of a collection of causes produces a corresponding sum of effects” (38). However complex a linear system may be, Davies points out, “it can always be understood as merely the conjunction or superposition or peaceful coexistence of many simple elements that are present together but do not ‘get in each other’s way’” (Davies 25). In opposition, they define nonlinear systems as those which “can display a rich and complex repertoire of behavior, and do unexpected things –they can, for example, go chaotic. Without nonlinearity, there would be no chaos, because there would be no diversity of possible patterns of behavior on which the intrinsic uncertainty of nature could act” (Davies and Gribbin 40).

The structural analysis of *The Memoirs* reveals the book as a complex nonlinear system that shows the four characteristics Davies attributes to this type of systems:

The first concerns their formation. Complexity often appears abruptly rather than by slow and continuous evolution. [...] Secondly, complex systems often [...] have a very large number of components (degrees of freedom). Thirdly, they are rarely closed systems; indeed, it is usually the very openness to a complex environment that drives them. Finally, such systems are predominantly 'non-linear.' (Davies 22)

These features are intrinsic to Marlowe's novel and spring mostly from the unexpected irruption of fictional characters and events on the one hand and of intertextual references on the other, which interact with the development of documented facts, thereby opening new lines of interpretation. Indeed, a parallelism can be established between the behaviour of metafictional texts and of molecular structures in a state of non-equilibrium as studied by Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers (1985): just as molecular collision brings about the creation of new particles that keep on interacting in ever-expanding new patterns that are only apparently disordered, so does interaction among the different textual layers in the novel create unexpected patterns of interpretation.

Thus, the narrator's initial belief in *chance* as the engine of historical development (Marlowe, *Memoirs* 1) and in life as a series of "accidents" that simply "happen in the right order" (96) without any transcendent "grand design" (409) becomes meaningful when he listens to God's words explaining to him that everything in his life went the way it did because "the time had come" for certain events to take place (564). Columbus's new insight therefore allows him to discern some kind of hidden pattern or order structuring and giving meaning to the apparent randomness of events. This "maturation" in the narrator's view of the interplay of chance and necessity contrasts with the reader's disorientation as regards the apparently random organization of various materials that constitute the novel. Yet it can also be interpreted as an invitation to look for meaningful underpinning patterns or grand designs in the text. Indeed, this self-conscious appeal makes up for the absence –typical in metafictional novels– of the authoritative God-like omniscient narrator of realistic fiction, which functioned as a guide for the readers to reach *the* message of the text. This absence inevitably creates in the readers an impression of disorder and randomness and leaves them with a multiplicity of elements they must interpret, since the relation signifier/signified is no longer univocal and stable. Interestingly enough, Peter Stoicheff describes metafictional texts as self-reflexive problematizations of language, as "a chaotic generator of significance whose interpretations are multiple. [...] In effect, the text ceases to transmit the exterior world, and interrogates its own medium of transmission" (86).

Furthermore, as happens to molecular structures in their interaction with the outside world, a metafictional text is not a closed, isolated system. It exists in the context of a multiplicity of cultural and literary discourses that place it in a state of non-equilibrium, especially when intertextual reference is overt: interaction among diverse intertextual sources may bring about unimagined patterns of signification that are endowed with harmony or order by interrelated implications from those absorbed external influences. The intertextual echoes and the overtly fictional events inserted within the linear structure of the plot that deals with Columbus's documented biography thus provide the novel with a complexity that can only be accounted for through a detailed study of those elements and, more specifically, of the way in which they alter the significance of historical events and call for different strategies of interpretation. As Paulson explains drawing a parallelism between molecular and literary self-generation, "what appears to be a perturbation in a given system turns out to be the intersection of a new system with the first. In becoming aware of such a relation, the reader in effect creates a new context in which the previously disruptive event or variety is reread" (44).

In this line, parallel to the autodiegetic narrator's account of his personal and professional trajectory runs a second level of meaning –namely, his multifaceted critique of historiography and geography. Intertextual references provide a variety of additional scales of signification that interact with the previous ones. For instance, the recurrence of Pynchonesque motifs brings to the fore the protagonist's ontological and epistemological concerns. A sequence of Chinese-box structured dreams adds a Biblical layer of intertextuality, portraying Columbus as a rather peculiar anti-Christian St. Christopher and as a reincarnation of the Wandering Jew at the same time. The appearance of "the Blue Pimpernel" –a feminist parody of Baroness D'Orczy's *Scarlett Pimpernel*– allows for a site of controversy and commitment with several poignant gender issues. Likewise, political engagement and uncompromising criticism upon colonialism and religious fundamentalism run parallel through the connections established by other intertextual "perturbations," like the parallelism between Moses and Columbus's (fictional) Indian step-son Yego Clone, or the references to Dante's *Divine Comedy* in the description of the dungeons of the Holy Inquisition in Toledo.

To finish with, I would like to remark a further link between the different (dis)orders exposed in the two scrutinized novels. For a start, Foucault's description of madness along the history of the term highlights the persistence of a language and state of the mad in which equilibrium is established though hidden beneath the mask of illusion, beneath feigned disorder. The connection is outstanding when he ponders on the time when Gothic figures of madness lose their meaning and gravitate around their own madness:

this liberation derives from a proliferation of meaning, from a self-multiplication of significance, weaving relationships so numerous, so

intertwined, so rich, that [...] meaning is no longer read in an immediate perception, the figure no longer speaks for itself. (Foucault 16)

Since the relation between the behaviour of the discourse of madness and that of a chaotic metafictional text is so close, it comes as no surprise that Stephen Marlowe coherently stuck to the same underlying ideological framework in the transition from one novel to the other, while allowing for a site of political and social criticism.

To sum up, mental (dis)order was explored in *Colossus; a Novel about Goya and a World Gone Mad* as a tool to denounce the madness of a historical period, the herd instinct of the neurotic late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Spanish population so much in need of a fascist leader, whose parallelisms with Franco's dictatorship served Marlowe well as the target of his veiled though politically engaged critique. Yet, temporal and narrative (dis)order –an alternative form of studied order indeed– provide *The Memoirs of Christopher Columbus; with Stephen Marlowe* with a different standpoint for ethical commitment. For a start, the metaphorization of temporal schizophrenia allows for a redefinition of concepts such as the teleological character of history, its alleged –and now dismantled– claims for veracity and objectivity, and its relation to the contemporary world. Finally, formal strategies such as the chaotic structure of the novel offer new tools to cope with a complex understanding of a multifaceted reality and of human mechanisms to interrogate and handle its media of transmission.

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