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Towards a Better Understanding of the Ugly in Literature

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Abstract
Because of the lack of a definition of the ugly that does not depend on beauty and that is applicable to literary studies, one proposes that ugliness is an independent aesthetic category. One determines *lack* and *excess* as the common aesthetic traits of the ugly and *horror* and *disgust* as the inherent emotional response they commonly provoke.

Key words: aesthetics of ugliness, excess, lack, horror, the ugly

Resumen
Dada la falta de una definición de lo feo que no esté basada en la belleza y que pueda ser utilizada en el estudio de la literatura, se argumenta que lo feo es una categoría estética independiente, mientras *la carencia* y *el exceso* son definidos como características comunes de lo feo, y e*l horror* y *el asco* como reacción emocional ante estas.

Palabras claves: carencia, estética de lo feo, exceso, fealdad, horror

The identity of ugliness in literature, as in most other fields, has inaccurately been constructed on the basis of its opposition to beauty. Historically, the definition of ugliness has often been simplified to the apothegm "ugliness is everything that beauty is not." The belief seems universal, even among young students of literature. Having asked a number of students what ugliness is, one has been able to determine a simple answer as the most recurrent. "It is not beauty," they would reply giggling when asked.

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In addition, since audiences commonly define ugliness by its contrast to beauty and also generally grant beauty a higher esteem, if not the highest, ugliness has historically been subverted to a secondary place. Beauty has been defined as an independent and self-existing aesthetic category, a grouping of objects with distinct aesthetic features which evoke similar emotional responses on subjects, but ugliness is still unfairly denied those merits of categorization. In the study of literature, however, the ugly[1] is as important as the beautiful. For centuries, writers have taken instances of ugliness from everyday experience and carefully placed them in their literary pieces. At times, they do so to scare. At times, they do so to appall. At times, they do it to inspire the reader with pity. Placing the ugly in their work, writers recreate the different hues of the immediate aesthetic world that we inhabit. That is, these writers incorporate what they appreciate as ugly in real life to their fictional creations, making their work true and familiar to the reader. Ugliness adds layers to their writing and makes it enjoyable and readable. In literature, the ugly is as necessary as the beautiful, and it exists independently without beauty. In poetry and prose, ugliness and beauty coexist naturally without necessarily interfering with each other. It is evident, then, that the artificial belief that subdues ugliness to beauty and forces it into a secondary existence is unsatisfying for the modern literary scholar. The need for a definition of ugliness that is independent from beauty is self evident, and having this kind of a definition, which details the common features of the ugly and their effects on readers, is a first step forward into identifying the ugly in literature and thus understanding the purpose of their aesthetic description inside a text.

The Basics of Theory

1. Aesthetic Experience

The world we inhabit, which is aesthetic, is filled with objects and subjects. Individuals experience and understand the world by means of their sensorial faculties. In the instant in which one of these experiences occurs, a subject perceives an object aesthetically and judges its value, thus building a link between them. These instances that link subject and object will be known as "aesthetic experiences." An aesthetic experience must be understood as the particular moment in which a subject (the beholder) perceives the sensorial qualities of an object (thing which is being observed) and passes a judgment on its value. By gazing at anything in existence in the world, say an apple, a person becomes subject in his/her experience of that apple. The apple, being watched and simply because of its merit of existing, is the object of that aesthetic experience. That object which is perceivable in an aesthetic experience must be considered to possess an aesthetic value. In other words, it exists in the universe of the aesthetic.

2. Aesthetic Category

As subjects of the world, humans have created categorizations for objects in it as a way to order them and to rationalize them. These categorizations, which order objects according to their aesthetics, will be called here "aesthetic categories." Although the term has been used with various theoretical meanings, one understands an aesthetic category as Adolfo Sánchez concretely defined it in his *Invitación a la Estética*, which states that they are general and essential demarcations of the universe of the real (145).[2] These categories encompass all the forms that build the real universe as perceived through our senses. If something exists in the universe, one should be able to categorize it according to its aesthetic value. An aesthetic category is, therefore, a collection of objects gathered according to a number of sensorial features that are common among them. Aesthetic categorization may involve sensorial features such as the magnitude (size), shape, color and shades distinguishable on the object being categorized. In other words, these features are the exterior details that one can distinguish on it, and they are the aesthetic characteristics that help the subject (the beholder) to categorize the object under one category or another.

