The image of 18th-century Spanish poetics is often that of a rigid classicism which completely banishes the irrational, dark and deviant. This black and white image is clearly one we should abandon (Carnero 14, 16-17; Álvarez Barrientos, “La comedia de magia” 99-100).2 Nevertheless most poetics of the time consider beauty and artistic creativity according to a set of rules and stable principles in order to rationalize the aesthetically ambiguous.3 Yet certain aesthetic phenomena escape clear and complete rationalization. Moreover, these phenomena do not just appear as exceptions to the rule; they frequently form an integral part of the genuine qualities and aesthetics of poetry. What comes into play then is, in Amaleena Damlé’s words, “[...] beauty’s necessary correlation with its counterparts of ugliness, and indeed monstrosity, and with the theoretical and artistic spaces that have contested the putatively hierarchical relationship between these terms” (1).

In this paper, I will present examples of Spanish theoreticians who attribute different functions to the monstrous within aesthetic phenomena and construct specific ‘poetic monsters’ that were not always condemned and whose status varied greatly.

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1 This article is the result of a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the ASECS and ECSS in Pittsburgh on April 2, 2016. I would like to thank the CRC 980 “Episteme in Motion” for funding my travel expenses. All translations in this text are my own.

2 With regard to the history of monstrosity, Curran (13), Helduser (Imaginationen 12-13) and Hagner (9-11) oppose a too linear reading, which would postulate that the monstrous was gradually rationalized over time and consider this process to be accomplished by the end of the 18th or the beginning of the 19th century. Helduser (Imaginationen 13-16) points out that the notion of a gradual ‘naturalization’ of the monstrous was rather construed by the discipline of teratology, founded by scientists such as Isidore Geoffrey Saint Hilaire or Albrecht von Haller with the purpose of rationalizing natural deviations.

3 We could argue that, as, for example, Schmidt-Emans states for the natural sciences in the 18th century, the poetics of this time depart from the fundamental conviction of a natural regularity of the phenomena (15).
The term ‘monster’ and the semantic field surrounding it can refer to a variety of things, from fantastical and mixed creatures to deformed bodies\(^4\) to deviant behaviours and inclinations.\(^5\) These three types of monstrosity alone reflect how many different perspectives and disciplines are involved in the construction of the monstrous, not to mention the omnipresent moral connotations (Curran 2); for example, fantastical creatures can be found in mythology and religion but also natural history; monstrous bodies are shaped by medical and aesthetic discourses; and social and political structures determine how deviant action and desire are construed.

In the different contexts we will encounter, the monstrous ranges in terms of aspect and levels, referring to concrete subjects in a story but also serving as a category to describe a certain poetic style or as an analytical device that allows us to detect transgressive elements.\(^6\)

**The doomed monsters of poetry**

On a thematic level, monsters persist throughout the 18th century in representations of creatures from Greek mythology or northern European myths. Hybrids between the human and the animal world or other manifestations of the supernatural can be found abundantly in 18th-century literature and are also discussed in theoretical texts, normally in the context of the ‘marvellous’.\(^7\)

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\(^4\) Hagner highlights the —not always unequivocal— semantic differences between the terms ‘monster’ and ‘monstrosity’, especially in the 18th and 19th century, stating that while the first referred to unnatural births and chimerical creatures, the second one was used for natural corporal malformation (8-9). But as also Helduser points out, this distinction could not be maintained strictly as it was linked to the always disputable criterion of the naturalness of those deviations (“Poetische ‘Missgeburten’” 670-671). For a more exhaustive analysis in this regard see also Helduser’s *Imaginationen des Monströsen*. Regarding mixed creatures, Foucault lists the following areas that combine within the monster: man and beast, two different species, two individuals, two sexes, life and death, or two forms (58).

\(^5\) Foucault denominates this last case “[l]e monstre moral” (69).

\(^6\) Parr distinguishes three different ways of constructing monstrosity: as a monstrous body, as an analytical instrument and as a topic of discourse (19). Geisenhanslücke/Mein and Overthun refer to monstrosity as an ‘analytical category’ and, following Foucault, generally differentiate between the monster as a concrete ‘liminal figure’ and structural ‘monstrous orders’ (9-11).

