NATURALISM: THE STIMULUS FOR PARDO BARZAN'S ARTISTRY WITH NICKNAMES

The recent study "Pardo Bazán's Literary Use of Three Personal Nicknames: Gedeón, Sureña, and Feíta" (Chamberlin 35-45) has demonstrated that Doña Emilia achieved a sophisticated artistry with sobriquets that differentiated her from her contemporaries, Galdós and Leopoldo Alas. However, this achievement was not immediate. In fact, in her first two novels (*Pascual López* and *Un viaje de novios*) there is in each only very slight utilization of two nicknames. It is not until her third novel, *La tribuna* (1883), that nicknaming can be considered and important aspect of her creativity. The aim of the present study is to demonstrate that Naturalism, especially with its emphasis on human/animal comparisons, was the aesthetic that stimulated the countesses' interest in and successful employment henceforth of sobriquets.

Before writing *La tribuna,* Pardo Bazán had become attracted to Zolaesque Naturalism, which stimulated her to write a series of twenty articles between November 1882 and April 1883 for the Madrid newspaper *La Epoca*. These weekly contributions, drawing heavily on Zola's crucial works *Le Roman experimental* and *Les Romanciers naturalistes* were collected and published as *La cuestión palpitante* (1883). Her next step was to follow Galdós lead of 1881, when he created the first Spanish Naturalist novel *La desheredada,* and write her own Naturalist novel.

From the Naturalists, Pardo Bazán learned the importance which members of that school gave to preliminary, precise documentation. Zola is well known for his notebooks of extensive preparatory documentation; however, Pardo Bazán says that "[Edmundo] Goncourt fue el primero que llamó *documentos humanos* a los hechos que el novelista observa y acopia para

fundar en ellos sus creaciones" (*Cuestión* 233). Thus, as she relates in her *Apuntes autobiográficos,* Doña Emilia was motivated to spend with the women workers of La Coruña's tobacco factory, "dos meses mañana y tarde, oyendo conversaciones, delineando tipos, cazando al vuelo frases y modos de sentir" (74).

Like other Naturalists, Pardo Bazán had great sensitivity to the dehumanizing conditions of most nineteenth century workplaces. She affirmed that "El verdadero infierno social a que puede bajar el novelista [. .] es la fábrica. [. . . .] ¡Pobres mujeres las de la Fábrica de la Coruña! Nunca se me olvida todo lo bueno instintivo que noté en ellas, su natural rectitud, y caridad espontánea. Capaces son de dar hasta la camisa si ven *una lástima* como ellas dicen" (*Apuntes* 76).

Omitting the frequent Naturalist emphasis on heredity, Pardo Bazán concentrated on her chosen "verdadero infierno social," and its dehumanizing conditions on the unfortunates who must, of economic necessity, work in such an environment. Nearly all the toilers are women, but the author does call attention to one man who works in the tobacco barn. This young man's health has been so ruined by the terrible working conditions that he merits a separate chapter titled "Aquel Animal." Here "*Chinto*" (<Jacinto) is seen as "estrujado, prensado, zarandeado y pisotado al mismo tiempo, Le había calificado y definido ya: era un mulo, y nada más que un mulo" (XII, 121).

The more numerous women workers have also been degraded and dehumanized, and this is reflected in their nicknames. For example, like Galdós in *Misericordia* (XXI, 193), Pardo Bazán finds "*Comadreja*" an appropriate nickname. Thus we see, unlike Galdos, who gives no physical description:[1] "[D]escarnada y puntiagudo de hocico, llamábanle en el taller *la Comadreja*, mote felicísimo que da exacta idea de su figura y movimientos. Bien sabía ella lo del

apodo, pero ya se guardarían de repetírselo en su cara, o si no… An tenia por verdadero nombre y a pesar de su delgadez y pequeñez, era una fierecilla a quien nadie osaba irritar (XI, 116). "*La Comadreja*" remains a close friend of the protagonist, Amparo Rosendo, throughout the novel, where only the narrator can have no fear of applying the nickname, which she does 38 times.

Another animal-like character, and one disliked by her co-workers—because she has succumbed to the Protestant missionaries in order to receive material benefits—is "*Pítinga*" The narrator explains: "[P]or el color de su tez biliosa y de su lacio pelo, por lo sombrío y zafio del mirar, [la] llamaban *Píntiga*, nombre que dan en el país a cierta salamandra manchada de amarillo y negro" (XXIV, 183). Also referred to as "*la protestanta*" (XXIV, 183, and passim), her animal-based nickname occurs seven times, three of which are by the narrator, and four by co-workers.

An additional character, coming to the foreground only as a solo dancer during the factory-workers celebration of Carnival is "*La Mincha*, barrendera vieja, pequeña, redonda como una tinaja" (XXII, 169). Benito Varela Jácome glosses this sobriquet: "Apodo que significa pequeña de cuerpo. Aquí parece significar pequeña, redonda y achaparrada en comparación con el pequeño caracol marino, adherido a las rocas, llamado *mincha* en gallego" (XXII, 169, n. 50). Pardo Bazán tells in her *Apuntes autobiográficos* of witnessing such a Carnival dancer, but there she neither shares a nickname nor animalizes this woman (76-77). These facets of characterization are saved for *La tribuna*, where they are employed to blend in with other Naturalistic aspects of the factory workers and their environment.