Moreover, the incidence of common aesthetic features of objects is only the first condition of an aesthetic category. The second one to this definition is the intrinsic relationship between the object and its beholder. There are, then, two conditions of the aesthetic object: the features concerning its form and the response that such features inspire on its subject—love, hate, disgust, for instance. One must notice that the second of these conditions certainly implies that there must exist an observer for an object to be aesthetically valuable— not because the object is necessarily precious for the subject in any manner, but because its matter of constitution makes them perceivable to a sensible observer. Consequently, the kind of value granted to a certain object will determine its correspondence to one or another category.

Beauty as an Aesthetic Category

Since beauty is already robustly defined as an aesthetic category, one takes the structure of its definition as the model for constructing a definition of ugliness. The study of beauty involves first the form of the object and, second, the reaction of the subject to it. These two areas have become a fertile ground for experts to cultivate ideas and harvest observations on beauty and its attributes, which are listed as follows: 1. Beauty is historical. Although beauty has proven such a rich (even extensive) subject of study, experts on the field generally agree upon the idea that beauty is historical. Social concepts of beauty change in time and from place to place. It is not strange then that the understanding of beauty greatly varies from one culture to another. In *History of Beauty*, Umberto Eco explains that, "in paeans Beauty was expressed as the harmony of the cosmos, in poetry it is expressed as that enchantment that makes men rejoice, in sculpture

as the appropriate measure and symmetry of its elements, and in rhetoric as the right phonetic rhythm" (41). These ancient forms of art illustrate the common belief that beauty is considered a synonym of harmony, enjoyment, properness, and symmetry. 2. Beauty is balance. Moreover, the Pythagoreans were first to formally emphasize the importance of order and proportion as parts of beauty. In *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Diogenes Laertius exposes the Pythagorean belief that, "virtue is harmony, and health, and universal good, and God; on which account everything owes its existence and consistency to harmony" (10). This notion is reinforced by Plato and Aristotle. In *Metaphysics,* the latter supported the premise that, "The chief forms of beauty are order and symmetry and definiteness, which the mathematical sciences demonstrate in a special degree" (XIII, 3). 3. Beauty is pleasurable. Other elements—light, delicacy, softness, smallness, grace, and smoothness—were later incorporated into a growing spectrum of definitions of the term by philosophers such as Edmund Burke and Emmanuel Kant.[3]

However, since aesthetic categorization does not refer solely to the sensorial features of an object, there is a need to incorporate the set of emotions which the beautiful can produce in the subject. Immanuel Kant was the revolutionary who, during the 18th Century, added a significant attribute to the concept of aesthetic beauty. In *Critique of Judgment*, he claimed that beauty is characterized by a sort of uninterested liking of the object (258). In his book, *History of Beauty*, Umberto Eco tells us that, "a beautiful thing is something that would make us happy if it were ours, but remains beautiful even if it belongs to someone else" (10). In other words, the beautiful object elicits a response on the subject to possess it, but s/he never falls into lust, envy or jealousy, passions which do not have an inherent tie to beauty. Similarly, the philosopher Edmund Burke proposes that beauty inspires positive feelings of love and tenderness on the observer because beautiful objects appear to "submit to us" (149). In *Invitación a la Estética*, Adolfo Sánchez also agrees with the idea of an inspiring beauty and claims that a beautiful object is that which, because of its formal form (which also carries its meaning), is productive of a certain harmonious or balanced pleasure (181). Sánchez adds that this "beautiful" pleasure is distinguishable because it involves greater serenity and emotional balance than other categories.

