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Research article

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Alberto Blest Gana and the Sensory Appeal of Wealth

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Abstract: This essay explores sensory stimuli in *La aritmética en el amor* [Arithmetic in Love/Economics of Love] (1860) as they relate to the consumer preferences (for clothing, furniture, jewellery) and purchasing practices of nineteenth-century Santiago, Chile. The novel presents detailed descriptions, for example, of fine fabrics, emphasising the sounds that the wearers of such fabric reproduce as they move about. Wealthy or not, people feel the pressure to present themselves in their best garments, but the "best noise" is made by the rich, who transmit the affect of opulence to the less fortunate. Overall, to radiate a sensory appeal, characters frequent the city of Santiago and patronise the finest clothing stores. From our very first encounter with the protagonist Fortunato Esperanzano, he is dressed accordingly, engaging with Santiago and showing in his persona that he shops only for nice clothes and the best cigars. From a Lefebvrian perspective, Fortunato represents how Chile's modernisation transforms the capital's "marketplace" as a social space where a new luxury economy flourishes and a traditional, rigid social order is maintained.

Keywords: Chile, Santiago, affect, clothing, La aritmética en el amor, social order

Introduction

The literary production of Alberto Blest Gana (1830–1920) contains elaborate descriptions of the physical and human geographies of Santiago and Paris, the latter described at length in *Los Trasplantados* (1904). With his life practically divided between a first half in Chile and a second half in Paris, Blest Gana once famously announced that he had ceased writing poetry, finding inspiration for his prose in the dramatic social scenes created by Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850) (*Epistolario* 14; 36). As he defined a macro historic space in the city via historical events, the Chilean author also inscribed a domestic, micro space where the private lives of city dwellers unfolded alongside these same events. Within this "cozy private sphere," the narration situated and described characters' amorous practices following the socio-political allegiances of Chile's national direction (Sommer 215, 217).

Guy de Maupassant visualised "both fashion and flânerie as multi-sensorial practices," with garments that not only self-identify the flâneur but also engage the city of Paris "through the senses of smell, touch, and hearing" (Brevik-Zender 225). This essay likewise examines the macro and micro social spaces of Santiago in Blest Gana's *La aritmética en el amor (AEA)* from a sensory perspective. External stimuli create explicit sensory perceptions in the text's characters and its readers. Tangible descriptions of exquisite fabric or imported furniture are signals of wealth that aim to beguile. The people who wear or possess such items are the "mediators," the ones who spark an aspiration to mimicry in other members of society (Girard 53). Affluence is a thing to be seen, heard, and even touched, and the sensory perception of affluence follows a

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pattern of preferences related to nineteenth-century Chile's system of producing and marketing goods. The mores of Chileans are also depicted, with an emphasis on the strengths and weaknesses of members of society as they react to, profit from, or fight back against the social changes brought about by encroaching capitalism. Finally, in *La aritmética en el amor* Blest Gana uses the senses to provide his readers with the "History" and the everyday city life that together maintain the equilibrium of Chile's social order.

Blest Gana, Social Order and National Space

The footprints of Blest Gana's literary identity can be found in historical archival work as well as in a compendium of national and cultural heritage. He poured these into his descriptions of different sectors of society (Hosiasson, "Siete novelas" 238). In his work of historical fiction, Durante la Reconquista (1897), which recounts the brief re-conquering of Chile by Spain (1814–1817), Blest Gana portrays how Chileans since colonial times have operated within a rigid class-based social order, with two factions fighting either to preserve or destabilise social customs and cultural practices (Vilches, Blest Gana 6). On the independista fighters' side, Manuel Rodríguez is considered to be Chile's first revolutionary and is celebrated as such by Blest Gana in this novel. Many of the author's anecdotical stories about Rodríguez have remained part of a national legend for Chileans. Henri Lefebvre states that "Nothing disappears completely [...]; nor can what subsists be defined solely in terms of traces, memories or relics. In space, what came earlier continues to underpin what follows" (229). In this regard, Durante la Reconquista exemplifies how Blest Gana's oeuvre conceived of a national space via the use of significant, dramatised past events, where he incorporated national heroes into the daily lives of ordinary characters. He remained unswervingly attached to a particular "world vision, style, technique and structures" (Araya 33), especially as they related to a conflictive national space. This is evident in his fiction and non-fiction. He worked as both chronicler and creative writer during the period 1853–1864 and, after retiring from his diplomatic and business career, came back as an author of fiction in 1897 with the publication of his historical novel (Hosiasson, "Siete novelas" 236). Across both periods, Blest Gana was consistently and keenly attuned to portraying characters from different social strata.

As nineteenth-century Chile found its footing as an independent, solvent nation, pelucones [conservatives] and pipiolos [liberals] started to raise their voices. In Martín Rivas (1862) and El ideal de un calavera (1863), for example, Blest Gana describes significant confrontations between the two. The pelucones maintained that the best option for Chile was to remain within the scope of the Spanish colonial social order (mostly to keep things as they were), whereas the pipiolos pushed back against this order. The pipiolos were keen to disrupt the status quo, advocating for a nation where opportunity was more accessible and for a better formal education for all. Characteristically, this forward-thinking group was constituted by upperclass letrados who sought to advance the country through high culture and more liberal institutions. This tension can be noted in the foundation of two Societies in Chile: the Sociedad del Orden [Society of Order] in 1845, which intended to uphold a conservative view of order "with the manifest purpose of restoring the value of the notion of order as a value in itself" (Stuven 139). Alternatively, The Sociedad de la Igualdad [Society of Equality], created in 1850, reflected a process of modernisation in Santiago as it emerged from having been a colonial "Spanish city" to become a more cosmopolitan urban space (Góngora 164). In this respect, the members of the Sociedad de la Igualdad looked up to Europe, especially France, and promoted the ideals of the Enlightenment. The pipiolos strove to disrupt socially rigid, hierarchical, and religious codes that, for those liberal-thinking Chileans, were stagnating the nation.

