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GALDÓS' CHROMATIC SYMBOLISM KEY IN *LO PROHIBIDO*

IN the novel *Lo prohibido* (1885), one of Galdós' characters shows the protagonist a "Mapa moral gráfico de España" with five colors used to designate different moral vices spread throughout the Spanish nation. The key to the map is as follows: "*Inmoralidad matrimonial, adulterio, belenes*, color rojo. *Inmoralidad política y administrativa, ilegalidad, arbitrariedad, cohechos*, color azul. *Inmoralidad pecuniaria, usura, disipación*, color amarillo. *Inmoralidad física, embriaguez*, verde. *Inmoralidad religiosa, descreimiento, violeta*" (IV, 1800).¹

The protagonist, José María Bueno de Guzmán, dismisses the "mapa moral" as the foolishness of a mentally disturbed relative. Literary scholars have also failed to accord the map serious consideration, but its significance to Galdós—who was in many ways a genuine moral philosopher and didactician—definitely transcends the brief reference in *Lo prohibido*. Nine years earlier (in 1876), for example, Galdós speaks of the setting of *Gloria* as being in Ficóbriga, "villa que no ha de buscarse en la Geografía, sino en el mapa moral de España, donde yo la he visto" (IV, 505). Galdós' mayor of Ficóbriga is Juan Amarillo, "cuyo apellido es de los que más admirablemente se conforman con la persona," an avaricious usurer "[con] todo el rostro amarillísimo y reluciente . . ." (IV, 584). Amarillo's wife, "atacada de una ictericia crónica" (IV, 681), is just as greedy and equally as yellow. She has "amarillas manos," "dorada piel de la frente" (IV, 598), and a citrine countenance which glows more intensely whenever she comes in contact with persons of wealth (IV, 652).

Such an early mention of the "mapa moral," together with the intense use of the precise symbolism for yellow found in its *Lo prohibido* key (i.e., *inmoralidad pecuniaria, usura*) certainly justifies an examination of all the colors (as Galdós listed them) to see if they are also in consonance with the key when he is dealing with moral weaknesses.

¹ All references to Galdós' works in the present study are to be found in *Obras completas*, ed. F. C. Sainz de Robles (Madrid). Volume IV is the *tercera edición* (1954); V and VI are the *segunda* (1950, 1951).

Red (Inmoralidad matrimonial, adulterio . . .).

Galdós heads up his list of colors with the well-known symbol of fiery passion and illicit love.² The connotative value of red is clear in the following passage from *La desheredada* (1881) in which Isidora Rufete is trying to prostitute herself to Dr. Augusto Miquis: "Sobre ambos, un farol de gas alumbraba con rojiza luz aquella escena indefinible en que la necesidad desesperada, de un lado, y la integridad vacilante, de otro, se batían con furor. ¡Dinero y hermosura, sois los dos filos de la espada de Satanás!" (IV, 1116).

Similarly in *Fortunata y Jacinta* (1886-1887), taverns, such as the one in which Fortunata once worked as a prostitute (V, 409), and the brothels in the *barrios bajos* of south Madrid are described as very red: "¡Oh! el rojo abundaba tanto . . ." (V, 99). Likewise in *Tristana* (1892), the room in which the titular protagonist and Horacio Díaz meet for their illegal trysts has "paredes de colorado" (V, 1556).

In *Lo prohibido* itself (before the presentation of his color symbolism key), Galdós uses red to help delineate the character of Eloísa Bueno Guzmán de Carrillo. In spite of having a small child and a gravely ill husband, Eloísa engages in an adulterous relationship with the narrator-protagonist. Her passionate nature, her lack of inhibitions—in short, the status of her sexual morality, which she says she wants to hide—becomes apparent to all (even the newspapers comment!) when she discards her usual modest attire and appears publicly "vestida totalmente de encarnado, el cuerpo de terciopelo, la falda de raso, medias y zapatos también color de sangre fresca . . . envolviéndose en ascuas de los pies a la cabeza. No quiero decir nada del escote, a quien la colocación chillona daba más realce. [Era] un vestido hecho con brasas del Infierno" (IV, 1725-1726). Such a dress is an accurate artistic externalization of Eloísa's basic moral weakness because, throughout the novel, she passes from one illicit relationship to another until Galdós finally calls her a prostitute (IV, 1883).