The Early Rejection of Artistic Ugliness

Beauty is historical, varying from place to place and culture to culture and so is conceptual ugliness. The history of the ugly, nevertheless, lacks the prestige and admiration of beauty. In ancient times, Greek philosophers, among them Plato, believed the ugly was the ultimate negation of the beautiful and that it represented everything that was disorderly and unbalanced. In "Sophist," Plato states that: "the ugly is wherever there is the deformed class of disproportion. The class of the ugly is as ugly as ugly things are. The agreement of the naturally cognate is not in itself beautiful, for agreement is not commensuration"

(II, 95). Their logical conclusion was that ugliness should never see the light (through art), a notion that implies a complete rejection of ugliness. However, Aristotle had a different position and sustained the ugly could be portrayed in art, as long as it was beautified. Accordingly, ugly objects in nature that horrified us in reality could become acceptable, and even pleasurable in art, wearing a mask of beauty. During the Middle Ages, the ugly was believed functional within the frame of beauty. It helped human beings remember the ephemeral nature of beauty. Ugliness was, then, a reminder of Plato's principle of duality, which states that the only true and pure beauty is that of the supernatural world, that of the Deity, and that earthly beauty (our beauty) is but a faulty version of the former kind. In this context, ugliness was the painful proof that our kind of beauty decays. These early stages of human thinking rendered ugliness not only undesirable but also hateful and insufferable, and this early negative response toward ugliness discouraged the development of the concept and the formation of its aesthetic theory.

Ugliness Defined from Beauty

This traditional idea that ugliness is a hateful and discouraging subject of study has of course hindered academic development of the concept. The definition of ugliness has traditionally turned around beauty and this concept of ugliness dependant on beauty proves unsatisfactory. Many have found characterization and explanation of the term unnecessary and rendered it simply as the "opposite of beauty." For instance, Plato claimed in "Sophist" that "ugliness is an error or mistake" (II, 95) and, following the same notion, Karl Rosenkranz states in *The Aesthetics of Ugliness* that "beauty is the original divine idea, and its negation, ugliness, as it is a negation, has only a secondary existence" (qtd. in Eco, *Beauty* 135). Hence, since beauty is the positive premise, ugliness is subdued to it. Similarly, others consider ugliness to be secondary and dependant on beauty, but they believe that the former is not necessarily the negation of the latter. John Ruskin, for example, supports this idea. In *Modern Painters*, Ruskin claims that beauty is present in almost everything in nature and that the few objects that one might call ugly are, in fact, beautiful to a lesser extent. In a very Platonic manner, Ruskin states:

> There is not one single object in nature which is not capable of conveying [ideas of beauty], and which, to the rightly perceiving mind, does not present an incalculably greater number of beautiful than of deformed parts; there being in fact scarcely anything, in pure, undiseased nature, like positive deformity, but only degrees of beauty. (102)

The ugly is then demoted from an aesthetic category to a simple degree of beauty, its lowest degree possible. This notion robs ugliness of any identity whatsoever. But Ruskin's theory seems inconsistent. Semantically, it is

never the same to appoint some ugly object and call it the least beautiful of a group. One saying so would definitely imply one's "liking"[4] of the object, whereas one truly likes the object or not. Moreover, Ruskin's claim is also biased. His scarce "deformed parts" function in favor of the beautiful, and his overall argument leaves the ugly dependant on beauty. The writer adds that the ugly in the world makes for "such slight and rare points of permitted contrast as may render all around them more valuable by their opposition, spots of blackness in creation, to make its colors felt" (102). To Ruskin, the juxtaposition of beauty and ugliness (or the "blackness in creation," as he calls it) functions in favor only of the former. In other words, the ugly makes the beautiful more pristine. The definition of ugliness which springs from beauty is unsatisfactory because the former is treated as an accessory of the latter.

Disruptive Aesthetic Categories

In *Aesthetic Experience: Beauty, Creativity, and the Search for the Ideal*, George Hagman calls ugliness a "traumatic disruption of our aesthetic experience" (7). However, contemporary readers can no longer label the ugly as a disruption of any aesthetic experience because it is an aesthetic category in itself, and one aesthetic category is not the disruption of another. The very purpose of categorization is separating what otherwise could be thought of as disruptions of a kind. An aesthetic experience refers to our interaction with a given object which, by its mere faculty of existing in the perceivable world, belongs to an aesthetic category; whether that category is that of beauty or ugliness, or any other whatsoever, is inconsequential. Beauty is as disruptive as ugliness. That is, the most beautiful object is as noticeable from the rest of its same kind as the ugliest is; they are noticeable because both disrupt the norm. Any ugly object, like a beautiful one, is aesthetically valuable; they are both perfectly perceptible through the senses as objects of this earthly realm. What distinguishes an ugly object from a beautiful one is the kind of value (in terms of one's liking) which it is given. Beauty and ugliness have completely separated existences, but they also, as opposite categories, juxtapose. Ugliness can easily be contrasted to beauty, but that does not mean the former originates from the latter. The definition of ugliness, therefore, should also be separated from that of beauty. It was until recent years that the revolutionary concept of a self-existing ugliness, proposed by critics such as Adolfo Sánchez,[5] began gaining acceptance. One question remains, nevertheless, what are the traits that are attributed to the ugly? It has previously been established in this study that an aesthetic category sorts objects according to two main criteria: the sensorial features that make for their exterior appearance and the response that such features inspire on their subject. Therefore, the primary objective hereafter is to find the parameters that delimit ugliness as an aesthetic category, fulfilling both criteria.