I have argued elsewhere that the Santiago constructed by Blest Gana stages scenarios very similar to those found in Niccolò Machiavelli's rendition of sixteenth-century Florence, especially in his works of

¹ Translation mine. All translations from Spanish to English are mine unless otherwise indicated. Quotations of Blest Gana are given in Spanish and English.

fiction, such as La Mandragola (1518) and La Clizia (1525) (Vilches, Blest Gana 52). In a Machiavellian sense, laws and liberty in Blest Gana's city are debated and fought for as the powerful seek to subjugate and the oppressed endeavour to be freed from the domination of the powerful (Discourses I, 4; 30). In La aritmética en el amor, this type of tyranny and subjugation is interwoven with sensory appeals. Like a dress pattern, the novel traces the silhouette of an unfair society; literally, the description of the cut on a fashionable garment evokes longing in characters while simultaneously provoking resentment. A fine-cut dress, therefore, tracks and traces by its very existence the one-sidedness of Chile's accumulation of capital; only a few characters can afford to wear, be transported in, and "feel" the beautiful things offered by the transformative affect of capitalism. Rosario Orrego's perception of society, which also applies to that of Blest Gana, points to a truthful confrontation between the old and the new in Chile, "between those of aristocratic stock and the neo-bourgeois," striving for power and influence by exhibiting their prosperity and thus "affirm [ing] the strength of their social identities" (Poblete 161). In a Chilean society transformed by "la aspiración al lujo" [aspiration for luxury] (Blest Gana, AEA 194),² the narration details the way new wealth has imposed a new manner of dress on people; that is, the visible feature of financial success becomes evident in the new "habits" of a Chilean nation that adheres to a brighter or, rather, shinier set of rules for social etiquette. New money has turned "the lights" on previously obscured families, and they have now become people with rank, emblematising the term siútico [social upstart] as well as turning the length of time a piece of land has been held by a family into a marker of "nobility" for the Chilean elite (Contardo 132). The author thus "shapes the national desires of the Chilean bourgeoisie" helping to promote, as a "creator" of nineteenth-century Chile, a "hegemonic project" for the nation (Álvarez 126). In Blestganian novels, therefore, through their dazzling, precious belongings, acquired through "intereses pecuniarios" [pecuniary interests] (Blest Gana, AEA 463), characters buy their way into the "valet" entrances of the salons owned by "las más encopetadas familias de Santiago" [Santiago's most posh families] (AEA 478), who are themselves the "mediators" of Chile, in a Girardian sense (Girard 53).

Blest Gana portrays social inequality against the backdrop of a nascent capitalism. The resulting discord of the opposing political groups continues to engage readers of the twenty-first century as it serves as a kind of mirror for what we see in contemporary Chile. Especially in *Martin Rivas*, romance and heterosexual love are collapsed from the perspective of a national, political, foundational "consolidation" (Sommer 6). It has been said that Blest Gana was neither a social advocate nor, à la Bilbao, a voice for justice and equality. Nonetheless, his narrations vividly depict social and political inequalities and project "ambiguities and contradictions" that are not resolved in the text (Hosiasson, "El caleidoscopio" 147). Using an indirect approach, the author conceals and uncovers substantial, discernible, and fundamental historical reasons for the socio-political situation in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Chile. These include Salvador Allende's election in 1970 and his subsequent overthrow in 1973, as well as the causes behind the *estallido social* of October 2019. On this, the word "*estallido*," which means "explosion," "outbreak," and even "flare," violently calls to our senses the volatile nature of people's revolts and of the repression by the Armed Forces who have seized control of the county in the past (especially the coup d'état of 11th September, 1973). The recent *estallido* was only interrupted by Covid-19, a world pandemic that brought everything to a halt in Chile and elsewhere.

Blest Gana Cuts through the Chilean Pattern

La aritmética en el amor offers a semiotics and a "palpable" narration whose influences can be traced to Balzac's La comédie humaine. For our purposes, an especially noteworthy Balzacian aspect relates to the ways in which the destitute state of the poor is manifested in dark and painful garments with coarse

² For *La aritmética en el amor*, I have modernised the Spanish spelling and added, when necessary, accent marks that were not available in the original text.

textures, while the comfortably rich live surrounded by the delight of bright, pleasant fabrics and accessories (Marzel 127). By portraying the vicissitudes of Fortunato Esperanzano, who confronts life with untroubled insouciance, *La aritmética en el amor* presents a blend of colours and hues, as well as a mix of satins and coarse fabrics. The narration interrogates, wonders about love, commiserates, and in an intimate voice shares secrets and conspiracies with readers, while unfolding the lives of Fortunato and others like him, as they aspire for a higher social position via capitalistic success. The novel is divided into two parts: Fortunato's life in the city and his brief journey in an anonymous Chilean province, where he finds no *locus amoenus* but rather discovers a nitty gritty thirst for political power and an inherited hatred in the style of the Montagues and the Capulets: "el odio de familia a familia" [hatred of one family for the other] (Blest Gana, *AEA* 367). Although they may behave in a more polite manner, the urban characters, like their provincial counterparts, find themselves in constant conflict. Social upstarts push and struggle to enter the space of those who belong to "proper" society (or who believe they do). In numerous laughable, yet altogether sad, descriptions of social conflict, characters appear as if thrown into a veritable *bufera infernale* which sucks them in while twirling them about with tortuous winds, finally spitting them out in different directions, with no regard for good or bad outcomes.

