

Daguerreotypy, Optical Metaphors, and Visual Power in Echeverría's "El matadero"

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The photograph is handsome, as is the boy: that is the *studium*. But the *punctum* is: *he is going to die*. I read at the same time: *This will be and this has been*; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake.

—Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

OPTICAL METAPHORS IN ROSAS'S ARGENTINA

The salience of visual culture in the Argentina of Juan Manuel de Rosas (1829-32; 1835-52) has been well documented by historians and literary critics alike. Besides punitive measures, populist rhetoric, and a loyal network of cattle-rancher *caudillos*, María Cristina Fukelman shows that Rosas's regime also maintained power via ample image-based propaganda (2-3). Roberto Amigo, in turn, appropriately describes Argentines of the era as waging nothing short of a "guerra visual" (11) in which lithographs, oil paintings, and even playing cards were emblazoned with the leader's likeness (Ramos Mejía 373). Finally, William Acree shows that both political affiliations and social duties were expressed via the *divisa*—a crimson ribbon worn on hats or at the breast (214); donning such regalia, moreover, was legally obligatory (Marino 43-45; Parkins 72-73).

Other aspects of visual culture intrigued Rioplatense society of Rosas's era: specifically, novel technological apparatuses that highlighted newfound optical know-how gained popularity. Magic lanterns, dioramas, and other devices used to project images had wide appeal. These apparatuses serve as the starting point for Brandon Lanctot's innovative and convincing interpretation of numerous narratives from Rosas's Argentina. In particular, in Chapter 3 of his *Beyond Civilization*

and Barbarism: Culture and Politics in Postrevolutionary Argentina (2014), Lanctot examines the relationship between visual culture, political power, technological innovation, and literary production. By looking at works from Esteban Echeverría, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, and lesser-known journalists from the era, Lanctot shows that “[i]n the writings of *letrados* of the Generation of 1837 [. . .] optical devices operate as metaphors for the conditions and limitations of intellectual activity in postrevolutionary Argentina” (109). For Rioplatense writers who invoked ingenious optical apparatuses, such devices “fulfill[ed] multiple functions: as a machine and a point of view, as an instrument of diversion and discipline, of entertainment and surveillance” (108).

While nuanced and well-argued, Lanctot’s analysis ignores the text that may best represent the Generation of 1837: Esteban Echeverría’s “El matadero.” Furthermore, my reading differs from that of Lanctot by locating a specific series of historical events that inspired Argentina’s notable enthusiasm for including technological innovation in narrative. In particular, I recount how the arrival and popularization of the daguerreotype—optical innovation par excellence of the early nineteenth century—captured the imagination of the Generation of 1837. With the following, I expand upon Lanctot’s reading of optical metaphors as they were employed in the literature of Rosas’s Argentina.

First, I recount the peculiar history of daguerreotypy’s arrival to Río de la Plata, and the Generation of 1837’s reaction to the optical wonders the device furnished. Second, I examine the optical metaphors employed in “El matadero” and show how the philosophical effects of visual technologies (such as daguerreotypy), are inscribed in the text. As Lanctot also points out, Echeverría’s prose recapitulates how optical apparatuses prompt “the limits between subject and object [to] dissolve” (96). In this way, like other Rioplatense writers of his day, Echeverría participated in his society’s gazing games. This article’s contribution, then, is to demonstrate that Echeverría’s most well-known work, “El matadero,” also speaks to his era’s interest in optical knowledge and innovation. Moreover, I contend that even while the narrator employs optical metaphors in his prose—evoking the visual capacities that those devices represent to facilitate reading—the text also evinces a marked anxiety regarding those same newfound optical technologies. In this way, “El matadero” remains a prescient warning against authoritarian regimes that maintain control

over their citizenry through visual know-how—even over a century after its posthumous publication in 1871.

ANOTHER HALLMARK OF RÍO DE LA PLATA'S VISUAL HISTORY: DAGUERREOTYPY

While Lanctot enumerates the many optically-advanced gadgets that entertained Argentines during the first half of the nineteenth century (90), he misses the era's most notable development in visual culture: the appearance and popularization of daguerreotypic technology. Notably, the arrival of daguerreotypy to Río de la Plata coincided with Echeverría writing "El matadero:" between 1838 and 1840.¹ When Frenchman Louis Daguerre first demonstrated his invention to the world on January 9, 1839, the device provoked nothing short of a "daguerreotypemanía" (Tagg 41; Eder, Epstein, and Lüppo-Cramer 246). By August 19 of that same year, the French government had purchased the rights to the apparatus from its inventor and made public the instructions for its manufacture (Williams 38). News of the invention reached Río de la Plata in early spring of 1840. In February of that year, Montevideo's newspaper *El Nacional* reported the arrival of a camera to Río de Janeiro the previous year, and Buenos Aires's *La Gaceta Mercantil* introduced the device to readers on March 11.² *El Nacional's* report coincided with the device's chance arrival to Montevideo, Uruguay, when the French ship *L'Orientale*, an *école flottante* piloted by wanderlust students exploring maritime commerce, made an unplanned stop. Originally slated to go ashore in Buenos Aires, *L'Orientale* (with daguerreotype in tow) was prohibited from entering the Argentine port city due to an ongoing French blockade (Becquer and Cuarterolo 11). Amid the scarcity of goods caused by the blockade, political emotions ran high in Buenos Aires, and public (that is, visual) demonstrations became vitriolic:

