"VAMOS A VER LAS FIERAS": ANIMAL IMAGERY AND THE PROTAGONIST IN *LA DESHEREDADA* AND *LO PROHIBIDO*

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Although the use of animal imagery in Galdós's novels has only begun to be studied, important polar anchors are identifiable in three different periods of his best writing. In the most popular of the *Novelas de la primera época, Doña Perfecta,* the characters opposed to Galdós's clean-cut, altruistic hero–characters who personify forces Galdós disliked–become animal-like at the climax of the novel and murder the protagonist (Chamberlin 63-65). Three studies have called attention to the richness of the human-animal comparisons in *Miau* (Paradisis, Doelz-Blackburn, Urbina), a novel of the naturalistic period in which one character is described as "un tipo de transición zoológica, en cuyo cráneo parecen verse demostradas las audaces hipótesis de Darwin" (587). Finally, in both *Nazarín* and *Misericordia,* the best novels of Galdós's third or *naturalismo espiritual* period, a seamy, sordid environment containing animal-like characters serves as a foil for a strong protagonist who climactically enters a Christ-like state of spirituality as the novel closes.[1] The present study will investigate the animal imagery in the unstudied early naturalistic novels *La desheredada* and *Lo prohibido,* focusing upon this imagery as it relates to the protagonist, a character now predetermined to failure because of adverse heredity and a negative environment.

In the opening pages of *La desheredada,* the protagonist, Isidora Rufete, visits her father, who is confined to the Leganés mental asylum. Conditions are so appalling that "cualquiera que despertara súbitamente a la razón y se encontrase [aquí], . . . entre turba lastimosa de seres que sólo tienen de humano la figura, y se viera en un corral más propio para gallinas que para enfermos, volvería seguramente a caer en demencia, con la monomanía de ser bestia dañina" (967). Some patients are kept in "jaulas" (967, 970), while others lie on the ground: "parece que están pastando" (968). The women's quarter is frankly "un gallinero donde cacarean hasta veinte o treinta hembras con murmullo de coquetería, de celos, de cháchara frívola y desacorde que no tiene fin ni principio, ni términos claros, ni pausas, ni variedad," and one can hear this sound "desde lejos cual disputa de cotorras en la soledad de un bosque" (969-70). On the day Isidora's father dies in this asylum, he is also described in animalistic terms: "El labio superior, demasiado largo y colgante, parece haber crecido y ablandádose recientemente, y no cesa de agitarse con nerviosos temblores como un conejo royendo berzas" (966).

Isidora, one learns as the novel progresses, has inherited her father's tendency to live in a realm of illusion rather than face the world as it is. Because of this inherited weakness, she is destined to end up much as her father did: dehumanized and animal-like in a world apart from normal human society. This process of deterioration is, however, gradual and takes place over two volumes; sig-

nificant human-animal comparisons serve as markers during Isidora's long descent, one which ends in outright street prostitution.

First, it is important to note that Madrid itself is full of animalistic dangers that threaten a newly arrived girl from the provinces. The idea of lurking animality is apparent already in chapter 2 when Isidora visits her aunt, *La Sanguijuelera,* who has horrible leeches "en enormes botellas, con la viscosa trompa o ventosa pegada al cristal, enroscados, aburridos, quietos, como si acecharan una víctima y esperasen a que entrara por la puerta" (978). (*La Sanguijuelera* herself brags that she can become "más fiera que el león del Retiro si se ofrece" [979].)

More important, all the men of the capital seem to be veritable "animals." Only one of those attracted to Isidora, the young medical student Augusto Miquis, is presented in non-animalistic terms, but, unfortunately, she rejects him early on. Significantly, Isidora prefers to spend her time looking at the wild animals in the Buen Retiro Zoo. On one occasion when Miquis tries to express his affection for her, she rebuffs him saying, "Vamos a ver las fieras." Playfully (but adumbrating her condition at the end of the novel), he counters, "¿Qué más fiera que tú?" When she insists, "Enséñame las fieras," he does give her a tour of the zoo.[2] Functioning at this juncture (I, iv) as an observing naturalist, Miquis speaks at length about nature and also uses a term that many naturalists believed helped to define their new type of novel: "el laboratorio de la Naturaleza" (989-90).