La aritmética en el amor was awarded first prize in a contest sponsored by the Universidad de Chile to promote the development of the national novel. The stipulations were that it should be "a novel in prose, historic or about manners, within the author's discretion, but whose subject matter was properly Chilean" (Silva Castro 188). When selecting candidates for the prize, the jury, which consisted of intellectual luminaries José Victorino Lastarria and Miguel Luis Amunátegui, considered La aritmética en el amor not the work of a first timer but rather a well thought out piece of literature by a seasoned writer (Poblete Varas 75). According to traditional readings, Blest Gana's novel has been said to reproduce a narration that stands between romanticism and realism. Notably, the awarding jury considered the novel a fiction that exuded a "Chilean" style, one that permeated the novel and elevated Blest Gana above the rest. Together with this literary prize, the author was also crowned via the periodical press as a master narrator of human passions and the affect derived from the material preoccupations and bourgeois ways of his time (Latcham 34). Therefore, La aritmética en el amor was a "professional" initiation of the Blestganian style carrying a dualistic romantic and realistic tone that incorporated visual and audible (speaking/listening) aspects as it described the experiences of everyday life in Chile. In other words, following the basis for the award, the novel was considered to be a national project. For Lastarria and Amunátegui the narration gave evidence of, and emphasised through the senses, the "Chilean" ways of the characters:

The great merit of this work is that it is completely Chilean. The various events in the narration have actually happened among us. We have either witnessed or heard similar accounts. The characters are Chilean, and they are very similar to people we may know. We shake those people's hands and we talk to them (Silva Castro 189).

In the eyes of the selection jury, the characters forged by Blest Gana could have been found *physically* in the urban space; they related to us. We could have either "witnessed," "talked" to, or "heard" of people with similar life experiences. We could even have found ourselves "shaking" those individuals' hands. But the portrayal of these "Chileans" in *La aritmética en el amor* goes beyond exposing the habits and customs of a nation: it explores universal questions, especially through the travails of money (Hosiasson, "Siete novelas" 245). Likewise, Blest Gana's general narrative project aims at an underlying, cultural level, mediating between pleasure and erudite purposes (Poblete 14). Notwithstanding its universal and foundational flavour, the novel matched the objectives of the literary contest well. It spoke a national language and described, among other things, *costumbrismo*; that is habits, fashion, tendencies, and so on, that modernisation was transforming. The jury noted and addressed affirmatively the novel's sensorial experiences/descriptions as they dominated the narration and thus communicated a "feeling" of acquaintanceship and "Chileanness" among the characters.

In a Cervantesque style, the story integrates readers to its side. We become the "lectores amigos," the narrator's friends, as the raconteur "sounds" delighted in constructing sarcastic representations of Chileans who exhibit many more weaknesses than virtues. As if slow roasting a succulent feast to offer later on, the

narrator gleefully announces his method to us and his prudency in not revealing too much too soon about his characters:

somos de sentir que, así como en un amigo vamos conociendo las prendas de su carácter a medida que más frecuentamos su comercio, así el autor debe revelar poco a poco las dotes morales que poseen sus distintos personajes (Blest Gana, AEA 34).

[since the more we frequent the company of friends the more we learn about the gifts of their characters, we feel that authors must reveal little by little the moral treasures possessed by their different characters.]

The narrator directs our senses to the tangibility of a piece of cloth. This attention to material detail is not gratuitous; it inheres in Blest Gana's method of character development, making us perceive, via metonymic language, the material aspect of people's interactions: "prendas," which means both "item of clothing" and "(valuable) gift;" "comercio," which can stand for "trade," "commerce," as well as "interaction," "exchange" among people (the "treatment" between two people); "dote," which in the singular signifies the goods or the amount of money a daughter brings to a marriage, as well as the intellectual or moral capabilities of someone, as used in the narration. In this manner, we can sense how a different reading of the passage allows us to view the narrator's conceptualisation in his development of a character. It becomes a sensorial experience akin to visualising garments in a shop; and, "little by little" or "drop by drop," we "hear" the sound of the narration as it cuts like scissors through the "pattern" of a character. The title of the novel itself, La aritmética en el amor, in a sense alludes to a type of commercial transaction, allowing us to "hear" how characters count numbers, ciphers, that discern a character's (monetary) value. In an earlier work, Blest Gana had presented an idealistic young couple whose love was threatened by a "cálculo aritmético" [arithmetic calculating]. In this case, the young girl's father had informed her suitor that "era preciso ceder a la omnipotente majestad del dinero" [it was necessary to yield to the mighty majesty of money] (Un drama en el campo 19).3 More explicitly, then, in La aritmética en el amor, we witness the economics of love. As "lectores amigos," we behold a society where material possessions and the lack thereof bestow insider or outsider social status on individuals, and these are aligned with how characters judge each other, often solely on how out of fashion or cheap somebody's garments might be. Throughout, therefore, the narration interweaves multi-sensorial stimuli to describe social practices that manifest opposites and conflicts, such as privilege, misery, happiness, sadness, and so on. More important, those opposites establish a socio-political and hierarchical relationship among characters.

Blest Gana constructs a highly flawed protagonist who always chooses the wrong path but is also fortunate enough to be perennially excused for his bad decisions. He is determined, nonetheless, and no matter how hard or often he may fall, he goes right back to his purposes. Fortunato's numerous mishaps, which do no honour to his name, reveal an oxymoronic personality: he is a materialistically oriented flâneur; he is utterly innocent, honest, while lacking direction and good morals. Ill-advised by Anastasio Bermúdez, Fortunato forges ahead with his ambitious plans to strike it rich no matter the consequences and is usually humbled by others as a result. The dynamics between Fortunato and Bermúdez resemble the relationship that develops between the ill-intentioned Vautrin and his eager disciple Rastignac in Le père Goriot (Hosiasson, "Siete novelas" 241). He urges Fortunato to abandon the thought of marrying beautiful but impecunious Amelia Almiro and instead to make a marriage of convenience. What could a penniless young woman gain from marrying a penurious and insolvent man like Fortunato? Nothing good, only horrible deprivation and misery, Bermúdez warns his friend (Blest Gana, AEA 83). Without any hesitation, then, Fortunato leaves Amelia behind "por correr tras la deslumbrante imagen de la riqueza" [to run after the dazzling image of wealth] (AEA 350).

³ In El pago de las deudas (1861), the narration also alludes to arithmetic as a polar opposite of poetry, of love: "La poesía y la aritmética se rechazan como dos electricidades del mismo signo: ya ves que debo decir adiós al amor y hacerme forzosamente un hombre de juicio" [Poetry and arithmetic reject each other like two electrical poles of the same charge: you see that I must say goodbye to love and make myself a sensible man] (Blest Gana 94).