\(^7\) For the repercussion of supernatural and monstrous creatures in the popular novel, see Ferreras (44-46). For the 18th century in general, see, among others, García Montalbán, Glendinning and Álvarez Barrientos (“Comedia de magia”).
In Juan Francisco de Masdeu’s poetological dialogue *Arte poética fácil* from 1801,8 Metrófilo, the dominant speaker and teacher of his pupil Sofrónia, denounces Greek myths as corrupt and disgusting. One of the reasons for doing so are the unnatural origins of the gods and goddesses, as in the case of Aphrodite —the daughter of Uranus, born in the foam of the sea— or Hecate —a mixture of three different goddesses who is therefore frequently depicted as a three-headed monster (Masdeu 232-233, 241). Still, he dedicates the entire final dialogue of almost 50 pages to “monstruos poéticos” (241). In spite of his moral objections to these “locuras fabulosas” (275), he stresses the need to ‘waste your time with the study of this nonsense’ (227). But even though the ancient beliefs and stories are constantly marked as ‘ridiculous’, ‘stupid’ and ‘dangerous’,9 there obviously is a fascination with them. This attraction is reduced to (a predominantly harmful) entertainment (Masdeu 226-227, 229, 233). Yet by describing the supposedly unbearable atrocities of Greek mythology in all its details, the criticized stories are not actually banished from normative poetics but, via negation, integrated into them.

In poetics, the question whether Greek mythology and/or the Christian supernatural should be represented is widely discussed (Barrientos, “Comedia de magia” 100; Carnero 104). The mythology and culture from the northern tribes (e.g. the Goths) is, generally speaking, rejected as uncivilized. Yet, the myths of those ‘barbarian’ realms also appear in persisting genres like the chivalric romance and are even discussed and —within limits— appreciated within theoretical treatises. In *Le rivoluzioni del teatro musicale italiano dalla sua origine fino al presente* (Vol. 1, 1783), written during his exile in Italy, Esteban de Arteaga, for instance, displays an ambiguous attitude towards the marvellous and towards northern myths. First, he condemns the marvellous as a ‘monstrosity’, opposed to decency, truth and the ‘invariable norms of critique of the ancients’ (“Reflexiones sobre lo maravilloso” 235). Later, when sketching the history of the marvellous in Europe, he criticizes the ‘modern myths’, whose origins can be seen in the northern and (in a Burkean sense) sublime landscapes, for their violent and superstitious character but he also praises them for their beauty and their insights into the essence of men (240–245).10

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8 There is a posthumous second edition from 1826, which was not corrected by the author himself.

9 The very beginning of the chapter about Greek mythology provides one very vivid example (Masdeu 225).

10 Arteaga’s description of northern landscapes clearly displays the influence of Burke’s conception of the sublime, i.e. as an overwhelming and yet pleasing experience of terror and admiration caused by something that transcends us and threatens us in our existence. Cascardi remarks that many authors established a special link between experiences of a sublime nature and northern European regions and quotes Addison as an example (222). With Burke, the sublime is no longer considered as the most elevated of the three *styles* but as an independent and
The marvellous can equally be seen in a more positive way, as a necessary part of creating a powerful effect on the reader. This aspect is treated by the Jesuit teacher of rhetoric Antonio Burriel in his *Compendio del arte poética* from 1757. In this compendium, Burriel describes the marvellous as ‘an enemy of verisimilitude’ because it constantly inclines the poet to surpass the limits of the believable and incurs the danger of letting the poetic imagination create without boundaries (58). At the same time, he stresses that the marvellous is an indispensable element that inspires readers with overwhelming admiration and wins their hearts (58–59). So Burriel does not condemn the marvellous entirely. He just juxtaposes its unrestrained supremacy with verisimilitude and common sense. Nonetheless, it keeps its character as a potential threat to the ideal of a rationally moderated poetic creation that Burriel outlines throughout his treatise.

The poet is thus required to know how to balance the demand for believability and astonishment in the right way. This knowledge of the ‘right measure’ is one of the central elements in those 18th-century poetics oriented toward classical principles such as the Aristotelian ‘mean’ (*mesotes*). But this ‘right measure’ is not something that can be found by mathematical calculation. It has to be achieved instead by carefully restraining the excessive...
influence of passion and imagination (considered sources of a rhetorical excessiveness), which leads to an ‘unhealthy’ abundance of rhetorical devices such as conceits (conceptos) and ingenious wit (agudezas). This poetic style, later named ‘baroque’, was condemned by many 18th-century critics because of its lack of moderation and its opposition to the buen gusto (good taste), that is, their stylistic ideal of clarity, naturalness and simplicity.

In this context, Urte Helduser’s suggestion to consider the use of monsters and deformed creatures within poetics as ‘aesthetic ciphers’ for disorderly and irregular art (“Poetische ‘Missgeburten’” 669 and Imaginationen 11-12) helps us to understand the sometimes quite harsh reactions toward the ‘baroque’, marked as artificial and decadent by the defenders of ‘good taste’. For its critics, this witty and over-ornate style stands for formal and moral decadence, an inversion of their didactic ideal of poetry as moderate, orderly and instructive.