Isidora's preference for animals over the hard-working young medical student–who rises socially and economically while she deteriorates into prostitution–is an important theme that will be developed throughout the novel. Certainly she does get to see her animals, not only that day in the zoo, but subsequently in Madrid's social fauna.[3] Each of the "animals" is happy to su pport her in fine style in return for sexual favors. The first is Joaquín Pez. Surely there can be no harm in having a pet fish, one might think. Miquis, however, abominates Pez (and his many relatives who are so detrimental to Spanish society), and he even proposes the following mock zoological classification for the Peces: "Orden de los *malacopterigios abdominales.* Familia, *barbus voracissimus.* Especie, *remora vastatrix*" (1034).[4]

In the long run, Isidora's first protector turns out to be a very "slippery fish" indeed. Never does he get around to keeping his promise to marry her, nor does he acknowledge their illegitimate son. Pez also requires considerable "feeding"; Isidora later has to get money from other lovers to support him. Most important, Pez's high style of living and his early indulgence of Isidora's desires for luxury stimulate her irreconcilably along the path to ruin.

After Pez abandons Isidora, she falls into the clutches of Alejandro Sánchez Botín, concerning whom another character says: "No comprendo estos caracteres. . . . Me parecen hechos con algo puramente material y grosero que sobró después de hacernos a todos, y que pudo tal vez ser destinado a crear los animales. Pero la mente divina quiso formar la transición del hombre al bruto, y fabricó a Botín" (1091). Subsequently the narrator adds: "No era todo lo fiera . . . para habitar en medio de los bosques. Tenía algo de hombre" (1095). When Isidora and Botín finally terminate their relationship during a violent argument, the latter is again presented as part man, part animal, "como el Minotauro vagando por las oscuras galerías del laberinto de Creta." So upset has

"la bestia" become that the narrator says: "Mitológicamente hablando, se mordía su propia cola" (1096).

After Botín, Isidora passes to Melchor Relimpio. Even before becoming her lover-protector, Relimpio had observed her with "cierto azaramiento de bestia taurina al hallarse en medio del redondel" (1097). Under Relimpio's influence Isidora continues to deteriorate, and animal comparisons now begin to be appropriate for her as well: "Cayó en una trampa de infame dinero, armada con el cebo de la vanidad" (1102). Isidora's love of luxury becomes so pronounced and her need for money so great that her next protector, Juan Bou, characterizes her as already "un tigre para el bolsillo ajeno" (1135). A similar process of animalization occurs simultaneously in the case of Isidora's brother Mariano, who has the same defective genes and also experiences difficulties in adapting to the Madrid environment. Mariano, called "fiera" (1130) and "animal" (1134), shows "aquella tétrica quietud, semejante al acecho de las bestias carnívoras, en las cuales la paciencia es precursora de la ferocidad" (1134).[5]

Of all the men attracted to Isidora, Juan Bou elicits the most animal-based metaphors. This proletarian is tagged by his surname—Bou is Catalan for *buey*—and his "bestial lenguaje" (1105) is likened to that of a "buey" (1103). Juan Bou is most often, however, compared to a bear; chapter 9 of book 2 is entitled "La caricia del oso." Unlike Isidora's previous lovers, Bou truly desires to marry her. Thus Galdós's *"ursus speloeus"* (1081),[6] his "oso torcaz" (1103, 1104), seems to personify the idiom *hacer el oso* or "galantear, cortejar sin reparo ni disimulo."[7] Isidora admits that Bou "es el animal más cariñoso" (1101), but she cannot long tolerate his uncouth *pueblo* manners. The narrator also explains that "las galanterías de Bou con Isidora semejaban a las del oso que quiso mostrar el cariño a su amo matándole una mosca en la frente" (1103).

In vain Augusto Miquis, now a physician and still an observing naturalist, advises Isidora to marry Bou. She is still beautiful, and Dr. Miquis himself has to be careful to resist the temptation to animality. Both recall their long-ago visit to the Buen Retiro Zoo, and Miquis now playfully calls Isidora "víbora, . . . pantera . . ., demonio con falda" (1110). But when he is seriously tempted to become her lover-protector (and descend to the level of Isidora and the other males in her life), Miquis has to remind himself that he is a man, not an animal: "Hombre, *homo sapiens* de Linneo, no te deslices" (1111).