The very few "good" characters in the novel, like Amelia and her parents, the military veteran don Diego and doña Rosa, are rather pathetic: "el pobre es el leproso de las sociedades modernas" [poor people are the lepers of modern societies] (AEA 170). They live on Duarte street, a destination for those without any means – a space also inhabited by Onofre Tapia, a former soldier of the defeated pipiolo army from Blest Gana's El loco Estero (1909) – demonstrating "la ingratitud de la patria" [the nation's ingratitude] (AEA 515) towards its military veterans. People avoid the Almiros' presence as if they had become infected by a contagious disease. In opposition to the "ambitious" ones who are constantly scheming, the Almiros seem to wait patiently for what Providence has in store for them. What they have in abundance is the narrator's loyalty; he never ridicules them in any respect. In fact, don Diego, owner of a modest, humble store (AEA 134, 170), represents how the old ways of Chileans have evolved from simple consumer habits into sophisticated behaviours. They have increasingly abandoned the "mom and pop" shops such as that of don Diego. The Almiros' store is about to collapse from debts; nonetheless, it perseveres. This exemplifies how old and new continue to coexist for a while in times of change, standing out among more modern commercial patterns (Dussaillant Christie 66). In a way, don Diego's humble store is like the Almiros themselves. They stick to their old ways and Amelia remains constant in her love for Fortunato, notwithstanding all his betrayals. Despite their travails, the Almiros are rewarded, even if only at the last minute, by their zest for work, honesty, and good values (Araya 35). In contrast, the narration offers very few instances of mercy towards the enterprising characters.

Fortunato: A Man Cut of Fashionable Cloth

La aritmética en el amor begins with the swift entrance of 23-year-old Fortunato into the space of the city. Told that he is Santiago's everyday man, we encounter him leaving his house in the year 1858, with one hand in his pocket and a fine cigarette from Talca in his mouth. This is a fine quality tobacco from an important provincial city and it exemplifies how the protagonist loves the good things in life. His age tells us that he was born during the end of the first conservative presidency of José Joaquín Pietro, who advocated order at all costs. Fortunato, then, has been brought up very aware of law and order. Beginning in 1850, Chile was entering a stage of modernisation and industrialisation that would accelerate toward the end of the 1870s, even after the War of the Pacific (1879–1883) (Góngora 164; Grez Toso 77). We could say, then, that the protagonist enters a space that has distanced itself and continues to do so from a Hispanic colonial environment to become a proper urban space (Góngora 164). Fortunato stops dead in his tracks when he sees a beautiful woman gracefully tying the lace of her shoe, which permits the young man to guess at the beautiful shape of the woman's delicate foot. This vision triggers an overload of Fortunato's senses:

la sangre se le agolpó al cerebro como la ola que azota el costado de un buque, sus pobres ojos vieron prodigios, y sin dar cabida a la reflexión, se arrojo de rodillas, tomando entre sus manos el pie de la desconocida en ademán de acomodarla el cordón (Blest Gana, AEA 3-4).

blood rushed to his head like a wave that crashes against the side of a ship, his poor eyes saw wonders, and without reflecting, he threw himself to the ground and knelt, taking into his hands the unknown woman's foot to help her lace her boot.

Seeing an irresistibly good-looking, mysterious woman, Fortunato suffers a proper shock to his senses. Emulating the impulse of a fetishist, he feels compelled to touch her foot. To be sure, the young woman has offered Fortunato an exclusive glimpse of a body part that, following strict Spanish tradition, was forbidden for women to exhibit in public in Chile until the end of the seventeenth century (Cruz 312). In this pivotal encounter, therefore, two of the main characters practically collide, giving a galloping rhythm to events and exposing Fortunato's weak nature. Reaching for a pleasant stimulus (an impetus that plagues him throughout the narration), he shows he is no saint, unable to resist a beautiful and sensual sight. The recipient of such adoration is the opposite of Fortunato and his emotions. She has her feelings under control and is not at all enchanted by the young man's handsomeness. In fact, she outright rejects his touch, reacting with a look of horror followed by an acute scream, quickly liberating herself and her foot from the protagonist's hands. The sensorial manner in which Fortunato becomes acquainted with the gorgeous woman establishes the standard for their future encounters. After her squeal, the young woman takes leave of the protagonist; he remains behind, looking at her longingly as she leaves. The sound of her departure imprints her fading presence and we hear the noise made by her clothes and her footsteps as her delicate feet touch the pavement:

Luego la vio cubrirse hasta los ojos con el emboce de su mantón, oyó el ruido cariñoso de su basquiña de vuelos y la contempló deslizarse aérea y misteriosa sobre el suelo, como un ángel rozando la tierra o cual una mujer que acude a una cita (Blest Gana, *AEA* 7).

[Then he saw her wrap herself up all the way to her eyes with the cover of her shawl. He heard the loving noise of her full skirt and watched her glide aerially and mysteriously on the pavement, like an angel skimming the earth or like a woman going to a rendezvous.]