In *Fortunata y Jacinta*, Galdós' universally acknowledged masterpiece, Fortunata plans to abandon her impotent husband (Maxi Rubín) and reestablish her adulterous relationship with

² See, among others, Gertrude Jobes, *Dictionary of Mythology, Folklore and Symbols* (New York, 1961), II, 1327; and Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (London, 1961), II, 1245, 1350.

Juanito Santa Cruz. On the day before she returns to her lover, Fortunata experiences a dream which affords the reader a vivid insight into her thoughts and her increasingly passionate emotions. In this dream, which one critic has rightly called "a powerful synthesis of all the impulses which impel Fortunata,"³ our protagonist walks toward a reunion with Santa Cruz; and, as she proceeds toward the "calle de la Magdalena" (V, 409), Fortunata perceives from the shop windows and street scenes primarily those objects which have a very definite and sequential sexual symbolism.⁴ She significantly notices no color but red—and this on a dwarf who is dressed entirely in that color. "This creature probably represents Maxi [her husband] who, because of his sexual insufficiencies, is also less than a man. The revulsion he inspires in her is very evident."⁵ The only stimulation the red dwarf (like Maxi) can give Fortunata is that of hastening her on to adultery with another.⁶ Consequently, both in the dream and in reality the following day, Fortunata becomes Santa Cruz's mistress again.

Blue (*Inmoralidad política y administrativa . . . cohechos*).

Galdós, who read and travelled widely, was perhaps acquainted with the French expression "passer au bleu—disparaître par suite d'un emploi irregulier ou clandestin"⁷ or the British "to blue—steal, plunder."⁸ Then again, he may have had in mind that officials in positions of authority—those who could most easily steal from the government or be susceptible to bribes—often wore blue uniforms.⁹

³ Lucille Braun, "Problems of Literary Creativity in Five Characters of Galdós' *Fortunata y Jacinta*" (unpubl. diss. Wisconsin, 1962), p. 99.

⁴ Cf. Braun, p. 98.

⁵ Braun, p. 98.

⁶ Only children are interested enough to stop and watch the dwarf. It is also on this children's level that Fortunata believes Maxi must be categorized: "[Era como] un niño y se había borrado de su mente la idea de que era un hombre" (V, 273). (For Maxi's wedding night incapacities and their effect on Fortunata, see V, 269–274; he also appears to others a "marica" (V, 287).

⁷ *Larousse du xx^e siècle* (Paris, 1928), I, 733.

⁸ John S. Farmer and W. E. Henley, *Dictionary of Slang and Its Analogues* (London, 1903), I, 255.

⁹ In a somewhat different vein, cf. the British thieves' cant: "to bilk the blues—to outwit the police," (Farmer and Henley, *Dictionary of Slang*, I, 253). Blue has also been considered to be the color of the hypocrite and the devil (Don Cameron Allen, "Symbolic Color in the Literature of the English Renaissance,"

In any case, Galdós knew that Spanish blue (i.e., large denomination) bank bills had great power to influence, compromise, and contaminate. Note, for example, the case of the student Alejandro Miquis in *El doctor Centeno* (1883) who receives an inheritance, the dissolute spending of which will only ruin his health and bring an untimely death. When Miquis' aunt hands him the fateful money, even the floor mat takes on "las sucias tintas azuladas y los garabatos de los billetes de Banco" (IV, 1362).

In *Tormento* (1884), the noble-minded Agustín Caballero is planning to marry Amparo Sánchez Emperador. He sends her money, blue-colored bills wrapped in white (the latter the color of purity and innocence of intent), so that she can arrange her personal affairs and live decently until the marriage. Amparo accepts the money but later finds herself in terrible mental anguish upon the return of Father Pedro Polo with whom she has been intimate. She feels unworthy of marriage to her fiancé, Caballero, but is unable to confess her previous sin or break off the engagement—the latter in large part because she has accepted and spent Caballero's bank notes. Speaking of these blue-colored bills, her conscience tells her, "No eran los primeros que venían, pero sí los más comprometedores" (IV, 1518). Although innocently given, the money does indeed compromise Amparo; and after an attempt at suicide, she must renounce all hope of marriage and become merely Caballero's mistress (IV, 1566–1568).