Lack, *Excess* and Their *Charm*

The elaboration of a self-sustained definition of ugliness starts by determining aesthetic features common among ugly objects. One has found two noticeable characteristics of objects that distinguish them as ugly and work as foundations for the category. Ugliness is constantly marked by a *lack*,[6] an *excess*, or even a combination of both in the physicality of the object. In his *Tractatus de Bono et Malo*, William Auvergne explains that "a man with three eyes or a man with only one eye is physically displeasing, the former for having that which is improper, the latter for not having that what is fit or suitable" (qtd. in Eco, *Beauty* 132). In either case, *lack* and *excess* prove a distinguishable trait of the ugly. When referring to *lack*, one means the aesthetic awareness of a missing part in a whole (which is previously understood as such by experience) and the uneasy feelings of absence that it implies. For example, one notices the lack of an eye in a person's face because one has already encountered other men with two eyes and understands that humans have, by nature, two eyes (the whole encompasses two eyes). Meeting a person with only one of the organs immediately breaks the schema[7] of the object (perceiving that there is a part missing). The object is understood as strange and incomplete; hence, *lack* carries a negative connotation. In Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, Jehan Frollo is quick to remark Quasimodo's disgrace at having merely one functional eye: "A one-eyed man is far more incomplete than a blind one. He knows what he lacks" (50). The emphasis of Jehan's attention here is not on the faculty of sight but on the organ that enables it. Losing the sense is undesirable, but it is worse to lack the organ. The vacant socket is ugly because the subject understands the absence of an eyeball based again on previous experience and contrast to the person's other complete eye. The vacant spot is the mark of ugliness that should otherwise be naturally filled.

Excess, on the other hand, involves an exaggeration, usually in size, of one of the parts in that whole—if the whole was exaggerated all together the unpleasing effect of *excess* would dissipate in the unity of the object. For example, if a person's head is too big for his body, then it is considered an ugly head because of its disproportion, but if the whole body is big then the effect of the large head dissipates in the wholeness of the form. Commonly, *excess* in a specific part of the body has an unbalancing effect, which is considered ugly. Rosenkranz adds that "if [one's nose] becomes too big, the rest of the face disappears too much by comparison with it. A disproportion is created. Involuntarily we compare its size with that of the other part of the face, and we conclude that it should not be so big" (qtd. in Eco, *Ugliness* 154). An exaggerated nose breaks the rules of proportion and disrupts the idea of "whole" (in this case a face) previously conceived. Consequently, much like order and harmony are said to be qualities of beautiful objects, ugliness often connects to either a *lack* or an *excess*—or a combination of both—in their form.

Interestingly, even though having one-too-many eyes, or one-too-few, is considered improper and unsuitable features in a fellow man, his very nature

makes them appealing to our curiosity. One ineluctably wishes to comprehend the reasons for their presence (or absence). Similarly, when meeting a scarred, marked, or stained face, one can hardly avoid wondering the cause of its disfigurement or the consequences of such. What is perhaps more interesting is that, at the time of encountering either of these qualities in an object, most subjects center their attention, at least momentarily, on it. Indeed, *lack* and *excess* have their own charm, not similar in nature to that of the beautiful, but ultimately a powerful and striving force of attraction that fixates one's gaze upon it. One calls this particular attraction the *charm of the ugly*,[8] and although this *charm* is not necessarily pleasing, one may say it is truly intriguing. The reason for this attraction is that abnormalities have a powerful effect on one's psyche without necessarily implying any form of morbid pleasure. One can link this attraction of the ugly to the mind because, since the object no longer corresponds with the schema of the subject, it results displeasing and simply strange. A negative reaction towards the ugly object enters conflict with our human curiosity. In other words, the object becomes a new source of experience for the subject, unlike any previous occurrence, almost as if this subject was discovering a new variation of a species of object, adding differentia to the genus.