As Isidora passes from one animal-like lover to the next, she turns more and more animalistic. Late in volume 2 she is arrested and placed behind bars, ironically now just like the animals in the Buen Retiro Zoo. When Miquis comes to visit her in prison, he remarks: "¿Sabes que te me estás pareciendo a la pantera del Retiro?" Subsequently, when her attention span fails during this visit, Miquis puts his hand through the bars and makes "algunas castañetas con los dedos, como cuando se trata de llamar la atención a un animal perezoso" (1130).

After being released from jail, Isidora lives with the last of her animalistic paramours, a *ruletero* named *Gaitica*. He beats her unmercifully and then forever scars her beautiful face with a knife. Galdós's choice of animal imagery for *Gaitica* ("aquel ser de la última gradación moral" [1138]) confirms that he is the lowest of Isidora's lovers. Another character labels him "asqueroso reptil" (1154), but Isidora says vehemently: "Ese es de los que deben ser cogidos con un papel, como se coge a las cucarachas y luego tirados a la basura. . . . Es un hombre con el cual

no se debe hablar con palabras, sino con una zapatilla; es un bicho asqueroso. Aplastarlo y barrerlo luego" (1155). Living with *Gaitica* not only causes Isidora further physical and psychic deterioration but even affects her speech. When Miquis comments on her changed manner of speaking, Isidora at last expresses an insight into her status: "Mira tú, chavó, qué quieres. . . . He vivido tres años entre perros de presa. No te asombres de que muerda alguna vez" (1155).

Never fully recovering from her mistreatment at the hands of *Gaitica*, Isidora is pushed further downhill by the enticements of a whoremongering procuress (a veritable "dragón" [1158]) and by the execution of her brother, Mariano, who had descended into crime (and attempted regicide) "con trote de bestia" (1154).[8] By the end of the novel Isidora is ready for street prostitution, and the penultimate chapter is entitled "Muerte de Isidora–Conclusión de los Rufetes." Her attitude toward men has understandably hardened into an aggressive (and naturalistic) "desplumarlos y sacarles las entrañas" (1155). It is really Isidora herself, however, who is destined to be the victim, for, although she is like an animal herself, she is still no match for the bestial world of the streets: "Así cayó ella despeñada en voraginoso laberinto de las calles. La presa fue devorada, y poco después, en la superficie social, todo estaba tranquilo" (1161). Like her father before her in chapter 1 (significantly entitled "Final de otra novela"), Galdós's naturalistic protagonist has been reduced to animality and succumbs (at least morally and spiritually) to a dehumanized world of bestial instincts.[9]

Whether read as a naturalistic novel or as a parody, *Lo prohibido* confirms the basic pattern seen in *La desheredada.* After two volumes of association with many animal-like characters, the protagonist (again flawed by adverse heredity)[10] can best be described at the end of the novel in animalistic terms. The main innovation in *Lo prohibido* is that the protagonist's final status is confirmed and made graphic by a stroke which causes him to lose control over several bodily functions, including locomotion and speech. The protagonist sees himself as "convertido en animal" (1879), "un pobre animal . . . que ladraba, pero ya no podía morder" (1878).

As in *La desheredada,* human-animal comparisons along the trajectory of the protagonist's descent are a vital part of the novel's art. Early on, the author adumbrates the climax of the novel by describing illnesses that reduce an individual to a dehumanized state. The first instance is the death of Eloísa Bueno de Guzmán's husband, Pepe Carrillo. Before Pepe dies, the narrator says: "Sus gritos eran la exclamación de la animalidad herida y en peligro, sin ideas, sin nada que distingue al hombre de la fiera" (1756). When Eloísa herself suffers a severe illness, the narrator describes her face: "la parte superior era lo único que declaraba parentesco con la fisonomía humana. Mas en la inferior la deformidad era tal, que había que recurrir a las especies zoológicas más feas para encontrarle semejanza" (1829).