The master politician, Manuel José Ramón del Pez (who appears in several novels) certainly personifies one of the evils of the Spanish nation against which Galdós crusaded.¹⁰ Pez enjoys a standard of living far in excess of that which his government salary could possibly provide (IV, 1602). The difference obviously comes from graft and bribes (IV, 1033, 1593). Although Pez appears "clean" to the general public—"se vestía siempre de una manera *inmaculada e impecable*" [italics mine]¹¹—little Isabelita Bringas correctly perceives in a dream that Pez, "la primera cabeza del orbe para acelerar o detener un asunto, la mejor mano para trazar el plan de un

PQ, XV [1936], 85); and *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, England, 1933), I, 942.

¹⁰ See especially IV, 1033–1038; 1593–1594. Also George J. Edberg, "Un estudio de don Manuel del Pez, una creación literaria galdosiana," *Humanitas*, II (1961), 407–417.

¹¹ Edberg, 409.

empréstito, la nariz más fina para olfatear un negocio, servidor de sí mismo y de los demás . . ." (IV, 1033), is indeed "todo azul" (IV, 1638).

Yellow (*Inmoralidad pecuniaria, usura . . .*).

Galdós believed that "the love of gold—that jaundice of the soul which makes it look so gilded and so foul"¹² should also be clearly shown in the external coloring of his avaricious characters. Consequently, and clearly following the example of Balzac,¹³ Galdós perennially described such *personajes* as yellow complexioned—as noted above in the discussion of Juan and Teresa Amarillo (*Gloria*). Other greedy and very yellow characters include Doña Salomé in *La Fontana de Oro* (1870), Doña Sales in *Angel Guerra* (1890–1891), the well-known moneylender Francisco Torquemada (in the four-volume series bearing his name, 1889–1895), and Doña Juana Samaniego in *Casandra* (1905). Further discussion of these yellow *personajes* will be foregone here as they have already been accorded detailed commentary in another study.¹⁴

Green (*Inmoralidad física . . .*).

Although the use of green as a symbol of libidinous desire has lost its force in English,¹⁵ it remains probably the most universally understood and employed of all color symbols throughout the Hispanic world. The common expression "viejo verde," occurs frequently in Galdós' novels. The Marqués de Tellería in *La familia de León Roch* (1878), for example, is such a "viejo verde" (IV, 783) that even his temples are "surcadas de venas verdes" (IV, 856).

In *El doctor Centeno*, Alejandro Miquis squanders his inheritance on, and ruins his health by contacts with, ladies of easy virtue.

¹² Abraham Cowley, *Essays, Plays and Sundry Verses*, ed. A. R. Waller (Cambridge, England, 1906), p. 434.

¹³ See my "Galdós' Use of Yellow in Character Delineation," *PMLA*, LXXIX (1964), 158–163.

¹⁴ See preceding note.

¹⁵ For earlier uses of green, see Farmer and Henley, *Dictionary of Slang*, III, 206–209; and Allen, "Symbolic Color," *PQ*, XV (1936), 85–86. For a twentieth-century writer who uses green with Freudian overtones, see D. H. Lawrence, "The Rocking Horse Winner," *Ten Modern Masters. An Anthology of the Short Story*, ed. Robert Gorham Davis (New York, 1953), 437.

Before Miquis dies, Galdós describes his neck as “un haz de cuerdas revestidas de verdosa cera” and his eyes as exuding a “fulgor de . . . verde” (IV, 1431). Even in his final illness when Alejandro is visited by a prostitute, Galdós emphasizes that it is green money that Miquis gives her (IV, 1425). (Compare with the function of blue money noted in the discussion of that color above.)

Violet [purple] (*Inmoralidad religiosa, descreimiento*).