It might also happen that an object, say a man, be plagued with several instances of *lack* and *excess*. In such a case, the attention of a subject may focus on particularities of that man, but it would be more common that the whole figure of that man becomes the object of attention to the common viewer, almost a spectacle. This is the case of Quasimodo in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. In Victor Hugo's text, a crowd is both appalled and amazed by the ugliness of the character. Initially, the character repels his audience, yet soon enough his ugly features become the center of attention: "The men, on the contrary, were charmed, and applauded. Quasimodo, the object of this uproar, still stood at the chapel door, sad and serious, letting himself be admired" (49). The physiognomy of the notorious hunchback is so distorted that it entices the senses which are driven, at least in this case, by curiosity. Once the initial shock of the ugliness mildly subsides, the subjects experiment the *charm of the ugly*. This charm commonly accompanies *lack* and *excess*, and these two are the most excellent markers of the ugly. They seem common aesthetic features of the ugly, thus, accomplishing the first requirement for the definition of ugliness as an aesthetic category. The following step is to find recurrent emotional responses that ugly objects evoke on subjects.

Horror and Disgust: Spawns of Ugliness

Two feelings are intimately intertwined with ugliness: horror and disgust. Let us, for a moment only, ponder on some synonyms for the word *ugly*. There is horrid, horrible, horrifying, frightful, unlovely, unpleasing, loathsome, repelling, repugnant, repulsive, and revolting, among others. All of these adjectives manifest the effects the ugly object has on the subject, and one can distinguish two main principles: horror and disgust. These are the two key effects of the ugly.

Like feelings of love and pleasure stem from the contemplation of beautiful objects, horror and disgust originate from the ugly. Strong disgust may arise from looking at different misshaping symptoms of numerous diseases—diseases that transgress the model of physical appearance we hold in our schema. Similarly, elongated fangs (like those of a ravenous wolf or the fantastic vampire) or excessive facial hair (fuzzy eyebrows, beards) are ugly because of the aggressiveness implicit in them, which gives rise to anxiety and horror.

In *Aesthetic Experience: Beauty, Creativity, and the Search for the Ideal*, George Hagman claims that "ugliness is the provocation and projection of unconscious fantasies that alter the sense of aesthetic experience, in such a way that the formal qualities of the experience—its shape, texture, and color—become what we experience as sources of the most disturbing and repulsive feelings" (7). Here Hagman provides a sensorial definition for ugliness. Care must be taken, though, while reading it. His premise that the "formal qualities" of an ugly object are repulsive and may inspire horror definitely fits one's formal definition of ugliness. However, to avoid misconceptions, it must be understood that the projection of fantasies refers only to a mental process of our own (the subjects'). The object remains unaffected in its form while our perception of it changes. Like in all aesthetic experiences, the inspection of a subject does not have power over the object's aesthetic features. Yet, it is up the subject to judge such object. In that particular moment of judgment, the object is rendered ugly by that specific subject. After perceiving the object aesthetically and validating its aesthetic existence, the subject categorizes it aesthetically.

One must avoid the notion that one's aesthetic experience is always altered by the ugly. Such belief completely defeats the idea of ugliness as an aesthetic category which has the same validity—and should be granted the same respect—of the beautiful. One may say ugliness is an alternative over beauty, but it is inaccurate to say it is an alteration of the beautiful. Ugliness is an alteration of the norm (like the beautiful is also an alteration of the norm), but it is not an alteration in itself, in its very particular nature. Ugliness is self-existent. Therefore, there is not any reason to say that the qualities of the object "become" disturbing either; for all one knows, they could remain unchanged, ugly, disturbing, yet unchanged. It is the subject who "finds" the object disturbing. The sense of change and alteration in the object implicit in Hagman's claim is suitable only if the beautiful is taken as the most excellent aesthetic category from which all of the rest derive. That, however, is not the case of this study.