Eloísa had been very attractive to the protagonist, her cousin José María Bueno de Guzmán, while she was married to another. When she becomes free to marry again after her husband's death, however, Galdós's protagonist is repulsed, experiencing "un frío mortal, un miedo como el que inspiran los animales dañinos" (1764). Eloísa subsequently offers to José María her own explanation of his fear: "No quieres tener por mujer a la que ya faltó a su primer marido y ha adquirido hábitos de lujo. Dudas de mí, dudas de poderme sujetar. La fiera está

crecida, y no se presta a que la enjaulen." Then she places her right hand before his "ojos, amenazándolos como [con] una garra" (1772).[11]

Addicted to luxury, Eloísa sells herself to Alejandro Sánchez Botín, one of the characters who had contributed to Isidora Rufete's ruin in *La desheredada.* The narrator now says concerning Botín: "Aquél nos venía a revelar el discutido y no bien probado parentesco con los animales. Viéndole y tratándole, . . . me volvía darvinista, sin que nadie me lo pudiera quitar de la cabeza" (1868). Eloísa herself had said earlier: "Si me ponen en la alternativa de querer a todos los soldados de un regimiento, a uno tras otro, o vivir dos horas con ese orangután, opto por lo primero" (1884).

Nevertheless, it is not Eloísa who finally contributes most to the protagonist's animalization but the third and youngest of his three cousins, Camila, the only one who resists his amorous advances. She is a veritable "fierecilla indócil" (1709), a happy, healthy "borriquilla" (so labelled at least twenty-two times) who frolics energetically with her husband (an "asno," "borrico," "pollino").[12] The envious protagonist asks himself "en un paroxismo de aflicción –¿por qué no he de poseer yo una felicidad semejante a la de este par de fieras?" (1787). Then, when he finds the virtue of his "indómita borriquilla" absolutely unassailable, he is overcome with "un ardiente apetito de brutalidad" (1794) and twice almost kills her husband. Reflecting later on what he has done, José María, a Darwinist who likes to visit the animals in the zoo, becomes "avergonzado y espantado de que los hombres más pacíficos se convierten tan fácilmente en fieras" (1794). It is, however, too late for him to change, and Dr. Miquis, now appearing briefly in *Lo prohibido,* subsequently sees José María as "un animal [dañino]" (1864). The protagonist's descent into the realm of basic animal instincts and behavior becomes confirmed, fixed, and externally manifest when a stroke overtakes him on a stairway while he is trying to gain entrance into the apartment of his much desired "borriquilla." The stroke occurs in the penultimate chapter, "Nabucodonosor." Like the Old Testament king of Babylon ("condenado a arrastrarse por el suelo y comer hierba" [1876]), Galdós's protagonist finds himself "convertido en animal" (1879) as punishment for his misdeeds.[13] He realizes that he has no one to blame but himself for "esta horrible situación de animalidad . . . [causada por] los vicios" (1879), "el resultado de dejarse dominar por las pasiones y los apetitos" (1877).

In marked contrast, however, to Isidora in *La desheredada,* the protagonist of *Lo prohibido* at this juncture of the novel also has, most unexpectedly, a non-naturalistic spark of spirituality. Foreshadowing the *naturalismo espiritual* of Galdós's novels of the 1890s, José María says:

> Yo no era completamente bestia. Si aquello me faltara, hubiera andado a cuatro pies, siempre que el izquierdo y la mano del mismo lado lo consintieran. Pero conservaba mi alma, aunque desquiciada, y en mi alma aquella chispa divina, por la cual me creía con derecho a reclamar un sitio en el mundo espiritual, cuando la bestia cayese por entero en el inorgánico. La conciencia de aquella chispa me consolaba de tener cara de idiota, voz como un ladrido. (1880)