Within the city of Buenos Ayres, the followers of the Dictator were kept in a veritable frenzy of enthusiasm. Rosas gave spectacular publicity to the activities of the blockading squadron and to Unitarian intrigue in the various provinces. Violence, extending even to murder, was not uncommonly inflicted upon those suspected of sympathy with his enemies. Everywhere the slogans appeared: "Eternal hatred to the parricide Unitarians, killer of kin, sold out to the filthy French gold!" (Ross and McGann 47)

Much like the dramatic opening scene of “El matadero,” in which a cataclysmic flood inspires Federalists to spew hate speech against Unitarians, in Rosas’s real-life Buenos Aires, his supporters were roused to action by an event beyond their control: the blockade of goods. Buenos Aires was seized by extreme violence into the late 1830s.

When the daguerreotype reached Montevideo, the city had already become a hub for the Generation of 1837 (Shumway 129). Comprised of Argentine intellectuals including Esteban Echeverría (1805-1851), Juan Alberdi (1810-1884), Domingo Sarmiento (1811-1888), and Bartolomé Mitre (1821-1906), the group actively opposed the Rosas regime. They hoped to end the era of strong-armed politics headed by caudillos, replacing it with an enlightened, progressive government. Members of the group already knew the city of Montevideo quite well: the youngest member of the Generation of 1837, Bartolomé Mitre, had resided with his family in Montevideo since 1833. Echeverría, in turn, had been hiding in his brother’s estancia, “Los Talas,” near present-day Luján, Argentina. In 1840 he moved to Colonia, Uruguay before eventually joining other Argentine exiles in Montevideo in 1841 (Wilson 82; Sarlo and Altamirano 312). Before Echeverría’s move—in late February of 1839, between the 24 and the 29, the *L’Orientale*’s chaplain, Abbot Louis Comte, demonstrated the daguerreotype to various Unitarian exiles residing in Montevideo—Mariquita Sánchez de Thompson, Florencio Varela, and Tomás de Iriarte (Vertanessian 12; Luna 17). These were among the first Argentines to see the invention firsthand (von Sanden 1-3). Sánchez de Thompson lauded the device as a “maravilla” (Bécquer and Cuarterolo 14), while Varela became a veritable daguerreotype fanatic, and eventually travelled to France in 1843 and again in 1845 to meet Daguerre (Facio 13). Soon after Comte’s demonstration, on March 4, 1839, Varela published an article about the daguerreotype in Montevideo’s newspaper *El Correo del Plata*. That same day, another Montevidean newspaper, *El Talismán*, published daguerreotype images of the Uruguayan capitol building. Finally, on March 6, yet another newspaper printed in Montevideo, *El Nacional*, published the article “Descripción del daguerrotipo por el Dr. D Teodoro M. Vilardebó” including more photographs taken in Río de la Plata (Becquer and Cuarterolo 11). In the following months, Comte continued to show the device along the

South American coast until June 23, 1840, when *L'Orientale* shipwrecked shortly after setting sail from Valparaiso, Chile (Wood 5-6).

In Río de la Plata and beyond, the daguerreotype's novel visual possibilities inspired excitement, conversation, and philosophizing. In the already mentioned article by Varela, the Unitarian intellectual lauds the daguerreotype as a great contribution to science as well as to the arts.³ Furthermore, like Henry David Thoreau—who characterized the device as “nature repeating itself”—and William Henry Fox Talbot, who referred to the invention as the “pencil of nature” (Sandweiss and Trachtenberg 22), Varela also emphasized nature's central role in the creation of daguerreotype images.⁴ Daguerre himself explained his invention as nature “reproduc[ing] herself” (Burrows 28). As both Jonathan Crary and Geoffrey Bachten claim, daguerreotypy tasked its viewers to wonder if something—an image, for instance—could spontaneously and automatically “be” without human premeditation. As Lanctot explains, “[t]he camera becomes an apparatus that renders process and product indistinguishable by diminishing human agency on both sides of the lens” (6). With this, the philosophical division between subject and object was undermined, if not made completely obsolete. Suddenly, objects could do the work of subjects while subjects, in turn, could be observed by optically innovative devices, and thus rendered objects.