To give just one of many examples, in his poetic treatise La poética from 1737, Ignacio de Luzán sharply criticizes Luis de Góngora for his excessive fantasy and hermetic style: “Mas sin apartarnos de Góngora, veamos en otro ejemplo cuán disformes monstruos puede concebir una fantasía desordenada y en qué derrumbaderos puede caer” (313). As this quote evokes, by using the verb “concebir”, the critique of style often works with a comparison between thinking and writing and the acts of conceiving and giving birth to a child. Within this analogy, it follows that bad works of writings are considered ‘miscarriages’ or ‘deformed foetuses’. Luzán states, this time in an earlier treatise on rhetoric El arte de hablar from 1729: “Mas como de la forma de concebir depende la de nacer, siendo imposible que nazca perfecto

12 Parr considers hyperbolic excessiveness an inherent feature of monstrosity (19).

13 For the opposition between these two poetic paradigms see, e.g., José Checa Beltrán (37-39), Russell P. Sebold (“Entre siglos”) and, with respect to the discussions about ‘good taste’, Helmut C. Jacobs (358–363).

14 As Helduser points out, the origins for the rejection of an irregular and excessive poetic imagination can be found in Horace’s De arte poetica, for example in the verses 1-13 (628-631), where painters and poets are subject to ridicule for inventing chimerical creatures with the body parts of different species (“Poetische ‘Missgeburten’” 673-674 and Imaginationen 27-29).

15 There is a revised posthumous edition of this text from 1789, yet the authorship of the revisions is contested.

16 Regarding the late 17th and the early 18th century, Moscoso points out how moral conduct and (successful) birth were seen as mutually determined (56-57). Huet explains that, since antiquity, the distorted or excessive female imagination was considered a decisive factor in the birth of deformed children (1, 4-7). What in the realm of medicine was applied solely to the imagination of women, seems in the case of 18th-century poetics to be valid for any kind of ‘mental procreation’.
As a consequence he concludes that the duties of rhetoric begin already with examining the thinking of the speaker (Arte de hablar 82). The ideas created by imaginatio and fantasia thus shape the concrete form of language; most 18th-century critics — referring to Horaz— therefore strengthen the importance of controlling the creative limitlessness of fantasy by reason and arte (study and rules) (Sebold, Lírica 427-432; Checa Beltrán 266-267).

In lyric poetry, Góngora and his many epigones are notoriously identified with a monstrous style. But even very popular poets like Lope de Vega and Pedro Calderón de la Barca fall into the disgrace of many theoreticians because of the numerous tragicomedies they wrote. This new genre of the Spanish comedia, first theorized by Lope de Vega in 1609, in his discourse in verse Arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo, combines elements and characters of both classic tragedy and comedy and intentionally disrespects some of the Aristotelian precepts of drama. For theoreticians like Luzán, who fervently defends the purity of genres, this hybrid mixture of two traditionally very distinct poetic forms necessarily clashes with his aesthetic principles. It is therefore hardly surprising that the Spanish comedia is described as ‘monstrous’. By citing the Tablas poéticas (Murcia 1617) by Francisco Cascales (194), Luzán condemns tragicomedies as being “unos hermafroditas, unos monstruos de la poesía” (La poética 589).

As we can see, 18th-century poetics has many different ‘monsters’ to fight. They might be found in a story (fantastical or mythological creatures) or challenge poetic conceptions such as the necessity of verisimilitude (the marvellous). The monstrous might threaten the purity of genres

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17 The manuscript of El arte de hablar from 1729 was published posthumously for the first time in 1991 by Manuel Béjar Hurtado.

18 With regard to the natural sciences, but invoking the “República Literaria” in general, Benito Jerónimo Feijoo draws even more drastic consequences by calling for a death sentence for all deformed births, the “monstruos intencionales” of human thought, the moment they are born (“Lo Máximo en lo Mínimo” 26). The importance of great and noble thinking as a condition for a sublime style is already highlighted in Longinus’ text. I will get back to this aspect further on.

19 Both Read (151, 153-154) and Soufas (107-112) emphasize the sceptical attitude of theoreticians such as Luzán (Read) and Feijoo (Soufas) towards imagination, which, on the one hand, is an indispensable element of poetic creation but which, on the other hand, is seen as an uncontrollable power threatening reason and fostering erroneous superstition.