Disgust for our Fellow Humans

Disgust, the first of the emotions mentioned before as potentially arising from the ugly, finds its epitome in the ugly human form. *Lack* and *excess* are both unpleasing to the common subject because they transgress his/her expectations of the norm, and since the human form has an intrinsic familiarity to us, experiencing its alteration results most often in utter disgust. As true

representatives of ugliness, *lack* and *excess* intervene in the common aesthetic experience of fellow humans. Present in the physicality of a person, these two features are digressions of common form and incidentally reminders of further problems. The *lack* in a toothless grin, for example, suggests disease and old age, both of which are symbolic of approaching death and pain. Similarly, the external symptoms of numerous diseases—especially those diseases causing sores, boils or ulcers—are marks of ugliness. In *The Aesthetics of Ugliness, III*, Karl Rosenkranz claims that "exanthemas abscesses are assimilable to the sand worm, which digs its tunnels under the skin; they are, to a certain extent, parasitical individuals, whose existence contradicts the nature of the organism as a unity and in which it disintegrates" (qtd. in Eco, *Ugliness* 256). All these abnormalities of the skin—which is incidentally the most external of our organs and, therefore, the most aesthetically impacting—interfere with the perception of the whole body, causing it to be perceived as disgusting and even horrifying. Another example of these diseases is the human papilloma virus (HPV), which can cover the body in warts. Other inner organs, however, may also have an impact on the aesthetics of an ugly object. Lack of muscular mass is also considered ugly, as it shows malnutrition, starvation and even eating disorders. A similar disgusting effect accompanies an *excess* of the flesh, which we commonly call obesity. Moreover, the same interference occurs if the body is infected with misshaping diseases such as syphilis, which can deform the bones and fracture the image of the whole.

At given times, writers purposely construct ugly characters to inspire disgust in subjects. These writers must acknowledge that there can be two types of subjects who judge an object (the ugly character) in a literary piece. The first type belongs to the real world the writer inhabits; it is the reader, who experiences the object aesthetically through his/her reading of its description in the text. The second type belongs to the fictional world created by the author; this subject is any other character within the story who judges the object as part of their own world. Though this second type of subject is fictional as well as the object, it is expected to react to his/her aesthetic experience in the same fashion a human reader would. The difference between a human reader and a fictional character as subjects of an ugly object in a text is the kind of value they may attribute to this object. Of course, a writer's fictional characters will always judge an object as the author intents, but the reader may not. The reader needs convincing. The author must skillfully manipulate language and construct the description of the object in such a way that the reader ultimately experiences it in the way he intends. For example, when Victor Hugo describes Quasimodo in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, he unleashes his creative imagination, attributing a number of disfiguring conditions:

> We will not try to give the reader any idea of that tetrahedron-like nose, of that horseshoe-shaped mouth; of that small left eye overhung by a bushy red eyebrow, while the right eye was completely hidden by a monstrous wart; of those uneven, broken teeth, with sad gaps here and there like the

> battlements of a fortress; of the callous lip, over which one of these teeth projected like an elephant's tusk; of that forked chin; and especially of the expression pervading all this, that mixture of malice, amazement, and melancholy. Imagine, if you can, that comprehensive sight. (47)

The character is ultimately (and perfectly) ugly. In his description of Quasimodo's body, Victor Hugo purposely omits mentioning any likeable feature of the character. Directly addressing the reader, the writer makes him/her participant of the aesthetic judgment of the hunchback. Victor Hugo makes us the subjects of Quasimodo's appearance and he offers the reader an image of disgust, thus tricking us into accepting the character as disgusting. Of course, other characters in the novel also participate in their own aesthetic experiences of Quasimodo. They naturally judge the character as ugly. The reader is explained that during his whole life, "he had known nothing but humiliation, disdain of his estate, and disgust for his person" (68). Multiple subjects of the second type (those characters immerse in the narrative) also find Quasimodo ugly. Victor Hugo straightforwardly depictured an ugly protagonist because his ugliness is the center for his novel. The author must convince the reader of the ugliness of Quasimodo. His ugliness and rejection by most other characters are the basis for the plot of the novel.