Conversation surrounding daguerreotypy also dealt with the device's possibilities for observation and surveillance. In this sense, the invention inspired anxiety along with exhilaration, and Rioplatenses of Rosas's era were not immune to the unease. The day after Dr. D. Teodoro M. Vilardebó first introduced the daguerreotype to Montevidean readers in *El Nacional*, the same paper ran a short story penned under the pseudonym “Moniteur” (Becquer and Cuarterolo 15). The article tells the story of a daguerreotype aficionado who, upon returning home, discovers that he has been robbed. Luckily, the daguerreotype in his house captured an image of the thief: his gardener. The daguerreotype image is presented as evidence in court and the gardener is convicted. As the “Moniteur” surmised, the daguerreotype had dramatically enhanced humanity's capacity to observe itself.⁵ Photographs soon became fundamental for collecting information, observing, and regulating society. Case in point is the New York Police Department, which began cataloguing photographs of repeat criminal offenders soon after daguerreotype technology was made available (Williams 162).

DAGUERREOTYPY AND OTHER OPTICAL METAPHORS IN “EL MATADERO”

Echeverría’s grotesque romp through a Buenos Aires slaughterhouse has inspired an array of interpretations.⁶ However, one constant observation of “El matadero” scholarship focuses on the text’s vivid descriptions and narrative reflection of Río de la Plata’s visual culture. Juan Ghiano, for one, notes that Echeverría was a skilled drawing student, and suggests that the “impresionalismo descriptivo” (87) of “El matadero” was possibly inspired by lithographer César Hipólito Bacle (1794-1838), painter Charles Henri Pellegrini (1800-1875), or painter Emeric Essex Vidal (1791-1861). Each of these artists worked in Buenos Aires during Echeverría’s lifetime (1805-1851), and all of them portrayed the cityscape in a vivid *costumbrista* style not unlike descriptions seen in Echeverría’s text. The most compelling comparison to be drawn with “El matadero” is the watercolor work of Englishman Vidal, especially his *Picturesque Illustrations of Buenos Ayres and Montevideo* (1820), a travelogue that includes twenty-two illustrations of Buenos Aires and the surrounding countryside. Vidal’s repulsive description of the Convalecencia slaughterhouse resonates with Echeverría’s text, as both describe in lurid detail how men and machine combine their powers to kill cattle (Vidal 37).

Furthermore, both Vidal’s book and Echeverría’s “El matadero” evince a dramatic sense of movement, transitioning from a vantage point on the outskirts of Buenos Aires before zooming in on their objects of analysis—the city and its customs—and concluding with a close-up of Convalecencia’s innermost, gruesomest spaces. As Horacio Botalla notes (8), the order of portraits in Vidal’s book mimics that of a traveller arriving to Buenos Aires, beginning with a faraway view of the port before progressively moving into the city center and ultimately, its four slaughterhouses. Vidal presumably made a similar journey through the city when he arrived in Argentina as a British army officer in 1816 and again in 1828.

Although such paintings likely inspired Echeverría’s close-up on his slaughterhouse, I propose that Río de la Plata’s special relationship to the daguerreotype should also give us pause: as already mentioned, the device piqued the interest of some of Echeverría’s closest interlocutors. “El matadero” shifts from the general to the specific, creating a sense of movement remarkably similar to that of ocular technologies like telescopes, microscopes, and cameras.⁷ Indeed, in Echeverría’s day,

painting and daguerreotypy were closely associated (Osorio 176), as were daguerreotypy and microscopy (Stafford 40); photos were routinely observed through a microscope in order to perceive images with greater precision (Mattison 1), and experiments using both devices were known in Buenos Aires during Echeverría's time.⁸

In order to better expose the heinousness of Rosas's Federalist regime, Echeverría's mode of narration intimates the employment of enhanced visual know-how. "El matadero" opens with the suggestion that the slaughterhouse scene must be visualized—not merely read—from a distance: "Para que el lector pueda percibirlo a un golpe de ojo, preciso es hacer un croquis de la localidad" (98). Such language was commonly used to describe daguerreotypic technology during Echeverría's day, as the camera was deemed a direct descendant of the *trompe l'oeil* dioramas meant to dazzle spectators with their illusions (Slater 233). Narration then zooms in towards the slaughterhouse, where we see a panoramic view of exactly forty-nine bulls hung outside: "La perspectiva de 'El matadero' a la distancia era grotesca, llena de animación" (100). As the killings commence, the text again thematizes a gaze's movement: "Pero a medida que [la matanza] adelantaba, la perspectiva variaba" (101). Pushing further inside the slaughterhouse, the narrator expresses the inconvenient truths that words alone cannot convey: "En fin, la escena que se representaba en 'El matadero' era para vista, no para escrita" (103). The close-up continues before we arrive at a precise spot deep inside the slaughterhouse's hellish bowels: the sacrificial body of the young Unitarian, whose insides (his sweat and blood) are rendered observable, practically externalized. "Gotas de sudor fluían por su rostro grandes como perlas [y] echaban fuego sus pupilas, su boca espuma, y las venas de su cuello y frente negreaban en relieve sobre su blanco cutis como si estuvieran repletas de sangre" (113). This shocking visual display can be likened to Roland Barthes's definition of "punctum." Although originally a Greek term, for Barthes "a photograph's punctum is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)" (27).