Purple sins are said to be “deep-dyed, [hence] grave, heinous.”¹⁶ In addition, purple and violet are the colors of deep devotion and ecclesiastical authority, the insignia especially of bishops and, to some extent, of cardinals.¹⁷ Consequently, the use of this chromatic symbolism by Galdós (the perennial anticleric) represents a debasement and complete reversal of the traditional values assigned it by the Church. As noted above in the discussion of red, the adulterous Eloísa Bueno Guzmán de Carrillo occasioned public scandal by appearing in a low-necked, flaming red dress, “hecho con brasas del Infierno.” What remains to complete Galdós’ description of her attire is the following: “Y para que nada faltara, [ella llevaba] mitones de púrpura” (IV, 1725–1726). Previously Eloísa had voiced religious compunctions about her adultery, but her partner successfully stilled them with “los argumentos socorridos que nunca faltan para casos tales” (IV, 1715). She obviously now has no belief in, nor fear of, hell-flames as punishment for her adultery. The chromatic symbolism of her attire seems especially shocking since purple gloves are a *sine qua non* of religious authority.¹⁸

There is no doubt that Galdós clearly associated purple not only with “inmoralidad religiosa, descreimiento” but with ecclesiastical garb as well. For example, in *El doctor Centeno*, Galdós describes the lips of the fallen priest Father Pedro Polo—the very lips with which he once took his vows—as now “color de la tela con que se visten los obispos” (IV, 1334), “morados labios” (IV, 1425).

¹⁶ “Purple,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, VIII, 1625.

¹⁷ See “Obispo,” *Enciclopedia universal ilustrada* (Bilbao, 1920), XXXIX, 315. Although red and scarlet are the prime colors of a cardinal, when appointed to his office he is said to be “elevated to the purple.” During the sacred conclave to elect a new Pope, the cardinals wear violet and sit on individual thrones beneath a violet-colored canopy. See “Cardinal” and “Conclave,” *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Chicago, 1961), IV, 854, and VI, 199.

¹⁸ See “Bishop,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, III, 656.

When Galdós first introduces Manuel José Ramón del Pez in *La desheredada*, he describes the politician: “. . . afeitada y descañada ya la barbilla *violácea*” [sic, italics mine] and makes no mention of Pez's religious disbelief.¹⁹ Later as the politician's career advances him to the royal palace itself (*La de Bríngas*), he wisely keeps his telltale chin whiskers shaved off (IV, 1593) and outwardly conforms to the established Church. Now, however, where there is no external symbol of religious disbelief Galdós devotes several paragraphs to explaining that Pez's pseudoreligiosity is only for political advantage—“una escalera para subir a los altos puestos” (IV, 1594–1595).

Polichromatic symbolism.

Galdós' use of symbolic colors is most interesting when several are used together, as seen in two examples in which don Benito clearly is not interested in recording external reality, but has symbolic connotations to impart. The first concerns a highly improbable physical description in which Galdós speaks of a key to be deciphered for the understanding of a moral-emotional illness manifesting itself in physical symptoms. The second example concerns a dream in which, of course, the author is completely free to employ all the symbolism he may desire.

To be specific, let us return to Father Pedro Polo, who is very ill with an undiagnosed but non-organic ailment.²⁰ “La madre [de Polo] no cesaba de leer atentamente a todas horas en la fisonomía del capellán, buscando [de balde] la cifra de sus misteriosos males” (IV, 1335). The colors of Galdós' “mapa moral” are the only signs available for her to decipher. “Era su rostro verde, como oxiado bronce. Sus ojos tenían matices amarillos y ráfagas rojas, recordaban a [Felipe] Centeno la bandera española, y sus labios eran de color de la tela con que se visten los obispos. Aquella mañana don Pedro no quiso celebrar misa” (IV, 1334). Because the omniscient author has shared with the reader a good deal of information not available to Polo's mother, he can, with the aid of the

¹⁹ In another passage Galdós says of Pez: “Su carácter salía sin estorbo a su cara . . .” (IV, 1593).

²⁰ When Polo withdraws from his problem (i.e., Amparo) to wholesome country life on the estate of a friend and mentor, he completely regains his health (IV, 1524, 1535).

Lo prohibido chromatic symbolism key, easily decipher the sick man's color syndrome.