20 Álvarez Barrientos analyses the different appropriations of the baroque theatre in the rise of literary historicism and the construction of a Spanish national identity, ranging from an absolute rejection by some neoclassical thinkers to the exploitation of the baroque past by gently adopting it to the neoclassic ideal to a national purism that elevated the baroque world to the essence of Spanishness (“El barroco en el debate dieciochesco”).
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(tragicomedy) or the formal requirements of poetic style, especially the ideals of clarity, simplicity and naturalness (in the form of conceits, wit, artificial language, etc.).

Deviant beauties in poetry

Despite such condemnations of the monstrous because of its mixed, artificial and excessive character, it can also acquire legitimacy or even come to set a new and higher standard. In the case of the ‘marvellous’, Burriel’s reflection on its relationship to verisimilitude revealed an ambiguous image: dangerous and tempting, but with an aesthetic effectiveness for poetry. Luzán and Burriel for example respond to the request of appealing not only to the readers’ intellect but also to their emotions; therefore, these theoreticians established the concept of dulzura (sweetness), i.e. the affective power of poetry, as a necessary companion to the rule-based belleza (beauty).21

The focus on the affective aesthetics of poetry (and speech) and the importance of capturing the readers’ attention by presenting them great topics in sublime style and with pathos goes back to Longinus’ fragmentary treatise Peri hypsous (On the Sublime), which was well known in 18th-century Spain through Boileau’s translation.22 In the 18th century, many theoreticians stress the need to stimulate readers by presenting them with events and stories that transcend the ordinary.23 Masdeu, for example, establishes that “[…] por regla general, quanto mas admirable y extraordinaria es la cosa que se dice, tanto la poesía es mas noble y mas sublime” (7). Shortly after, he explicitly includes the monstrous by comparing poetic creations to the “monstruos extravagantísimos” that nature sometimes produces: “[…] así el Poeta es dueño de inventar otros monstruos semejantes, de que es capaz la naturaleza, aunque jamas se hayan visto” (8). Masdeu’s excuse for accepting

21 Luzán treats the dulzura and its relationship with beauty in the chapters IV-VI of the second book of his Poética; Burriel, who follows Luzán’s interpretation of this concept, does the same in chapter VI of his compendium. Mandrell (210-211) and Pozuelo (353) link the concept of the dulzura to the rhetoric sublime.

22 According to Assunto and Mandrell, the reception of Longinus via Boileau’s translation strengthens the classicist (Assunto 22-24) and rhetoric (Mandrell 209) interpretation of the sublime. As Menéndez Pelayo explains, the first Spanish translation of Longinus by Manuel Pérez Valderrábano dates from 1770 and parts from Boileau’s translation rather than from the Greek original; the first complete Spanish translation based on the Greek text was written by Miguel José Moreno and appeared only in 1881 (1156-1157). According to Blanco, parts of the Greek text were already translated into Spanish by Pedro de Valencia in a letter he wrote to Góngora in 1613 (53).

23 The extraordinary often adheres to the didactic purpose of helping readers remember the moral of the story. For its mnemonic function see Schmitz-Emans (14). This utilitarian view of the readers’ delight is widespread in 18th-century poetics and clearly expressed by Arteaga, for example (Investigaciones 133).
such sometimes ‘irrational inventions’ is that they are believed by the common people and therefore cannot be avoided (8-9).24

In his Poética, Ignacio de Luzán underscores the necessity of showing new, unseen and extraordinary things or events (269).25 This premise corresponds with the specific poetic objective of educating through entertainment (221-224). Luzán characterizes the outstanding material that poetry should provide for the readers’ instructive entertainment as ‘marvellous’26 and ‘great’ and —again— compares it to the ‘monsters’ nature can produce: “La naturaleza regularmente sigue un mismo tenor, obrando según el curso ordinario de las cosas. Sin embargo, de cuando en cuando, como para ostentar su poder, suele obrar portentos y producir raros monstruos. Entre las muchas cosas comunes y ordinarias que suceden, no deja de haber algunas maravillosas y grandes, de las cuales puede echar mano el poeta como de materia apta para picar nuestro gusto y excitar nuestra curiosidad y admiración” (270). However, the examples he gives regarding such admirable objects show that he has especially heroic events in mind, such as the conquest of Mexico by Hernán Cortés or the deeds of Alexander the Great (270). Such—as we could say by analogy— ‘rare monsters of history’ thus are not considered unnatural, dangerous or morally inacceptable. Instead, they acquire a position of supremacy over the ordinary. What makes these extraordinary and noble events nevertheless ‘monstrous’

24 Luzán is also aware of this fact and therefore refers to Muratori’s distinction between a popular and vulgar versus a noble and erudite verisimilitude (La poética 262–267).