All told, the narration in "El matadero" photographically (or daguerreotypically) telescopes from the outskirts of Buenos Aires to the heart of Unitarian nobility and, adversely, Federalist cruelty. Somewhat paradoxically, once inside the slaughterhouse, we realize that visual acuity is not only activated so as to better apprehend Argentina's ills: rather, the philosophical ramifications of technologized

optical acumen are also understood as odious. Within the slaughterhouse—this microcosm of Rosas’s Argentina—Echeverría’s narrator recounts and satirizes the numerous observational techniques used to monitor and control subjects. Not unlike the themes expressed in the aforementioned “Moniteur” article, in the bowels of Echeverría’s slaughterhouse, surveillance mechanisms are employed to regulate and punish.

Federalist observational tools—most notably, the mutual monitoring between individuals, rather than a top-down monitoring—are activated to more efficiently distribute foodstuffs and facilitate disciplinary action against those who violate the pecking order. When the killing of calves resumes on the sixteenth day of Lent, harpy-like women scavengers (“achuradoras”) steal bits of butchered cattle—organs, muscles, and fat—that spill onto the floor during the slaughter. Amid the bloody melee, the grubbers attempt to pilfer the best cuts of cattle:

“Ahí se mete el sebo en las tetas, la tía,” gritaba uno.

“Aquél lo escondió en el alzapón,” replicaba la negra.

“Che, negra bruja, salí de aquí antes de que te pegue un tajo,” exclamaba el carnicero.

“¿Qué le hago, ño Juan? ¡No sea malo! Yo no quiero sino la panza y las tripas.”

“Son para esa bruja: a la m. . .”

“¡A la bruja! ¡A la bruja!” repitieron los muchachos: “¡Se lleva la riñonada y el tongorí!” Y cayeron sobre su cabeza sendos cuajos de sangre y tremendas pelotas de barro. (101)

Here, even the lowliest slaughterhouse workers evince visual acuity; subjects keep tabs on each other, and their mutual surveillance promotes a more effective and more hierarchical distribution of goods. Significantly, Rosas, the man at the helm himself, is only referenced elliptically as “el Restaurador.” The slaughterhouse’s operations, “restored” and buttressed by optical know-how, aim to diminish errors and optimize killing.

Nevertheless, miscalculations are made in the slaughterhouse, often as a result of inconsistent observational techniques. For example, two young, anonymous butchers perceive “[u]n animal [que] había quedado en los corrales, de corta y ancha cerviz, de mirar fiero,

sobre cuyos órganos genitales no estaban conformes los pareceres porque tenía apariencia de toro y de novillo" (103). Since both animals and workers are covered with blood and mud, debate ensues as to whether the cow is a calf (and thus fit for slaughter) or a bull (and thus unfit for killing):

"Mal haya el tropero que nos da gato por liebre."

"Si es novillo."

"¿No está viendo que es toro viejo?"

"Como toro le ha de quedar. ¡Muéstrame los c. . . , si le parece, c. . . o!"

"Ahí los tiene entre las piernas. No los ve, amigo, más grandes que la cabeza de su castaño; ¿o se ha quedado ciego en el camino?"

"Su madre sería la ciega, pues que tal hijo ha parido. ¿No ve que todo ese bulto es barro?"

"Es emperrado y arisco como un unitario." (104)

Ironically, while trying to better systematize operations in the slaughterhouse via surveillance, the Federalist butchers misrecognize the object of their study, failing to distinguish the absolute symbol of masculinity—namely the bull's testicles. The scene thus expresses not only the Generation de 1837's known anxiety surrounding masculine identity, but also suggests that Federalists—with their muddled political vision—ultimately misrecognize manhood (Haberly 293). Rosas's henchmen fail to adjudicate the difference between a "novillo" and a "toro." In sum, the optical organization of state power fails to forge an unassailable classification scheme to eradicate differences and operational contingencies. The scene also emphasizes Federalist hypocrisy: the formidable head butcher, Matasiete, illicitly has the adult bull slaughtered before he is offered the "matahambre" or "flank steak" for consumption (also unsanctioned during Lent). *Caudillismo* still controls the slaughterhouse even as its operations supposedly abide by instrumental rationality and, in particular, specialized optical acumen.

The Matasiete scene suggests that enhanced visual acuity is both part of Echeverría's narrative toolkit as well as a target of his critique. In this sense, "El matadero" relates to visual power in a markedly ambivalent manner. This overdetermined character of

visual authority is perhaps best represented by the text's climax, when Matasiete, the lead slaughterhouse thug, orders the torture of an anonymous Unitarian. Appropriately, Matasiete is described as a man of action, not words. Like daguerreotypic technology—or, like Rosas's regime itself, which “employed visuality, rituals of state power, and public space in order to reconfigure, monitor, and control the expression of public opinion as mechanisms for legitimizing its power” (Lanctot 61)—Matasiete represents visual, not readable, power:

Matasiete era hombre de pocas palabras y de mucha acción. Tratándose de violencia, de agilidad, de destreza en el hacha, el cuchillo o el caballo, no hablaba y obraba. (109)