Angel or demon, ethereal or terrestrial, the mysterious lady that exits the stage carries some baggage with her. We learn, "drop by drop," with the aid of our senses, about the ups and downs of her life. The gorgeous foot that Fortunato lovingly held in his hands belongs to Julia Valverde, a young widow who has much more than good looks in common with the protagonist. Notwithstanding their doubts about each other, their irrepressible ways show that they are quite similar. Certainly, these two dynamic characters work their way up with a greedy eye for material gain, participating in love-and-money triangles that give structure to the narration and propel it forward (Araya 41). Both have been born without means and they hold on to the ambition of making it big in Santiago. The beautiful widow views a marriage of convenience as the perfect vehicle for entering the upper echelons of Santiago's society. Like a true siútica, she wants more than anything else to be near the people she both envies and aspires to emulate, so that she can be (Contardo 159-160). After exposing her beautiful foot to Fortunato, she quickly retrieves it from the pretender so that she can go after the real thing, don Anselmo Rocaleal, none other than Fortunato's uncle. Following his passion, and, in spite of Julia's rejection, Fortunato feels that he must follow her anywhere she goes. He is guided by his instincts, "este deseo de repetir las sensaciones agradables" [this desire to repeat pleasant sensations] (Blest Gana, AEA 6). In fact, both Julia and Fortunato are heading to don Anselmo's house that day. They seek the favour of the pretentious, wig-wearing, staunch bachelor. Once in don Anselmo's house and in a moment of privacy, Julia strategically removes her mantón [shawl] to free her beautiful face and make it available to don Anselmo's eyes. She gives honour to the legacy of the *manto*, which in the Baroque age "constituted a true wardrobe enigma," a featured garment that endowed women with allure, conjecture, and mystery (Cruz 312). Julia's dramatic unveiling causes don Anselmo to become enraptured, "transportado en plena zona tórrida" [transported into a fully torrid zone] (Blest Gana, AEA 17). Incapable of controlling himself, and, following the same irresistible impulse of his nephew, the old man throws himself at Julia's feet. Fortunato happens to walk in on the intimate encounter and, having learned from his first meeting with Julia, leaves the compromising scene in a rush, closing the door with such a hard slam that the whole house shakes (AEA 19-20). This "blast" sets the tone for these two beautiful characters. Throughout the narration, Fortunato and Julia seem to surprise each other constantly. They make noise by opening doors on each other; eagerly participate in or overhear accounts that put one or the other in a bad light; and generally discover disquieting behaviours about each other. Overall, there develops an enmity between them that exists at a "gut feeling" level. Like Fortunato, Julia does not heed the risks involved in focusing on her selfish goals. The narration warns us that she forgets that she has to keep it together without ever wavering or taking a false step along her ambitious trajectory to acquire means and status:

Pero la brillante senda del lujo tiene sus sinuosidades que una mujer debe saber evitar a su paso, para no romper el botín delicado que aprisiona su pie (AEA 302).

[But the brilliant path of luxury has many curves that a woman must know how to navigate as she goes along, so as not to break the delicate boot that imprisons her foot.]

She finds a rich and devoted husband in the person of the ultra-Catholic don Anselmo. For a long while, and, in spite of her obscure birth, Julia gets everything she wants. Having been widowed and left without much inheritance at the tender age of 20, the young woman now seeks a commercial transaction in marriage, one that will endow her with the material possessions necessary to project a new, rich, and ornate Julia for others. In a Lefebvrian sense, for Julia "[t]he restoration of the body means, first and foremost, the restoration of the sensory-sensual-of speech, of the voice, of smell, of hearing" (Lefebvre 363). With her new marriage, she gains a new voice and "restored body" by becoming a socialite, an actual society queen who dictates the rules in the city. She is now allowed where she had been rejected before. Because of her secret, amorous dealings with Carlos Peñalta, a masculine version of herself, Julia manages to derail herself from her goal and things do not turn out well for her in the end. She inspires the hatred of doña Petronila, her sister-in-law, who informs her brother of Julia's betrayal, an action that results in being caught by her husband in flagrante with her lover.

Queens and Kings of Appearances

Chile followed the trends of more advanced societies, such as nineteenth-century Great Britain, where "fashionable goods circulated" among people in various ways, including pieces of cloth that were publicised in newspapers (Wilder 434). The Chilean characters of *La aritmética en el amor* know expensive textiles just by looking at them, and these in turn make the wearer of the luxurious item worthy of being known in Santiago's society. The narration underscores how money literally talks through people's garments and describes in detail where they can be bought. Fortunato is determined to win the hand of the elegant Margarita Mantoverde, a beautiful and moneyed young woman whom many fortune-seekers court and aspire to marry. On one occasion during his pursuit, he saunters through the streets of Santiago like a flâneur, walking in the city but going nowhere (Brevik-Zender 225). He appears detached from the capitalist aspects of the city, enjoying himself as he looks at the stores while remaining unwilling to make a purchase. He thinks about Amelia, a counterpoint for the other characters' capitalist desires, and simultaneously contemplates his own future in Santiago. These contrary thoughts very fittingly disclose Fortunato's ambivalent spirit. Eventually, Fortunato arrives at a strategic point in the centre of town:

había llegado a la calle del Estado y era precisamente la hora en que nuestras elegantes santiaguinas invaden las tiendas en busca de esas fruslerías de exorbitante precio que componen el traje y la segunda vida de la mujer (Blest Gana, *AEA* 140).

[he had arrived at State Street and it was precisely the hour at which our elegant Santiago women invade clothing stores in search of those exorbitant trifles that make up the costume and the second life of a woman.]

It is peak hour for clothes shopping in Santiago. We are told that Margarita and doña Rita, her mother, are just stepping out of the "department stores" of "Calle del Estado," a concrete product of the city's modernisation. While mother and daughter have provided themselves with the finest garments by the best designers the city has to offer, their purchasing choices reveal up-to-date shopping habits and "new patterns of urban life" which had begun to occur during the second half of the nineteenth century in Chile (Dussaillant Christie 65). In a Machiavellian sense, the shopping practices, the multitude of purchases, and the noise made by the carriage that awaits Margarita and doña Rita connote oppression. It is "felt" in the friction between those who can and those who cannot. By mere visualisation, the latter know that they are viewing opulent people who possess items that impose a tangible social barrier and create a line of demarcation between themselves and others. In this regard, the fabric and texture of the garments purchased by Margarita and doña Rita, together with their luxurious accessories, speak loudly in *La aritmética en el amor*. In a macro space, they are the voice and symbols of the fabric of upper-class society:

¿Sentís el roce de la seda que comunica a los nervios un extraño magnetismo, que los fabricantes de Lyon ni sospechan tal vez en sus tareas?

[...]

Fortunato, experimentó la fascinación de ese ruido y le fue imposible impedir a sus piernas que echaran también a andar (Blest Gana, *AEA* 8).

[Do you feel how the touch of silk communicates a strange magnetism to our nerves, one that the manufacturers of Lyon would not suspect while they are creating it?