25 If the poet cannot find or invent such extraordinary material, he should convert ordinary events into new and outstanding ones by representing them with mastery. Luzán’s statement evokes Addison’s differentiation between the primary and the secondary pleasures of imagination exposed in his Essays on the Pleasures of the Imagination first published in The Spectator in 1712 (Nr. 411-421): While the primary ones only occur in the actual presence of the object in question, the secondary ones are stimulated by the memory or representation of the given object (Addison 3). Addison states that the main sources for the first type of pleasure are greatness, novelty and beauty (7), whereas the pleasure of the second type arises from the act of comparing the original with its imitation, which can even surpass the object it represents through the artistic perfection of nature (36-38, 47, 51-53). For more information on Addison see Zelle (103-109, 158-161). However, in his reflections on possible subjects for poetry, Luzán, unlike Addison, does not consider beauty as one of the sources of delight, but rather as a consequence of the other two sources Addison names, i.e. the new and the great (Luzán, La poética 269).

26 Luzán does not treat the question of mythology here but rather elsewhere in the context of epic poetry in the chapter “De las máquinas o deidades”. There he dismisses the use of mythological figures whenever they are related to a theological dimension (La poética 657-659).
seems to be their status as a rare deviation from the norm, which here is understood as mediocrity.

Such transgressive potential is an inherent quality of the monstrous. For Rolf Parr monstrosity constitutes a “Differenzphänomen” (19, ‘phenomenon of difference’) that involves an infringement of a norm or the normal (19-21). Among the differences the monstrous can evoke, Parr mentions, among other things, the oppositions of beautiful/ugly, natural/unnatural, human/animal and moral/mmoral (20). Foucault, for his part, refers to the monstrous as “le grand modèle de tous les petits écarts” (52): a model that does not just violate the laws of nature but also the laws of religion and society (51, 58-60).

While prior examples seem to indicate that the monstrous is always an object of criticism as a deviation from a norm (laws of nature, verisimilitude, style, genre) this last example shows however that whenever the norm itself is questioned or even replaced, ‘monstrous’ transgressions have a claim to legitimacy.

In the following two examples, the focus shifts from strictly poetological reflections to more general ideas about beauty and ugliness which are also applicable to poetry.

In 18th-century classicism, the beautiful is, in a platonic manner, often seen as a 'splendour' that radiates from truth. At the same time, it is frequently defined as an inherent quality of the objects in question, related to their proportion or symmetry (Checa Beltrán 285-286; Jacobs 122–127, 352-353). In 1789, in his aesthetic treatise Investigaciones filosóficas sobre la belleza ideal considerada como objeto de todas las artes de imitación, Esteban de Arteaga opts for a different vision and builds his theory of ideal beauty regarding all the arts of imitation upon the relativity of beauty and ugliness in an artistic

27 The difference between norm and normality Parr evokes is analysed more exhaustively by Jürgen Link. Link argues that while norms and normativity constitute general mechanisms in all cultures and times, normalization is a phenomenon especially present in modern western cultures and cannot be applied in a generalized, synchronic way (23, 26). For the cases studied here, any possible distinction between the norm and the normal becomes blurred by the normative character of 18th-century Spanish poetics and aesthetics. Other scholars connect monstrosity to the concept of otherness, e.g., Curran, for whom the monstrous embodies “conceptual alterity” (3, 14).

28 Burriel, e.g., defines beauty as: “[...] aquella claríssima luz con que la verdad, iluminando el entendimiento, lo llena de placer, y [unavidad]” (53).

29 To back up the object-based definition of beauty, the Spanish theoreticians frequently refer to Crousaz, who established five distinguishing features of the beautiful object: variety, unity, order, regularity and proportion (12–16). But already Crousaz extends this object-based realm by adding three factors that appeal to our emotions and increase the effect of the beautiful objects: grandeur, novelty, diversity (74-75).
representation (Investigaciones 32-33, 45). For him, imitation creates its own kind of “lustre y belleza” (33) as well as its own kind of ugliness or monstrosity. He bases this idea on the observation that, in art, the horrid and monstrous can also be a source of delight (15-16, 33-35). For Arteaga, the reason why even ugly and frightening objects please us, when artistically represented, lies in the very concept of mimesis itself. Not the objects themselves, but their masterly representation in art creates a pleasant effect, converting them into something beautiful and arousing the beholders’ delight in comparing and judging what they recognize as mere imitation and therefore fictional (11-16, 35, 44-45). This conversion can only be achieved when the represented object, the art form it is represented in and the means and devices used are combined in the right way. Consequently, an object that has the supposedly absolute qualities of ugliness and monstrosity is not necessarily excluded from the comparative artistic beauty. For instance, with regard to the frequently discussed example of Laocoön’s scream, Arteaga stresses that the expression of unbearable pain can be represented beautifully in all of its most distressing details in poetry but not in the visual arts (36-39). Ideal beauty thus turns out to be a unique configuration, determined by its subject, the medium of imitation and the artistic devices employed. The tension between an abstract “arquetipo” (19, 54, 106, 113) that the artist builds in his mind through the principles of selection and invention (52-54, 120) and its material and individual manifestations destabilize the idea of an immutable and universal norm. Ideal beauty paradoxically represents an abstract norm that can only exist as a material deviation from itself thus