Almost camera-like, the “tuerdo” (104) Matasiete is at the heart of the Rosas's Argentina and the embodiment of its optical power. After his fellow butchers spot the young Unitarian on account of his aberrant appearance, Matasiete brings the young hero under his own gaze, and orders that his prisoner be tortured.⁹

Significantly, it is only at the moment of the young Unitarian's death that readers “see” his inherent worth. Via an ingenious narrative device, Echeverría recounts how the Unitarian maintains his integrity even while the narrator's (and Matasiete's) ocular gaze destroys the young hero, laying bare hitherto hidden truths as the Unitarian's inner-workings are exposed:¹⁰

El joven, en efecto, estaba fuera de sí de cólera. Todo su cuerpo parecía estar en convulsión. Su pálido y amaratado rostro, su voz, su labio trémulo, mostraban el movimiento convulsivo de su corazón, la agitación de sus nervios. Sus ojos de fuego parecían salirse de la órbita, su negro y lacio cabello se levantaba erizado. Su cuello desnudo y la pechera de su camisa dejaban entrever el latido violento de sus arterias y la respiración anhelante de sus pulmones. (111)

This, too, is in keeping with how Rioplatenses imagined the power of daguerreotypy: the new optical apparatus was closely associated with death.¹¹ The daguerreotype's nascent technology created haunting,

blurry images: appropriately, the first newspaper article printed in Buenos Aires's *La Gaceta Mercantil* to reference the daguerreotype describes them as "diabolical."¹² Early photographic technology oftentimes served as a means of instantly capturing a moment already passed, functioning as *memento mori*.¹³

Furthermore, new visual technologies like the daguerreotype were associated with a precision that writing could not capture.¹⁴ Photography was thought to lay bare the truth of one's physiognomy and character, a means of microscopically examining minute details and thus, uncovering truths (Burrows 13-14; Gillespie 69). Samuel M. Morse, the creator of the telegraph and daguerreotype enthusiast, even believed that scientists could view the absolute "discoverable limits" of nature by observing a daguerreotype photograph under a microscope (Mattison).

In sum, the final scene of "El matadero"—the Unitarian's tragic death—can be understood as a fatal encounter with the visual power and surveillance technologies of Rosas's regime. From Echeverría's perspective, how better to represent the inherent value of the young Unitarian, than by "exposing" him to deathly optical power? After all, the Argentine intellectual was not the only writer of his era hoping to support political claims via the observational exactitude of a clinical gaze. Harriet Beecher Stowe, for example, claimed she wanted to "daguerreotype" Uncle Tom, thus illustrating his inherent goodness (Burrows 19). Furthermore, José Mármol, in *Amalia*, suggests using a daguerreotype so as to document Rosas's crimes.¹⁵ The dehumanizing, clinical, or even "photographic" gaze that dissects the Unitarian, as Barthes would explain, transforms the young Unitarian from subject to object.¹⁶ Truly a writer of his era and place, Echeverría subjects his hero to optical power and thus illustrates both Unitarian virtue and Federalist cruelty.

SUBJECTS BECOME OBJECTS IN THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE

I conclude with a final observation regarding how visual culture in Rioplatense society is inscribed in Echeverría's "El matadero." As Lanctot (96) and various art historians (Crary 92; Brittain 307; Flusser 68) have proposed, the invention of technological apparatuses for optical intensification occurred concomitantly with an erasure of the longtime Cartesian distinction between subject and object (Crary 92; Batchen 92; Brittain 307; Flusser 68). With daguerreotypy, the

observer became both the subject and object of his own gaze. Gone was the mediating hand of the artist, nature could now engender itself, and everyone could be objectified on silver plates sensitized to iodine. Effectively, subjects were rendered obsolete by mechanical innovation. As Louis Daguerre himself explained, with the photograph, nature drew itself.¹⁷ Somewhat paradoxically, in a society like Rosas's Argentina, organized by an extremely sophisticated system of visibility, individuality and uniqueness seemingly disappear: optical precision does not cultivate diversity but rather promotes homogeneity. I contend that "El matadero" recapitulates what many during Echeverría's time perceived as the primary philosophical consequence of daguerrotypic technologies: an erasure of distinction, an effacement of subjectivity. Echeverría's prose thus symbolically figures a heinous subject (Rosas's state) as evincing unmediated access to an object of analysis (the Argentine citizenry).

"El matadero" opens with a clear metaphor of how Rosas's regime aimed to diminish difference, by drowning individuality via a totalizing discourse of surveillance, subservience, and order; this is likened to a catastrophic flood. Under six feet of water, identity cannot be observed: having invaded every last crevice, leaving no room for contradiction, difference, or debate, the Rosista ideological flood makes everyone appear abysmally similar. Echeverría's description of the "nuevo diluvio" (92) is not entirely fictitious: as mentioned above, both Rosistas and anti-Rosistas attempted to inject their ideologies into every corner of Argentine society. Divergent political views were promoted by sarcastically using a variety of ephemeralia characteristic of modern life—such as recipes, wills, and tonic advertisements (Lucero 20-23). One particularly mordant advertisement for a fictional elixir read: "Tónico para los salvajes unitarios, tan hambrientos como rotos que se hallan encerrados en la infeliz plaza de Montevideo" (Varela 1913, LXV). Even the first advertisement for the daguerreotype in Buenos Aires—published in *La Gaceta Mercantil* on June 16, 1843—included a supplication for the death of the "salvajes unitarios" (Facio 14).