Modes of an Aesthetic Experience

One of the most heavily commented issues concerning ugliness is its aesthetic value and its connection to art. Contrasting Aristotle's initial notion that the ugly is beautified, refined, through art, later critics found real value in the ugly. In art, the ugliest of objects can be represented unchanged and have the same pleasing impact beauty could. Kant, in *The Critique of Judgment*, says that "a natural beauty is a beautiful thing; artistic beauty is a beautiful presentation of a thing" (179), a sound argument for two main reasons. First, it is within our means to portray the ugly in literature, explicit and undistorted, and second this ugliness not only becomes "acceptable" but also enjoyable without necessarily being beautified. One tends to praise literature because of its accuracy or its execution, not because the objects portrayed in the piece are pleasing or comforting in nature. For example, the extraordinary mastery of language which characterizes John Milton's descriptions in *Paradise Lost* seems even more exquisite when he describes Satan, who is mostly considered ugly. Depicting the fallen angel, Milton heightens his language and creates a brilliant comparison between Satan and an eclipsed sun:

> As when the sun new risen
> Looks through the horizontal misty air
> Shorn of his beams, or from behind the moon
> In dim eclipse disastrous twilight sheds

> On half the nations, and with fear of change
> Perplexes monarchs. (I, 594-599)

Here Satan is a dark figure who spreads fear with its mere presence, yet the means of Milton's metaphor are of astonishingly pleasant to read. The tendency of validating literature for its execution and accuracy implies there are different modes of aesthetic perception, and they can operate individually in the presence of any other. So, an ugly demon can feature in a fine painting or a striking literary passage without devaluating it. Therefore, a first mode, such as the original impacting, or displeasing, aesthetic qualities of that demon in this case, remains (unmodified) even as part of that particular literary passage (this being the second mode). Such a demon is presented artistically and beautifully, but not beautified, and this is the general rule for ugliness in art.

Further on Disgust: The Exception of Ugliness in Art

Through literature, then, the ugly can be experienced aesthetically unchanged and unrefined and still be pleasurable. However, disgust is such a powerful response to the ugly that it transgresses art. Dedicated research has ultimately presented us with what appears to be an only exception to the notion that ugliness in literature can be enjoyable: objects of disgust. In his discussion on art and ugliness, Kant adds that,

> There is only one kind of ugliness that cannot be presented in conformity with nature without obliterating all aesthetic liking and hence artistic beauty: that ugliness which arouses disgust. For in that strange sensation, which rests on nothing but imagination, the object is presented as if it insisted, as it were, on our enjoying it even though that is just what we are forcefully resisting; and hence the artistic presentation of the object is no longer distinguished in our sensation from the nature of this object itself, so that it cannot possibly be considered beautiful. (180)

Disgust is such a potent emotion that it overpowers all pleasing effects art can raise. In fact, no subject can accurately defocus from the disgustingness of the object; or rather, the ugly object in its primary mode of aesthetic recognition disturbs the subject's appreciation and, logically, the enjoyment of the second mode (that of the object as part of the piece of art). Therefore, the repulsiveness of the primary mode transgresses art and lingers into the second mode. In other words, the repulsiveness of the real object makes it impossible for the subject to find pleasure in it, even in a painting or written passage. That is, simply reading about the object is disgusting. Of course, one is to remember that disgust is one of the two emotional responses to the ugly suggested here, and the ratio of its experience to the sight of a given object may vary considerably among different subjects. The effects of disgust naturally wear out in accordance to the

experience of the subject and his/her disposition to face the object[9] since feelings of disgust rely intrinsically on the imagination of the subject, his/her willingness and capacity to relate to an object whether in a primary or secondary mode of aesthetic appreciation will define its experience.

Further on Horror: Terror and Fear Differentiated

Horror, the second emotion that characterizes subjects of the ugly, is also connected to art but, contrary to disgust, horror can be commonly enjoyed artistically and, in at least one of its forms, is more proper of literature than any other form of art. Here, horror must be defined in accordance to its applicability to literature. Aside from its definition as a literary genre, which embraces fantastic narratives featuring supernatural elements (such as ghosts and monsters) and focuses on creating a feeling of fear, this study requires a definition that corresponds to the emotional response of a subject. While the *Macmillan English Dictionary* defines horror as "a strong feeling of shock or fear caused by something extremely unpleasant" ("Horror," *Macmillan*), the *Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* stipulates it is "an overwhelming and painful feeling caused by something frightfully shocking, terrifying, or revolving" ("Horror," *Random House*). Both these definitions reveal that horror is indeed a complicated mixture of sub-emotions. It is, therefore, vital to delimit the term, so it can be useful to our field of study, literature. Since the adjective "revolving" is more closely related to disgust, which has already been defined as a separated feeling towards the ugly, only two distinctive aspects of horror remain in these definitions: shock and fear. These two aspects are the grounds to divide horror into two more specific feelings. These two divisions of horror will be called *terror* and *fear*. The former we experience immediately while reading. The latter builds over time.