Yet another worker is seen by the title protagonist when she accepts "*Chinto'*s" invitation to visit the tobacco barn. "*Señora Porcona*" sports a now-attenuated, but swine-based, nickname meaning "sucia, desaliñada" (Varela Jácome 164, n. 48). She has worked with tobacco ever since

the state-owned factory opened and now is a physical wreck: "[Con] voz temblosa como el balido de la cabra, [. . .] parecía tener los párpados en carne viva y los labios blancos y colgantes, con lo cual hacía la más extraña y espantable figura del mundo" (XXI, 164). Amparo, the protagonist, reacts strongly, "horrorizaba de aquella imagen [. . .] que le parecía como vaga visión del porvenir" (XXI, 165).

From the factory women, whom she greatly pitied and admired, Pardo Bazán may also have learned about Pepa, the midwife who assists them when they become pregnant. Although Amparo does not need her services until much later, the midwife is introduced early in *La Tribuna*:

> Pepa la comadrona, por mal nombre señora *Porreta.* era ésta mujer colosal, más a lo ancho que a lo alto; parecíase a tosca estatua labrada a ser vista de lejos. Su cara enorme, circuida por colgante papada, tenía palidez serosa. Calzaba zapatillitas de hombre y usaba una sortija, de tamaño varonil también, en el dedo meñique. (II, 70).

This character's nickname, as in the case of some of Galdós's *personajes,* comes from her *muletilla*.[2] Walter Borenstein, glosses the *comadrona*'s speech tag and sobriquet "*Porreta*" as "a colloquial expression that means 'stark naked'" (253, n. 6). As occurs in many a Naturalist birth scene, Amparo has a very difficult time in a seamy, sordid environment.[3] For the first time now, we see the midwife—with her large greasy hands—exclaiming "¡porreta!" (XXXVII, 263-65), while the only sound from the suffering protagonist is "un clamor ya exhausto, que más se parecía al aullido del animal expirante que a la queja humana" (XXXVII, 265). Thus one perceives that Pardo Bazán had a good artistic reason for not explaining the origin of the midwife's nickname early on. She achieves greater emotional impact by waiting to demonstrate

the dynamics occasioning the nickname until the scene just described.[4] Although "*porreta*" might be appropriate to describe a forthcoming baby, it may well be that the last thing the deceived, unmarried mother in labor needs to hear is the equivalent of "stark naked." In any case, Naturalist dehumanization is effected by having the midwife resemble a repulsive male veterinarian assisting at an animal-like birth.

A nickname does not always have to be animal-based to help communicate the unfortunate circumstance of a woman worker. Such is the case of one known only by her sobriquet: "[LL]amábanla *Guardiana*; era nacida al pie del santuario de Nuestra Señora de la Guardia, tan caro a Marienda" (XI, 115). After a miserable childhood, which included begging, she becomes employed in the tobacco factory. The nickname is an indispensable part of her characterization when this physical and economically unfortunate woman summarizes her condition and outlook on life: "[L]a Virgen le había de dar la gloria en el otro mundo, porque en éste no le mandaba más que penitas y trabajos" (XI, 115). Because "*Guardiana*" becomes the title protagonist's constant companion, the narrator has occasion to use the *apodo* 24 times. Amparo never uses the nickname in direct address, but once in reported indirect discourse, we see it as Amparo is thinking about her friend (XVI, 143).

In her *Apuntes autobiográficos* Pardo Bazán reveals that before undertaking her novel, she was curious about the political views of the factory workers:

> Quien pasee la carretera de mi pueblo natal al caer la tarde, encontrará á docenas grupos de operarias de la Fábrica de cigarros, que salen del trabajo [. . . .] ¿Habrá una novel bajo esos trajes de percal y esos raídos mantones? [. . .] Un día recordé que aquellas mujeres, morenas, fuertes, de aire resuelto, habían sido las más ardientes sectarias de la idea federal en los años revolucionarios, y parecióme

> curioso estudiar el desarrollo de una creencia política en un cerebro de hembra, a la vez católica y demagoga, sencilla por naturaleza y empujada al mal por la fatalidad de la vida fabril. De este pensamiento nació mi tercera novela, *La Tribuna*. (74)

So Pardo Bazán's fictional proletariat, whose prototypes had been pro-Federal Republic advocates, do have strong political feelings and find *motes* useful in expressing their dislike of individuals of other political persuasions. One such is the prominent politician and orator, "[Salustiano] Olózaga, llamándole, *el viejo del borrego*, porque andaba el muy indino buscando un rey no nos hacía falta … sólo por cogerse él para sí embajadas y otras prebendas" (IX, 107). Additionally, they also ventilate aggressive feelings as they participate in the nationwide antiestablishment nickname for the Italian-imported king, Amadeo I: "ese *Macarroni*" (XXXII, 228; XXXVII, 261), and for his wife, "desdeñosamente *la Cisterna*" (XXV, 248).