30 For more on this delightful horror in its different manifestations and meanings in 18th-century France, England and Germany, see Carsten Zelle.

31 Aristotle also presents this representational argument that would later be adopted by Boileau (Zelle 114-116). In Spain, Luzán also takes up this point (La poética 194-195). Unlike Arteaga, Luzán does not really elaborate this idea nor does he draw consequences concerning the material and medial aspects of imitation. Furthermore, as he focuses exclusively on poetry, the interrelations between different art forms are not his concern.

32 As García Ramírez and González-Rivas Fernández (284-285) explain, in Burke the lifesaving distance of fiction is a crucial factor for the sublime to not just appear as threatening and terrifying but also as pleasant. The same argument was already made by Addison (47-51). For more on Burke see also Zelle (186-202).

33 Arteaga elaborates on this point extensively and discusses the possibility of applying the specific means of one art form to another and the consequences this transfer may entail for the status of the artwork as beautiful/ugly (Investigaciones 11-13, 19-28, 35-44, 49-51).

34 For more on the Laocoön debate, see e.g. Manuel Olguín, and for more information on Lessing’s view see Zelle (395-412).
revealing the ideal archetype to be something purely virtual. In this sense, Arteaga’s ideal beauty seems to entail what Monika Schmitz-Emans describes as the monstrosity of individuality regarding bodily deviations, that is, the inherent deviance of the individual which never fits entirely into any abstract, ideal norm and therefore contests the norm itself (12).

Yet throughout his treatise Arteaga gets trapped in several contradictions due to his vacillating between giving preference to art over nature (127-148) and then nature over art (18, 152–156). Consequently, his claim that the ugly can be an object of ideal beauty when represented in a masterly way is ambiguous because he also asks the artist to just pick the best of nature and omit its ugly side (127-128).

Still, in spite of the relativism outlined here with regard to the ugly and the beautiful, it is important to stress that Arteaga does not step out of a normative framework. The contradictions in his writings seem to indicate that he is trying to unite a classicist and intellectualist attitude with a growing emotive and expressive side of art: these two opposing aesthetic visions cannot be completely harmonized and therefore lead to inconsistencies within his treatise (León Tello and Sanz Sanz 91-92, 108–112), most vividly perhaps in his appraisal of Shakespeare. While Arteaga recognizes Shakespeare’s originality and deep genius, he rejects his work, among other things, on the basis that it violates decorum and dramatic rules, such as the three unities (Investigaciones 159-160).

As early as 1734, Benito Jerónimo Feijoo dedicates an essay to a different type of deviant beauty, that is, to that ‘certain something’, in Spanish the *no sé qué*. This text is part of his monumental, nine-volume *Teatro crítico universal*, a miscellany of essays on a wide range of subjects all in the name of fighting popular superstition. In the essay “El no sé qué”, Feijoo claims to be the first to rationalize this supposedly unexplainable yet overwhelming phenomenon (370). He starts by distinguishing between two different causes of the certain something: first, some qualities of the object itself—individuality in the case of simple objects and harmony/coherence of the parts in the case of

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35 Panofsky remarks that this tension has accompanied reflections on beauty since antiquity (7–8, 24-25).

36 For instance, even though Arteaga claims to apply an empirical method that relies on the ascertainable effects of art, he proposes some universally applicable principles (Investigaciones 7, 32, 53).

37 One of these inconsistencies concerns Arteaga’s claim to treat aesthetic phenomena based on their effect. Yet throughout his treatise he focuses almost exclusively on the artistic objects and their composition and not on the perceiving subjects (Jacobs 152-153). It is clear that Arteaga is simply opposed to basing artistic beauty on the *represented*—i.e., natural— objects, but analyzing the artwork itself as an object, with all the previously mentioned dimensions such artistic objects entail, is not a problem for him.
composite ones— and, second, the relationship between the beholder and the object which turns out to be a complex lock-and-key principle (370-376).