[...]

Fortunato experienced the fascination of that noise and it was impossible for him to prevent his legs from going either.]

At their first encounter, Julia escapes Fortunato's grip on her foot but leaves behind the sound prints of her gown's delicate cloth. The narrator calls our attention to the sensuality of silk, a smooth fabric with ancient roots in Asia. Julia's preference for such luxurious fabric reflects the advances of modernity. Already by 1850, the appeal of silk was such that the United States had become the site of the "largest silk manufacturing industry" in the world (Ma 330). In the novel, silk is always loud, it literally crackles, thereby audibly announcing the elegant garment: "este oyó el crujir de su basquiña de seda" [he heard the crackling of her silk skirt] (Blest Gana, *AEA* 107). It also indicates how silk gloves for horse riding have been bought at an exclusive clothing store in Santiago (*AEA* 390). For Fortunato, the sensation of the noise made by silk is so strong that his legs cannot help but move in response to the magnetic noise, causing him to engage "with the physicality of fabric" (Wilder 436). Even though the silk route had reached the shores of Latin America as early as the time of the Spanish conquest, the narration in *La aritmética en el amor* refers to a specific type of manufactured nineteenth-century silk, that of Lyons in France which was of the highest quality. It was world renowned, treated by expert weavers who had mastered the art of "highly complicated design," which demanded skill, thoughtfulness, experience, and method (Ma 342).

In Blest Gana's text, silk (like other expensive fabrics) needs to be seen, heard, and displayed on parade in society. The visual of a gown made out of exquisite fabrics makes clear to others that money, for the wearer, is essential. It satisfies those who can afford to spend while creating urgency (or bitterness) in those who cannot possibly or could barely obtain such an item. The external appearance of an elegant woman describes also her essence. It alludes to her shopping habits and her fashion inspirations, and these also reflect changes effectuated in the entrepreneurial mindset and ways of doing business in Chile during the nineteenth century (Dussaillant Christie 66). Irrespective of the praises that a woman may receive in society, the narration warns that, without the means necessary to obtain luxury items, the very same woman does not stand a chance for recognition by others:

Sin sus ricos vestidos de aterciopeladas flores, sin su coche, sus lacayos y su palco en la ópera ¿qué sería doña Sutana, la altiva dama de envidiadas riquezas? (Blest Gana, AEA 15).

[Without her rich dresses of velvety flowers, without her carriage, her lackeys and her box at the opera, what would become of Mrs. Jane Bloggs, the haughty lady envied for her wealth?]

In mid-nineteenth-century Santiago, money provides visibility; people stop and stare at worthy spectacles of beautiful fabric, displayed during carriage rides, or at entertainments such as the opera, and high society balls (Poblete 44). With these cultural advances loaned from Europe, the city becomes a treasure trove of pleasure for the leisure classes: exquisite carriages, better if imported from France, elevate even further the moneyed individuals as they parade themselves in the urban sphere; the sophisticated harmony of singers and instruments that embody opera and the beautiful melodies of society balls delight the ears of those who are dressed to kill.

In both *La aritmética en el amor* and *Martín Rivas*, the narration allows for glimpses of a nation undergoing a process of industrialisation which at times disadvantaged national products against foreign ones. It favoured foreign capitalists alongside those that were part of the Chilean oligarchy and who had embraced a new way of doing business (Grez Toso 73). The affluent characters in both texts demonstrate their adhesion to these new models with a predilection for things French, buying and wearing exclusive,

expensive, imported, items that produce the affect of European sophistication. In Martín Rivas, Agustín Encina displays impeccable outfits that are accompanied by his afrancesado ways; this goes hand in hand with his own creation of the French language. It sounds like French for most people but, for those who know the language, Agustín's "French" comes out as a comical pastiche. In the tradition of the flâneur, however, even his pastiche has legitimacy because the young man has been "in person" to Paris. He has walked along the Seine and around other European urban spaces, acquiring his afrancesado demeanour through a "sensorial access to the city" (Brevik-Zender 225). From this perspective, since he has physically experienced the city, Agustín brings the affect of Paris to Santiago with him. Likewise, in La aritmética en el amor characters shop (or go window-shopping) at the Ville de Paris (Blest Gana, AEA 512), illustrating a period of transformation in Chilean commerce during which a predominant number of shop owners had immigrated from Europe and helped to stimulate imports (Dussaillant Christie 70). Especially for Julia Valverde, once she has married don Anselmo, the French industry allows her to give off a sensorial message of having been favoured by nature. She surrounds herself with beautiful things that have been imported, like French mirrors that reproduce her image, as well as flower vases, carpets, and many other types of "caprichosas figuras" [capricious knick-knacks] (Blest Gana, AEA 481). In a Lefebyrian sense, Julia presents a brilliant façade of herself.5

Were he to have enough money, Fortunato laments, he could order a custom-made suit, in the European style, from one of Santiago's most stylish tailor shops. Bermúdez, who is neither handsome nor rich, manages always to present himself with elegance, projecting an image above his truly meagre earnings as an "empleado de oficina fiscal" [civil servant] (*AEA* 79). He is required to do this in order to remain faithful to his tenacious intention of penetrating the upper crust. Hence, without any means whatsoever, by some miracle, the civil servant actually owns a few of those wonderfully cut suits that Fortunato desires. In a Balzacian manner, the narration in Blest Gana's text describes how a refined cut in a suit gives shape to the male body. Bermúdez advises Fortunato that the visual of a well-cut trouser and jacket will not only enhance the latter's proper entrance to society but that it will also lead to an advantageous marriage (Marzel 129–130). Hence, Bermúdez is much more than a mere civil servant. He is a professional social wannabe as well as a feared world-class gossiper who delights in instructing the protagonist on the appearance of wealth. Enamoured of Margarita, Fortunato tells Bermúdez that he is at a disadvantage with the other young suitors who frequent Margarita's house:

- ... no puedo luchar en elegancia con todos esos jóvenes que van allí, y esta sin duda, es una gran desventaja.
- Eres un inocente ¿qué dificultad tienes para ser tan elegante como todos ellos?
- Una muy pequeña: que no tengo dinero.
- ¿Y tú crees que todos esos jóvenes son ricos?
- No lo sé, pero a juzgar por el lujo que gastan...
- ¡Bah! te repito que eres un inocente, porque puedes vestirte sin necesidad de plata.
- ¿Cómo?
- No pagando al sastre.