The flood in "El matadero" offers Rosas's supporters—devoted Federalists and fervent Christians—an opportunity to vent their spleen. Unitarians are blamed for provoking God's watery wrath: "La cólera divina rebosando se derrama en inundación" (93). In Buenos Aires, "las calles de entrada y salida a la ciudad rebosaban en acuoso barro," while even in the air "[l]os beatos y beatas gimoteaban

haciendo novenarios y continuas plegarias. Los predicadores atronaban el templo y hacía crujir el púlpito a puñetazos" (92). Every corner of the city is awash with the all-seeing disciplinary power of Rosas's regime, a point the narrator underscores:

Porque han de saber los lectores que en aquel tiempo la Federación estaba en todas partes, hasta entre las inmundicias de "El matadero" y no había fiesta sin Restaurador como no hay sermón sin Agustín. (96)

The subject that is Rosas's government is seen engulfing its object—the general populace.

Echeverría formally reproduces this all-consuming subject capable of promulgating a crippling sense of homogeneity in other ways as well. In particular, the continual subtraction of connectors from Echeverría's prose serves to express the progressive collapse between subject and object. While connectors like "sin embargo" and "por otra parte" pervade the first pages of "El matadero"—as the jingoist narrator attempts to convince us that Federalist principles are grounded in reason, and the closer narration approaches the epicenter of Federalist odiousness (Matasiete and his henchmen)—the number of connectors lessens in the second part of the story. The inclusion of linking words intimates the processes of ratiocination, a subject that mediates. Adversely, the disappearance of those same linking words indicates a subject that need not even examine the object of analysis. Rosas's regime is increasingly unfettered from and ultimately swallows up its object (the populace). All told, the regime's unmediated control of citizenry is represented by the fact that Echeverría's heinous narrator recurs less and less to conjunctions and linking expressions: the object of analysis is engulfed by an omniscient and ubiquitous subject. For the *caudillo*, whose regime is buttressed by all-knowing optical information, Cartesian dualism is rendered useless: Rosas's power can apprehend those antagonistic to his government with immense ease.

At the text's opening, Echeverría's narrator still includes various linking expressions to represent how a subject's consciousness logically apprehends an object. When torrential rains begin to fall and Rosas's political base starts to blame the Unitarians for having incited God's ire, the narrator describes the Federalists' reaction—their injurious speech—as "rational:" "Se hablaba ya, *como de cosa*

resuelta, de una procesión en que debía ir toda la población descalza y el cráneo descubierto” (93; italics mine). Further on, “[l]as pobres mujeres salían sin aliento, anonadadas del templo, echando, *como era natural*, la culpa de aquella calamidad a los unitarios” (93; italics mine). Federalists’ reaction to reality—namely the downpour—is, at very least, cast as in keeping with philosophically sound arguments. The pervasiveness of linking words suggests Federalist “rationality” is capable of transforming reality; yet, reality does not comply completely with their cognitions. Mediation between idea and event, subject and object, thought and action, eye and observed is still somewhat necessary. The narrator thus explains: “Continuaba, *sin embargo*, lloviendo a cántaros, y la inundación crecía *acreditando el pronóstico de los predicadores*” (93; italics mine). Federalists enjoy a relatively untrammelled relationship with reality and thus, the future, too, begins to corroborate with their “logic.”

The Federalist narrator’s “rationality” also serves to interpret individuals in devastatingly reductive ways. Their vision does not render the world more complex but rather, less. Citizens are described via preconceived notions of social types, and not a single character in “El matadero” diverges from Federalist textbook typology:

Los abastecedores, *por otra parte*, buenos federales, y *por lo mismo* buenos católicos, sabiendo que el pueblo de Buenos Aires atesora una docilidad singular para someterse a toda especie de mandamiento. (92; italics mine)

This simplistic reading of identities—as a powerful subject “sees” its object of analysis—is repeated: “Los libertinos, los incrédulos, *es decir*, los unitarios, empezaron a amedrentarse al ver tanta cara compungida” (93; italics mine). Within the Federalist classificatory scheme, belonging to a certain social identity necessarily denotes other socio-cultural or political affiliations: Rosas’s society disallows for the recognition of fluid, liminal, or polyvalent subjectivities. Within the narrator’s vision, being a Unitarian and a believer (interestingly, Echeverría was both) is unimaginable.¹⁸ In other words, just like the scene with the “novillos,” descriptive, visual information is pervasive and yet, ironically, only bears out reductive classifications. This type of reductive rationality, which hypostatizes identities and diminishes complexity, was a common part of the Rosas’s regime’s propagandistic sloganeering, wherein to say

"salvajes" was to say "unitarios."¹⁹ Soon, even these mediating terms become superfluous as the number of linking words lessens during the narration. Our subject need not recur to connectors to affect its object.