Nevertheless, the quintessence of his reflections on the composite objects is that this peculiar but still pleasant attraction escapes all the known systems that try to give order to aesthetic phenomena, such as the Pythagorean mathematical proportion.\(^38\) It is something deviant that simply does not fit into the norms human thought has built upon the aesthetic experience: “Pero los hombres, reglando inadvertidamente la inmensa amplitud de las ideas divinas por la estrechez de las suyas han pensado reducir toda la hermosura a una combinación sola, o cuando más, a un corto número de combinaciones; y en saliendo de allí, todo es para ellos un misterioso no sé qué” (377).

Beyond these manmade rules, Feijoo posits a “regla superior” (378), consisting in a variety of patterns and orders. In his opinion, only a few naturally talented artists possess the ability to access this superior sphere.\(^39\) In music, he illustrates with the example of *musica ficta* the possibility or even necessity of expanding the average horizon of men by breaking the existing rules. This Latin term was used between the late 12th and 16th century to describe the pitches that did not fit into the musical hexachord system. Feijoo infers from this example that the infringement of rules and standards is not to be automatically condemned because it can introduce the audience to new and superior delights.\(^40\) Instead of judging everything new and unknown as

\(^{38}\) Feijoo explicitly criticizes Pythagoras in “Simpatía, y Antipatía” (43-44).

\(^{39}\) In music, he refers to these artists as the “compositores de alto numen” (“El no sé qué” 378). Feijoo often reflects on the innate character of artistic and stylistic talent, for example in “La elocuencia es naturaleza, y no Arte”. The discussion whether the skills of a poet are naturally given or learned are crucial to the poetic debate of the 18th century. It is shaped, among other things, by the function primarily attributed to poetry (useful instruction vs. delightful effect). In his treatise on the sublime, in chapter 8.1, Longinus identifies both natural and acquired sources (18-19). Marc Föcking points out that Longinus employed the sublime to reject an excessive use of rhetoric means; his treatise could therefore fruitfully be exploited by the Italian *Arcadia* in their fight against the baroque *elocutio* and for the benefit of the natural skills of the speaker to arouse *pathos* (173-175). According to Pozuelo, the reduction to the natural sources of the sublime is rather due to Boileau’s interpretation of Longinus (354). Yet, in chapter 9.1, Longinus himself explicitly favours the first of the five sources he lists, i.e. the great nature of the speaker and his predominantly born capacity of conceiving great thoughts (20-21).

\(^{40}\) Regarding not taste but imagination, Addison establishes a similar hiatus between the vulgar generality and “[a] man of a polite imagination” (4), capable of discerning hidden beauties and the variety of divine patterns and ideas (4-5, 67-69); furthermore, Addison remarks on the conventional character of what might be considered beautiful and stresses the immediate effect or secret attraction certain beauties can have on the beholder (10-12) evoking qualities of the ‘certain something’.
heretical because of its transgression of the traditional rules, the only legitimate judge for Feijoo is pleasure: if something pleases the ear, it must be good, and what is good cannot be against the rules, he concludes (378-379).

Yet Feijoo’s very ambitious goal of finding a definite and rational solution to the problem of the certain something is contrasted by contradictions and ambiguities in his text. For example, the assumption that pleasure is the ultimate judge leads to incongruent conclusions. On the one hand, Feijoo maintains that the quality of an object can be determined by the quantity of people with good taste who claim it to be pleasant. But, on the other hand, he assumes that this very good taste is to be determined by the quantity of pleasant objects a person is capable of discerning. In this circular argumentation, objective qualities define subjective taste that in turn defines objective qualities.

Also his definition of the ‘superior rule’ the talented artist has in mind remains quite vague as he fails to characterize it in positive terms. Instead he describes it relationally and by its deviant character when it comes to existing patterns. Referring to the superior art of an architect, he writes: “Todo lo hizo según regla; pero según una regla superior, que existe en su mente, distinta de aquellas comunes, que la escuela enseña. Proporción, y grande; simetría, y ajustadísima hay en las partes de esa obra; pero no es aquella simetría, que regularmente se estudia, sino otra más elevada, adonde arribó por su valentía la sublime idea del arquitecto” (378, italics added). This rule is only tangible in its superiority when related to other inferior standards and, therefore, gains its strength precisely by displaying its deviant and transgressive character.

In this sense, the infringement on the established rules praised here links such transgressions to the concept of the genius, whose artistic freedom exceeds the principle of ‘poetic licence’. Those licences sanction the works of the already accredited poets, who do not question the general legitimacy of the rules and principles that they might pointedly neglect on occasion. For Feijoo, in contrast, the “regla superior” is the only legitimate rule capable of producing captivating and magnificent art, while following the petty manmade aesthetic regulations does not actually allow anybody to create exquisite beauty. Consequently, transgressions of manmade rules offend the taste of only those with limited minds, but the born and ‘superior’ artists and critics are not offended. Thus, the binary oppositions Parr proposed could,

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41 For a more detailed analysis of Feijoo’s no sé qué and the strategies he applies to explain it, see also Fallert.