⁴ When meeting Agustín Encina for the first time, provincial Martín Rivas realises how different he is from Santiago's high society. Martín sees Agustín's easiness in his comportment, causally parading his handsome self in the beautiful Encina mansion. His wardrobe is elegant and his shoes show his good taste. All that overload makes Martín feel totally out of place, not even knowing "cómo colocar sus brazos" [how to place his arms] (*MR* 75). This causes Martín to act mimetically and recklessly, wanting to be like Agustín. On his first day in Santiago, anxious for a pair of boots that could replicate somehow those of Agustín, Martín makes a fool of himself in a fight with a boot seller in the public space. The young provincial not only has to endure a night in jail but also the humiliation of having to confess his misfortune to the Encina family (For more on Martín and Agustín, See Vilches, "Tejido" 41).

⁵ Lefebvre speaks of a subject's *lived* space as a concrete, subjective one; that is, of a subject. He declares that the private realm asserts itself in, and is in conflict with, what it departs from, the public realm (362). He adds, "In the West the reign of the façade over space is certainly not over. The furniture, which is almost as heavy as the buildings themselves, continues to have façades; mirrored wardrobes, sideboards and chests still face out onto the sphere of private life, and so help dominate it" (363).

- ¿Y después?
- Después, si te casas, pagas y quedas rico (Blest Gana, AEA 122–123).
- [... I can't fight the elegance of all those young men who go there, and this is, without a doubt, a great disadvantage
- How innocent you are. What difficulty do you have in being as elegant as all of them?
- A very small one: I don't have any money.
- And you think all those young men are rich?
- I don't know, but judging by the luxurious clothes they wear...
- Bah! I keep telling you that you are so innocent because you can actually dress well without having money.
- How?
- Don't pay the tailor.
- And then?
- Afterwards, if you marry, you pay and remain rich.]

Through "consciously" accumulated debt, Fortunato learns how to project an aura of opulence. Always fashionable, his clothing "que debería aun por mucho tiempo al sastre" [that indebted him to his tailor for a long time (AEA 114), together with his handsome features makes him distinctive and provides a visual simulation of wealth. This stands, of course, in stark opposition to who he really is, a young man who lives in scarcity and off the charity of his uncle don Anselmo. The rich fabric attached to his fabulous attires makes Fortunato a Balzacian product who combines nature and culture (Marzel 132). Nonetheless, the protagonist remains privileged but "indebted," having bestowed upon himself a level of awesome spectacle that is not actually his own.

Julia Valderde seeks to express herself in the showiest of textiles. Her rich vestments and expensive accessories, exhibited after her marriage to don Anselmo, receive mixed reviews in Santiago's society. Some celebrate the happy union between her good looks and her elegant ensemble. Others, especially don Anselmo's poor relatives, are irked by her grandiose ways and flashy attire and consider them unbecoming her ethos: "se escandalizaban de tal ostentación en una persona que era conocida como pobre" [they were scandalised by such ostentation in a person who had been known to be poor] (Blest Gana, AEA 286). But Julia has waited a long time for her triumph, and she feels compelled to perform for others. More than anything else, Julia wants to depart from her past and remove herself from a time when all she could do was gaze at the reflexion of luxury "en calidad de tapada" [with her head covered by a shawl] as she looked through the window at the magnificent balls offered by society queens (AEA 99). Now, she is keen to be seen by others. Married to don Anselmo, Julia's elegant and sensual attire finds its rival only in Margarita. Both ladies represent the change in the mores of female comportment in Santiago's nineteenth century. Upperclass women like Margarita have much more to offer in their attire. They are undergoing a "reorientation of taste," a trend that dominates the "national costumes" of the time. These ladies look for more risqué dresses, eschewing Spanish patterns and favouring European, French ones. With liberated and libertarian outfits, the exquisite garments of these two ladies follow the socio-political cannons emanating from Europe's Enlightenment and Neo-classicism (Cruz 309-310; 328).

Julia and Margarita are just too beautiful to wear raggedy clothes. The narration highlights that, without any means to sustain it, "la belleza pierde la mitad de su prestigio y atractivos" [beauty loses half of its prestige and attractiveness] (Blest Gana, AEA 480). To an extent, the young ladies' good fortunes resemble that of Leonor Encina from Martín Rivas, the doyenne of Blest Gana's characters. Leonor is introduced in a way that appeals to the readers' senses. She is so beautiful that poverty would have been too cruel a fate for her:

Cualquiera que hubiese visto aquella niña de diez y nueve años en una pobre habitación, habría acusado de caprichosa a la suerte por no haber dado a tanta hermosura un marco correspondiente (MR 66).

lanyone seeing that nineteen-year-old girl surrounded by poor living conditions would have accused fate of capriciousness for not having given such beauty a corresponding framework.]

no money (Vilches, "Tejido" 51).

Margarita and Julia from *La aritmética en el amor* are not Leonor's equal, either. The young women do not possess the qualities that allow Leonor to choose, support, and elevate a man like Martín Rivas. Julia has blind ambition, a hard heart, and is driven by passion while Margarita likes to amuse herself by giving hope to penniless Fortunato while biding her time until she can secure a favourable marriage. Like Inés Arboleda of *El ideal de un calavera*, Margarita chooses sensibly when marrying, looking for a prospect that will allow her to continue leading her charmed life. Margarita's family wealth buttresses her reign in Santiago's society. And, as it does for Leonor Encina, it endows her with a proper frame:

ella era rica. La mano descarnada de la pobreza no la había nunca presentado un tosco vestido de quimón para cubrir su cuerpo elegante. Todos sus vestidos eran de seda; sus batas abundantes en valenciennes; sus cuellos, vueltas y manguillas variaban del punto de Inglaterra al d'Alençon, y de este a los encajes de Bruselas con primorosa elegancia (Blest Gana, *AEA* 91).