Over the course of two paragraphs, conjunctions drop out and the narrator simplifies the identities of those who refuse to abstain from meat during the Lenten season. With this, I propose that the division between subject and object has been effectively erased. Federalist "seers" have become omniscient. First, it is explained that "[l]os pobres niños y enfermos se alimentaban con huevos y gallinas, y los gringos y herejotes bramaban por el *beef-steak* y el asado"; one paragraph later, various "gringos herejes" die immediately after indulging themselves with Extremaduran meats (94). The increasing proximity of terms—"gringos y herejotes" becomes "gringos herejes"—intimates that the narrator believes that all "gringos" are "heretics" and, adversely, that all "heretics" are "gringos" (94). The totalizing simplification of Rosas's government symbolized by the juxtaposition of the terms used to describe the regime's undesirables is also seen with the following: "llamaban ellos salvaje unitario, conforme a la jerga inventada por el Restaurador, patrón de la cofradía, a todo el que no era degollador, carnicero, ni salvaje, ni ladrón" (114). Such "collapsed" language—the unmediated slippage between epithets—was pervasive in Rosas's Argentina. Buenos Aires's Federalist newspaper during the Rosas years, *La Gaceta Mercantil*, was replete with similarly reductive sloganeering, and Rosas was a master at repeating platitudes until they became truths.²⁰ As articulated by Echeverría's narrator, in Rosas's savagely systematized, optically enhanced society, the goal was to "reducir al hombre a una máquina cuyo móvil principal no sea su voluntad sino la de la iglesia y el gobierno" (96). The Federalists' heinous linking of supposedly affine ideas and identities assumes a sinister valence when, via an injurious speech, they ultimately associate living and deadness, formally represented by the progressive proximity between opposite words "life" and "death:"

"¡Mueran los salvajes unitarios! ¡Viva el Restaurador de las leyes!"

"¡Viva Matasiete!"

"¡Mueran! ¡Vivan!" repitieron en coro los espectadores y atándolo codo con codo, entre moquetes y tirones, entre

vociferaciones e injurias, arrastraron al infeliz joven al banco del tormento como los sayones al Cristo. (110)

Soon after, the Unitarian's elbows are tied together—a second image that evokes sameness—and life and death become one in the Rosas's regime.²¹ Even though the Federalist vision is described as able to “see” everything, this power only serves to heinously dissolve differences between self and other, subject and object, even death and life. With the Unitarian's death, the dialectic is halted, and the image of his dead body becomes a polysemic sign, simultaneously representing Unitarian civility and Federalist barbarism.

In sum, Rosas's Argentina runs with the automaticity and unmediatedness of camera clicks. The visual power that the regime (as subject) evinces over the populace (as object) is so complete that no activity goes unseen. In such a society, the processes of ratiocination—thinking about who the object *really* is—proves increasingly unnecessary, as do the connectors that verbally represent those processes of cognition. Like the Young Unitarian, those whose conduct is proscribed by the state are immediately vanquished from the world: “Se fueron derecho al cielo innumerables ánimas y acontecieron cosas que parecen soñadas” (94).

PICTURING EXILE

During the years when he wrote “El matadero” and those immediately following, Echeverría became more despondent, ruminating on his own mortality.²² It is said that the manuscript appeared to have been written by a man riddled with anxiety. In 1840, Echeverría finally decided to join his fellow political dissidents in Uruguay, a move which he likened to death.²³ The text itself—unconventional, grotesque, and brilliant—was never published during his lifetime, and Echeverría returned to his favored Romantic tones, writing *La guitarra* (1842), *El ángel caído* (1846), and *Avellaneda* (1849). Here, I have proposed that via “El matadero,” Echeverría studies how an odious regime, armed with enhanced visual acuity, arrogantly deems itself all-knowing, thereby disavowing mediation between subject and object.²⁴

With the specter of his 1851 death closing in and cognizant of his fragile health, Echeverría finally gave himself over to the power of the gaze, posing for a daguerreotype portrait in 1850.²⁵ The photo represents the only instance when Echeverría allowed himself to be

objectified by the preeminent optical innovation of his day. It remains the only known image of Echeverría and, more importantly, a testament to the importance of visual culture during his time.

Notes

1. Flemming suggests Echeverría wrote "El matadero" between 1839-1840, while Wilson claims 1838-1839 to be more likely (82). "El matadero" was only published posthumously, in 1871.

2. "Física. Explicación del Daguerreotipo." *La Gaceta Mercantil*. March 11, 1840. Also see "Artes y Ciencias. Segunda Noticia de la Heliografía o Daguerreotipo." *La Gaceta Mercantil*. 7 May 1840. Also "Nuevos Pormenores sobre El Daguerreotipo." *La Gaceta Mercantil*. 24 May 1840.