The animal imagery in Galdós's early naturalistic period is rich, dynamic, and purposeful. In both *La desheredada* and *Lo prohibido* a two-volume process results in the degeneration and the dehumanization of the protagonist; animal imagery effectively charts the course. In *La desheredada* Galdós also uses pseudo-zoological

terminology repeatedly, speaks of "la eficaz influencia del medio ambiente" (1112), and employs a physician who functions as an observing naturalist. These elements appear to refute the recent notions that "evidence of any influence by Zola on Galdós is . . . almost non-existent" (Dendle 28) and that "the time has come to call a moratorium on the subject of . . . naturalistic elements in *La desheredada*" (Percival 311).[14] The recently resurfaced idea that *Lo prohibido* is a parody on the naturalistic novel, however, is quite tenable.[15] In their persuasive study, Alfred and Luz María Rodríguez include the novel's final characterization of the protagonist in animalistic terms as one of the supporting arguments in favor of parody. It should be added, nevertheless, that this parody is evident chiefly because the terminal animalization is so different from that of *La desheredada.* It is also emphatically antinaturalistic to have a first-person narrator-protagonist who comments climactically not only upon his own animal-like status but also upon another part of the human personality: "aquella chispa divina . . . del mundo espiritual." In all probability Galdós first created the gradual, progressive animalization of Isidora in 1881 as part of a serious study in the new naturalistic mode.[16] Then, after turning away from naturalism to a considerable extent for four years, he entered into a dialogue with his own creativity in *La desheredada,* now in order to be markedly different and effectively parodical in *Lo prohibido.*

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NOTES

[1] My forthcoming "A Further Consideration of Animal Imagery in Galdós' Late *naturalismo espiritual* Period" is a supplement to Lowe.

[2] At the end of the tour Isidora is depressed: "Más que admiración, produjéronle lástima y repugnancia los infelices bichos privados de libertad" (990).

[3] Galdós specifically uses the word *fauna* in this context when he delineates an important character in both *Tristana* (1603) and *Misericordia* (1932).

[4] For an interpretation of this classification, see Edberg (416).

[5] Earlier the narrator had described Mariano as "callado, hecho un ovillo, meditando sobre una sola idea . . . como un perro que roe y voltea un solo hueso después de haberle quitado hasta la última hilacha de carne" (1099).

[6] As with the Pez family, Galdós devises a playful pseudo-zoological classification: cave bear.

[7] In the following chapter, Bou himself says (in another context): "No pensaba . . . ni hacer el oso, ni ponerse en ridículo como un indianete sin seso" (1118-19).

[8] Mariano has also visited the animals in the zoo. Late in the novel he crosses the Retiro and passes in front of the Casa de Fieras. He decides not to enter, saying (reminiscent of Isidora's attitude in volume 1): "Estoy cansado de verlas" (1137).

[9] Although the reader assumes from the chapter heading, "Muerte de Isidora . . .," that the latter will soon perish, she does, in fact, reappear as a (quite changed) character in *Torquemada en la hoguera* eight years later.

[10] In *La desheredada* Isidora not only inherited her father's illusionary traits but also may have passed a variant of this defect on to her son, who is macrocephalic. In *Lo prohibido* nearly all the members of the protagonist's family suffer from seminally transmitted defects, some of which are quite bizarre (for details, see Pattison 82-83).

[11] When Eloísa subsequently desires closeness with José María, she changes her tune: "No soy una fiera. Tú puedes domarme, pero no con el látigo de las cuentas. Amor a cambio de lujo" (1774).

[12] Camila and her husband also playfully liken each other to a variety of other animals (1787-88).

[13] Munsen, in his study of this episode, judges it to be antinaturalistic.

[14] Knowledge concerning Zola's use of animal-like characters dates from 1867. In the preface to *Thérèse Raquin,* Zola explained that his two main characters are "without free will. . . . They are human animals, nothing more" (vii-viii). Although the well-known *La Bête humaine* (1890) was written after *La desheredada,* Galdós is generally believed to have read a number of other novels written by Zola before 1881, including *Nana.* In the latter novel, the animal-like protagonist reduces her main lover, a chamberlain at the Imperial court, "quite literally to a brute beast on all fours," riding him "round the room like a horse, and afterwards she makes him act the dog, and fetch her handkerchief in his teeth" (Hemmings 151-52).

[15] Ocantos reports that, a short time after finishing *Lo prohibido,* Galdós told him that he rejected aspects of naturalism and added: "las demasías del naturalismo deben ser censuradas" (416).

[16] Galdós said in 1910 that he remembered a time "admirando mucho a Zola y haciéndome sentir y pensar mucho sus novelas" (Shoemaker 88).

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