[she was rich. The stark hand of poverty had never presented her with a rough cotton dress to cover her elegant body. All her dresses were made out of silk; her robes were abundant in valenciennes; her collars, sleeves and cuffs showed an exquisite elegance that varied from an English style to that of Alençon, and from that to lace from Brussels.]

People stop to stare at Margarita as she presents herself as a worthwhile spectacle of finesse. In the text, she becomes a visual image of prosperity that bespeaks the transformation of the city, reproducing how a narration that contemplates any type of "observations about modernity" (which in Blest Gana's novel is Santiago) also contemplates the alterations of fashion (Brevik-Zender 231). For this reason, whether in the city or the countryside, wealth transmitted through a fashionable garment causes the greatest affect in La aritmética en el amor. Absolutely, when Fortunato finds himself in the countryside, a society ball creates enormous anticipation in people, especially the society ladies. They all rush to have a dress made for the occasion: "la febril agitación de la expectativa hacía deslizarse las agujas sobre las costuras con admirable ligereza" [the feverish excitement of the upcoming event made the needles slide over the seams with admirable lightness] (Blest Gana, AEA 410). Hence, el último grito de la moda [the latest fashion statement] expressed by a new dress indicates the "novelty and change" acquired by the fashionable item when worn by Margarita, Julia, or any other wealthy lady. It also documents the spending desires of the consumers (or at least the potential consumers) in Santiago's society (Arnold 2-3). In Blest Gana's narration, therefore, items of clothing inform people's impulses; they show their hidden agendas; and they indicate whether they have money, good taste, and the correct measure of élan for their attire, offering readers "periodical" notations of what not to wear for the times.

"Sensing" a Conclusion

A modernised Santiago becomes assimilated sensorially by the readers of *La aritmética en el amor* as they witness how characters react and adapt to the exigencies of a nascent capitalism. The affect and footprint of social and urban development are expressed through the characters' daily practices and behaviour as consumers. The narration tells us, with noted exceptions, that those members of society with whom we

become acquainted represent "una clase de gentes habituadas a las comodidades y aun a las superfluidades de la vida" [A class of people accustomed to the comforts and even the superfluities of life] (Blest Gana, AEA 302). As well, there are others who are poor but live surrounded by luxury, "fenómeno muy común en toda sociedad civilizada que entiende el uso de los naipes" [a common phenomenon in every civilised society that knows how cards are played] (AEA 102). As Chile progressed and detached itself from its colonial roots, new members of a moneyed aristocracy emerged, some that had immigrated from the provinces and others who had struck it rich in capitalist ventures. These individuals found themselves elevated to the upper layers of society due to the financial rewards of mining, agriculture and commerce, which for Blest Gana constituted abundant material for an estudio social (Latcham 32). Certainly, La aritmética en el amor alludes to the benefits of striking it rich: "llegan días en que una buena mina es lo que mejor caracteriza a un individuo" [the day comes when a prosperous mine is what best characterises an individual (Blest Gana, AEA 31). Because of this societal perception, characters pursue recognition of their wealth by others and self-gratification through sensorial experiences. The Mantoverdes and don Anselmo Rocaleal are affluent members of Santiago's society and, as such, they are "mediators" pursued by social upstarts who desire to be part of their group, seeking to reach the level of the former. This is the general impulse of the Chilean nation.

Maupassant depicts how a female garment becomes visualised by characters, "making fashion not merely inseparable from, but indeed constitutive, of the living, breathing female body" (Brevik-Zender 232). In the same manner, Blest Gana's characters first engage with others via what the others wear, through a sensorial experience of other people's possessions, such as expensive and exclusive garments or any other exquisite belongings that establish a hierarchy. Although eyes can be deceived, the best belongs only to the affluent, especially to the female socialites. The narration determines the critical importance of those possessions via descriptions of how they feel accessible to the touch, an example being when Margarita is seen on a shopping day in Calle Estado: "Aquel coche aristocrático, el elegante vestido de Margarita, su orgullosa sonrisa, los ricos encajes de su cuello y manguillas, el reluciente brocato del interior del carruaje, toda la pompa del lujo" [That aristocratic carriage, Margarita's elegant dress, her proud smile, the rich lace of her dress's collar and cuffs, the gleaming brocade inside the carriage, all the pomp of luxury (Blest Gana, AEA 141). Of course, a costly dress, such as Margarita's, makes the loudest of noises and must be looked at. In turn, characters' shopping habits make readers engage with the modernising developments in the city of Santiago. In this sense, Margarita's big-budget attire signifies a desire for capitalist products and the support of successful enterprises by the consumers of such products. The owners are those who have built capitalistic bonds with Europe between their national industries and new international markets. With the exception of the Almiros, who contemplate bankruptcy, loss of capital, and the threat of future hunger (AEA 173), most of the other characters are "hungry" for power, ready to do anything and everything to be part of high society in Santiago. They resemble the characters of Los Trasplantados, Blest Gana's much later novel, where Hispanic American characters spend fortunes and will sacrifice anything to be part of "le tout Paris."

Los Trasplantados emblematises the Chilean author's persistent focus on the struggles endured by siúticos as they sought to belong in society. Here, Blest Gana used the French term rastaquouères for "the Latin American bourgeois" who wished to lead lives "as European nobles in Paris" (Álvarez 127). Like the Canalejas in Paris, many of the characters of *La aritmética en el amor* are relentlessly chasing what is "chic" in Santiago. This pursuit comes at a high price to their pockets, to themselves, and to the future of the nation. Therefore, even though love and heartbreak are ever present in the lives of its characters, Blest Gana's novel has a deeper focus. Social order is perpetuated via the things capitalism produces: wealth, economic relationships, social inequalities and the sensorial affect they generate. They are at once the catalysts and the by-products of progress and modernity in Chile.

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