3. The daguerreotype was typically celebrated as a scientific innovation rather than an artistic feat. Usually, it was believed that "the daguerreotype was a mechanical 'technique' rather than a creative art" (Williams 7). See also Frizot 38, and Banta 33. Varela, tellingly, does not agree with those who "pone[n] en dudas las aplicaciones de este magnífico descubrimiento a las artes" (Biblioteca 40).

4. "La naturaleza reunía todos sus misterios en el gabinete del operador, para darle la gloria de sorprenderlos todos, uno a uno" (Varela 5).

5. Batchen notes that it is not happenstance that Jeremy Bentham's panopticon was conceived approximately around the same time as photography (447).

6. Foster reads the text as a paschal allegory; Bauzá as a ritual sacrifice; Sorbille's interpretation is Freudian; finally, Girman employs Queer theory.

7. Omil sees narration in "El matadero" move from: "1.) Cuaresma-inundación" to "2.) El niño degollado" and finally "3.) El vejamen al unitario y su posterior muerte" (9). Alazraki, in turn, notes: "El relato avanza telescópicamente de lo general a lo particular," and describes narration as "[m]uy a la manera de una cámara cinematográfica que gradualmente se aproxima a su objetivo (técnica de zoom in)" (419, 420). Unfortunately, he fails to note how historically ascertained his observation is.

8. See "Nuevos Pormenores," a journal article that discusses the experiments realized by Frenchman Alfred Donné (1801-1878) using both the daguerreotype and the microscope.

9. "¿No le ven la patilla en forma de U? No trae divisa en el fraque ni luto en el sombrero" (108). Matasiete subsequently orders his men to shave the young Unitarian "a la federala" (112).

10. The young Unitarian retorts: "Primero degollarme que desnudarme, infame canalla" (113).

11. St. George J., Barthes, and Rice each discuss photography's relation to death.

12. The article's writer notes: "La imagen que resulta de estas operaciones que pudieran llamarse diabólicas."

13. "Not only was death a fundamental subject of the nineteenth-century photograph, but the medium itself was strongly linked to causing death in both its subjects and its practitioners. Even men with powerful imaginations like Edgar Allan Poe shrank from the camera out of a fear that it would steal their souls" (Williams 42).

14. Sandweiss and Trachtenberg discuss Henry David Thoreau's reaction to photography: "More important for Thoreau is the analogy to writing: the daguerreotype reveals how an exact and accurate description of facts can release symbolic resonances and implications. Under the right circumstances a copy—a repetition or reproduction of things in the world—might be an original, and originating, experience" (22). Makarius recounts how, in a letter from Mariquita Sanchez de Mandeville to her son Juan Thompson, dated February 25, 1840, she describes the daguerreotype as producing a "perfección y exactitud que sería imposible obtener de otros modos" (35).

15. "Para acusar a Rosas y la parte activa de su partido, a cada momento les hacemos su proceso con las piezas oficiales de ellos mismos, y con la exposición de hechos que han estado bajo el imperio de los ojos o que existen daguerrotipados en la memoria de cien mil testigos" (531).

16. "Photography transformed the subject into object, and even, one might say, into a museum object: in order to take the first portraits (around 1840) the subject had to assume long poses under a glass roof in bright sunlight; to become an object made one suffer as much as a surgical operation" (Barthes 13).

17. "With Louis Daguerre's unveiling of the daguerreotype in January 1839, the dream of nature reproducing herself without the aid of human hand or eye seemed finally on the verge of being realized" (Burrows 28).

18. At times anti-clerical, Echeverría never denounces Christianity completely (Katra 107).

19. See Rivera's discussion of the flattening logic of Rosas's regime: "En su delirio de orgullo y de sangre, ha declarado altaneramente al Gobierno Oriental, y a todos los hombres que lo sostienen o le son afectos, *salvajes unitarios*, título con que designa a los argentinos que disienten de su gobierno infame y perverso" (23).

20. *La Gaceta Mercantil*. September 9, 1839. Print:

¡Mueran los salvajes unitarios!

¡Mueran los incendiarios piratas asquerosos franceses!

¡Mueran el pardejón pardusco salvaje unitario Rivera!

¡Muera el manco sabandija salvaje Juan Lavalle!"

21. "Y por el suceso anterior puede verse a la claras que el *foco* de la federación estaba en 'El matadero'" (114) (Italics mine).

22. Jitrik (1967) recounts Echeverría's years of despondency. Katra describes that in a letter Luis Domínguez wrote to Félix Frías: "Ever since he came to Montevideo, [Echeverría] has relegated himself to total inactivity. In vain we all have attempted to motivate him to do something; but he has not written even a line of prose or verse. I don't know what has become of his old aspiration" (194-195).

23. See Jitrik (1968): "Al fin, en 1840, Echeverría debe emigrar. 'Emigrar -opina- equivale a inutilizarse para la Nación, es la muerte'" (241).

24. "Of all the members of his generation, he was perhaps the most traditional in his orientation; among his generational brethren only he would launch a radical critique of modernism such as it was beginning to manifest itself in the region" (Katra 132).

25. On page 21 (February 24, 1850) of Echeverría's *Cartas*, he notes his "estado enfermizo."

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