From these two modalities of horror, *terror* is the most appropriate to describe the reaction of a reader towards a literary passage. In *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry*, John Dennis also finds the terms distinguishable and claims they are both "a Disturbance[10] of Mind proceeding from an Apprehension of an approaching Evil, threatening Destruction or very great Trouble either to us or ours. And when the Disturbance comes suddenly with surprise, let us call it Terror; when gradually, Fear" (356). Therefore, the word *terror* will here denominate those feelings involving shock and violence, while fear will encompass characteristic emotional attitudes towards an object, which are built increasingly through a long period of time. Thus, terror is a term naturally much more appropriate for literature because the aesthetic encounters that a reader has in a literary text occur in an instant. Ugliness is an essential part of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and there are a number of passages in which that ugliness evokes terror. One of the most striking is Victor Frankenstein creation of the monster. Having just bestowed life to his creature, the scientist is terrified by his first sight of the monster: "It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by

the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs" (35). Shelly builds the entire scene to inspire terror. The atmosphere is quite unsettling. Every aesthetic element that she mentions, the dark late hour, disturbing wind and rain, and the flickering candle light, contributes to the effect of the passage. In these few lines, Shelley builds *terror* adding image after image until she culminates with the description of the monster. This writing strategy allows the reader to experience the monster along with Victor Frankenstein and identify with his *terror*. Additionally, a literary piece such as Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum," strikes the reader with terror in few pages. Yet, it would be inappropriate to claim one fears Poe's tale (like one fears spiders or clowns). Fearing Poe's tale would imply being afraid of the book itself, of its pages and bindings. Fear is built over time, years one may say, while terror occurs spontaneously at the encounter of frightful or ugly imagery. One must conclude then that horror can be divided in fear and terror, and looking for a term applicable to literature one chooses terror, leaving fear to the cognition of objects and events belonging to real, day to day, life.

Ugliness must be understood as an aesthetic category independent from beauty. The notions that ugliness has an existence secondary to beauty and that it is not an aesthetic category have proved erroneous. Ugliness has been forming itself slowly through history—perhaps through the history of the beautiful. And each small theoretical contribution has, directly or indirectly, strengthened the position of ugliness as an independent aesthetic category under which one can gather objects with distinct aesthetic features that evoke similar emotional responses on subjects. Ugliness is essential to literature. It often connects the reader to the text. It makes the fictional worlds of authors more complex. It makes them more real and also more familiar. Constructing the ugly in literature demands great skills from writers, and of course, this construction, the ugly in literature, allows readers to enjoy those great skills.

Notes

1 Hereafter the term "ugliness" refers to the aesthetic category. And the usage of "the ugly" denominates the object(s) inside such category (the ugly object).

2 In Spanish, the original quotation from Sánchez's *Invitación a la Estética* reads: "Las categorías estéticas son determinaciones generales y esenciales del universo real que llamamos estético" (145).

3 Burke's *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, 1754, and Kant's *Critique of Judgment,* 1790.

4 Immanuel Kant's term (*The Critique of Judgment*).

5 Sánchez builds a chapter in his *Invitación a la Estética*, dedicated to the historical presence of ugliness in different societies, as well as to the affirmation of the ugly as self-existing. Nevertheless, the author does not define ugliness as an aesthetic category.

6 In the future, italics will mark the use of a word as a term of my own coinage in order to reduce grammatical ambiguity.

7 Understand a subject's schema as his/her prior knowledge of the object, his idea of its "whole" as commonly experienced.
8 My term, it refers to the attraction experience towards the ugly, and it is understood as a quality of the object, not a faculty of the subject.
9 For example, a doctor will not react with disgust while operating on a patient, but an unaware subject, less accustomed to seeing the inside of a body, could find the same display of viscera, or other organs, disgusting.
10 All of Dennis's capitalization will appear in this study as it does in the original text.

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