42 This contradiction becomes clear by comparing the essay about the no sé qué with the one on taste just before it (“Razón del Gusto”), as already shown by Jacobs (248).

43 Feijoo explicitly criticizes the rules on many occasions. An especially harsh critique can be found in “La elocuencia” (51). Nevertheless, he does not reject rules in all areas of the arts and sciences. While they seem legitimate to him in handicrafts, he
in Feijoo’s case, be supplemented by differentiations between the born versus trained artist, the talented versus untalented and the genius versus mediocre. Still, Feijoo’s assumption of a superior sphere of regularity and his strong rational claims mark a decisive difference from the limitless genius of the romantics and demonstrate the normative character of his own reflections.44

In conclusion, the deviant may be considered acceptable or even superior: as something or someone that transcends the mediocrity of common events for the benefit of extraordinary and far more captivating stories. The deviant surpasses the restrictions of a mere object-based beauty, overcoming such limitations through ideal beauty which relies on the power of artistic creation with all its material and medial implications. The genius transgresses the purely human standards of beauty as a highly talented artist capable of entering a superior sphere of divine rules.

Conclusion

In 18th-century poetics in Spain, the monstrous was used in very different ways and on different levels. Among classicist theoreticians, there is consensus about a specific ‘poetic monster’ that embodies excessiveness and unnaturalness. This ‘monster’ is linked to a specific style and discredited because of its deviation from classical norms and rules, such as the purity of genres or the requirements of naturalness and clarity. On a thematic level, the monstrous is identified with the marvellous and fantastical and considered with mixed feelings: sometimes criticized and doomed for its excess of fantasy and its lack of verisimilitude, sometimes praised as something outstanding and great that transcends the ordinary and overwhelms the reader with admiration.

Although the objects designated as monstrous may differ, what unites them is their status as a deviation from the norm and from the usual. The different valuations of the monstrous seem shaped by its variable ontological status. In the cases presented here, whenever an author uses it to refer to fantastical creatures recognized as imaginary it is criticized. By extension, the denunciation of a poetic style that strengthens the power of fantasy, instead of rationally controlling it, simply transfers this logic to a poetological level. But when the monstrous applies to a real and indisputably experienceable deviation from a norm, it is considered an acceptable phenomenon of frequently excludes them from purely intellectual arts such as eloquence or poetry, stating that there is no ‘geometry’ to measure a metaphor (48-49).

44 In line with Sebold’s view I argue, that one should be careful not to automatically judge possible liberties or flexibility within 18th-century poetics as early manifestations of romanticism (“Contra los mitos” 29-31). Especially Feijoo was often described as a pre-romantic writer—a view Sebold and, in more recent times, Checa Beltrán and Olay Valdés already contested by focusing on the classicist aspects of Feijoo’s writings. For Feijoo’s reception as a pre-romantic see Olay Valdés (291-295).
(poetic) reality.\textsuperscript{45} For example, both Masdeu and Luzán take rare but ‘real’ deviations in nature and history as legitimate poetic subjects or inventions.

The question of legitimacy obviously constitutes a problem of its own reflected in discussions about taste and aesthetic judgement. But even though there may not be an objective way to determine this legitimacy, what comes to light in the 18th century is a shift to the effect of monstrous phenomena on the beholder as an important indicator of their aesthetic value. The artworks Feijoo describes may transgress classical rules but they still please us, and the same can be said for Arteaga’s reflections on the delight of ugly or terrifying objects in art.

As a deviation from a norm, the monstrous may thus even be seen as formally acceptable, that is, whenever it enables a questioning of the very norms it transgresses. Therefore, we can also trace examples of how deviant beauty, which challenges the purely object-based definitions, might even figure as a higher standard, as seen in Arteaga’s attempts to define artistic beauty as relative or in Feijoo’s ‘superior rule’ which appeals to the senses and disobeys the manmade rules of symmetry. Yet the authors presented here continue to act within a normative aesthetic framework resulting in contradictions and ambiguities when they try to define and explain deviant or relative beauty. And even though some of these theoreticians show a pronounced interest in the aesthetic value of transgressions of classical norms, they feel the need to find new or other norms into which they make these deviations fit. The most feared ‘monster’ of 18th-century poetics is ultimately that which cannot be explained by any pattern, principle or rule at all.

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