First and most pronounced is Polo's green face. This is a reflection of the priest's great problem—his sexual attraction for Amparo, his "Tormento." Red suggests their illicit relationship, which eventually causes Polo's transfer to the Philippines and ruins forever Amparo's chances of contracting a decent marriage. (These two colors are significantly the only ones seen in the courtyard of the house where Polo lives, and they distress Amparo whenever she comes to visit.)²¹ Yellowness (symbolizing a desire for wealth) reminds one that Polo entered the priesthood only for financial reasons and that he has been very successful in this sphere, even operating his own private school (IV, 1312–1313). Finally, the purple of religious immorality and disbelief completes the picture not only because of Polo's present conduct²² but also because he has never experienced a true calling to the priesthood (IV, 1312). And yet Polo is an ordained man of the cloth; no wonder that he is troubled, sick and unable to celebrate the holiest of the Church's offices!

After Polo's illicit relationship with Amparo has been discovered and terminated, Galdós repeats his description of the sick priest. Now, however, he significantly omits red: "Su color . . . verde, lo blanco de sus ojos amarilleaba, . . . [tenía] morados labios" (IV, 1425). Here one perceives that even the withholding of a color may be an important facet of Galdós' artistry. Apropos of this phenomenon, it is germane to note that in both descriptions of Polo, Galdós uses no blue. This color signifying "inmoralidad política y administrativa . . ." is simply not appropriate in the personal career of Father Polo.

Blue is better reserved for the professional politician, Manuel José Ramón del Pez. He fools a great many people, but Galdós allows a child, Isabelita de Bringas, to perceive the "true colors" of the man who will soon seduce and ruin her mother. In contrast to her father, who is entirely white (pure, innocent), Pez appears in Isabelita's dream: "un señor antipático, así como un diablo con

²¹ "Corría un arroyo de agua verde, uniéndose luego a un riachuelo de líquido rojo" (IV, 1492). "i . . . el patio surcado de arroyos verdes y rojos!" (IV, 1535).

²² Finally, Polo's license to say Mass is revoked, and he severs all formal connections with the Church (IV, 1496).

patillas de azafrán [es decir, amarillo]²³ y unos calzones verdes. [Un] río de sangre envolvía poco después en ondas rojas a su mamá y al propio señor de Pez. . . . Después el señor de Pez se ponía todo azul . . ." (IV, 1637-1638).

If one may again use Galdós' own chromatic symbolism key regarding moral defects, he perceives that Pez is essentially a devilish, greedy (yellow), aggressive libertine (green), who is becoming involved in an adulterous relationship with Rosalía (both red). In addition, Pez is completely dishonest in financial matters (blue). The fact that Pez turns blue after being enveloped in red with Rosalía (rather than being so designated at the outset) consummately parallels the plot emphasis because Pez is dishonest in financial affairs relating to not only his government position but also (and more importantly) his adulterous relationship with Rosalía.²⁴ She had expected to be well paid for her favors, but Pez (slippery "fish" that he is) disappoints her completely: "¡Oh Virgen! Venderse y no cobrar nuestro precio es tremenda cosa," laments a disillusioned Rosalía (IV, 1657).

The foregoing citations, it may be seen in conclusion, definitely indicate that Galdós frequently associated the same moral connotations with the five colors of the "mapa moral" both long before and after he made a complete list of them in 1885. In addition to these colors, another study²⁵ has shown that he also used the traditional connotations of white (for purity and innocence) and black (for evilness). Although Galdós (master realist of nineteenth century Spanish fiction) did not, of course, use color for symbolic purposes only, he did have a well-defined system of seven colors for indicating moral values. The best key for interpreting and illuminating the heart of this chromatic symbolism appears to be Galdós' own scale of values accompanying the "mapa moral" in *Lo prohibido*.

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²³ Although *azafrán* might imply either yellow or orange, Galdós (like most writers) seems to equate it with yellow. See, for example, VI, 174.

²⁴ This is the titular protagonist's first overt step that leads her to prostitution (IV, 1671).

²⁵ See my "Galdós' Sephardic Types," *Sym*, XVII (1963), 94.