Importantly, Amparo Rosundo, the protagonist, does not have an animal-based nickname. She has not worked long enough in the tobacco factory to have ruined her health; but, as already noted, when seeing the emaciated "*Porcona*," she does perceive what her future may hold. Thus it is understandable that she should become dedicated to advocating better working conditions for all the employees. Amparo does not receive her nickname until chapter 18, which is entitled "*Tribuna del pueblo.*" In this chapter, Amparo delivers an impassioned speech from an elevated tribune or speaker's platform. The kindly patriarch of the liberal political rally enthusiastically hails her as the "*Tribuna del pueblo*" (XVIII, 153). Amparo is unaware that she has thus acquired a nickname until a friend so informs her later. This friend also asserts that the sobriquet is widely known, because "la Tribuna" is the appellation by which Amparo is acclaimed in the newspapers. With enthusiasm and pride Amparo accepts the *apodo* (XXVIII, 205).

Subsequently, she even uses it self-referentially, when she mistakenly believes that Baltazar Sobrado truly wants to marry her, and that she may thus be able to flaunt an upper-class rival with "la dejaba por *la Tribuna*; ¡por *la Tribuna*!" (XXXII, 226). Amparo's sobriquet occurs 55 times in *La Tribuna*, with the narrator using also an adjectival variation when she speaks of Amparo's "firmeza tribunicia" (XXI, 217) and her "tribunicia frase" (XXIX, 208). Pardo Bazán's choice of this nickname is most appropriate considering the tumultuous fictional time of *La Tribuna*, which includes the liberal revolution of 1868, the reign of Amadeo I, and the founding of the First Republic. Moreover, it proves appropriate for a focus on the workers' movement (frequently of interest to the Naturalists), because it anticipates one of the nicknames of V.I. Lenin, as well as the several huge paintings which feature the founder of the Russian Communist Party on the tribune (Lunacharsky 4). Moreover, Lenin himself said, "The Socialist's ideal should not be a trade-union secretary, but a *tribune of the people*, able to explain [. . .] to *all* and everyone the historical significance of the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat" ("Lenin" 1). This is the type of role to which Amparo dedicates herself**.**

Amparo appears again thirteen years later in *Memorias de un solterón* (1896), where she is known primarily by her sobriquet. Her now-grown son, Ramón Sobrado, has acquired his unwed mother's enthusiasm for the workers' movement. In fact, he has become the city's foremost labor activist—and he also carries a proletariat nickname: "*el compañero*" (X, 170 and passim). Like fellow-Galician Pablo Iglesias, who founded Spain's Socialist Party in 1879, Pardo Bazán's "socialista" (X, 170 and passim) is also a printer. Pardo Bazán's consistent presentation of "el compañero" as the most admirable of persons is undercut only after he has forced Baltazar Sobrado to marry his mother, "*La Tribuna*," whereby he himself acquires wealth and social status. Only then does this "corresponsal" of Pablo Iglesias (XXIII, 277) abandon his worker's

dress for upper-class finery, ride in a carriage, and flout his new social status (XIII, 277). It will be remembered that Pardo Bazán considered herself not only a Catholic, but also a Christian Socialist until the end of her life (Hilton 18). Perhaps she had seen humor-evoking transformations similar to that of her "*el compañero*." In any case, the nickname of the son of "*la Tribuna*" is socially and historically appropriate in *Memorias de un solterón*, serving as one of the techniques used by the narrator and other characters in the presentation and delineation of Ramón Sobrado. Thus one sees that the creation of proletariat nicknames, first generated in Pardo Bazán's *La tribuna*, carried over into her post-Naturalist period.

In summation, we see that in *La tribuna Pardo Bazán* for the first time successfully utilized the fact that nicknames and their dynamics are not only a part of everyday reality but can also be useful across the entire breadth of a novel for characterization, for the interaction between characters, and for the establishment of regional and historical authenticity. Analogous to Zola, who was in the habit of following the most shocking of his Naturalistic works with an idealistic one, Pardo Bazán chose in her fourth novel *El Cisne de Vilamorta* (1885) to "tone down her Naturalism and regain public esteem" (Pattison 49). As part of this endeavor, she will change her focus and techniques—but not her rich employment of nicknames.

Notes

1. For the appropriateness of the Galdosian nickname "*Comadreja*," in spite of no physical description, see Chamberlin, "Animal Imagery" (10).

2. A prime Galdosian example concerns Doña Cándida, Viuda de García Grande, in *El amigo Manso*. For details concerning her nickname "*Doña Cosa Atroz*" and its origin in the *muletilla* "Es una cosa atroz," see Chamberlin, "*Muletilla*" (303). In *Nazarín* there is a variation in that the nickname "Bálsamo" for a blind musician comes from the refrain" Bálsamo de amor" in his most remembered song (II, ii, 1695).

3. Zola's best known example is Adèle in *Pot-Bouille* (ctd. in Baguley 253. n. 31).

4. The withholding of important matter until the moment of maximum emotional impact is one of Pardo Bazán's very effective techniques. For another successful example, see the short story *El tranvía,* where the blindness of the poor woman's baby is withheld until the final sentence (181).

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