

# JUAN VALERA AND GALDÓS'S CHARACTERIZATION OF JUANITO SANTA CRUZ

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In the opening chapter of *Fortunata y Jacinta*, which introduces Juanito Santa Cruz, Galdós links the name of rival novelist Juan Valera with that of his fictive, immature philanderer. The Galdosian narrator even invites the reader to participate in his game: «¿Y por qué le llamaba todo el mundo y le llama todavía casi unánimemente *Juanito Santa Cruz*?» After claiming not to know, the narrator drops the following hint: «Hay en Madrid muchos casos de esta aplicación del diminutivo o de la fórmula familiar del nombre, aun tratándose de personas que han entrado en la madurez de la vida. Hasta hace pocos años, al autor cien veces ilustre de *Pepita Jiménez* le llamaban sus amigos y los que no lo eran *Juanito Valera*» (15).

To date, no study has investigated the possibility that Galdós might be playfully planting a clue early in the novel to encourage his reader to think of Valera as a model for the male protagonist of part 1. The juxtaposition of *Juanito* and Valera as one name and the italicized parallelism, «*Juanito Santa Cruz ... Juanito Valera*,» in the same paragraph suggest a literary game. Moreover, the surname Santa Cruz has had, as we will see later, a significant connection with Valera. Most interesting is that the words preceding «Juanito Valera»—«y los que no lo eran [sus amigos]»—suggest a touch of spite by emphasizing that the man has enemies, a common enough phenomenon in the arena of literary rivalry. Although Juan Valera was not necessarily the exclusive model for Juanito Santa Cruz, Valera's behavior and the image he strove to project made him an excellent study for the Don Juan figure, as significant parallels between the two «Juanitos» demonstrate.

Juan Valera is known today as a fine novelist and suave international diplomat but more rarely as a womanizer. Yet his correspondence shows his interest in seduction to have been so pronounced that he wrote to his father in May 1850: «Esta afición mía a las faldas es terrible» (*Correspondencia* 47: 95), and described to his mother in December of that same year his efforts to pursue two married women simultaneously (*Correspondencia* 47: 119-22). More important, Valera frequently delighted in including details of amorous escapades in his letters from far corners of the world to male friends in Madrid.

Some of Valera's personal letters (often with clever literary references that highlight his adventures) are known to have made the rounds in the Spanish capital. Sáenz de Tejada, for example, describes the typical circulation of one of Valera's letters by Serafín Estébanez Calderón: «La carta va pasando de mano en mano, en el Prado por la tarde y en el café por la noche. ... Unos la copian, otros recuerdan una anécdota, y todos conservan en la memoria el nombre de Valera» (146).

A sanitized version of the missive might appear the following day in a Madrid newspaper, but many already knew the scintillating details of the uncensored original. Valera himself mentions in his «Noticia autobiográfica de don Juan Valera» «largas y variadas cartas a Calderón, que Calderón enseñaba a algunos» (133). In similar fashion, Leopoldo Augusto Cueto (the Undersecretary of State), who received Valera's letters from St. Petersburg, «circulated them among his friends and even published long extracts from them in the newspaper, *La España*» (DeCoster 20).

In one of the St. Petersburg letters Valera tells of spending hours in the bed of the French actress, Magdalena Brohan:

Me eché sobre ella, y la besé, y la estrujé, y la mordí, como si tuviese el diablo en mi cuerpo. Y ella no se resistió, sino que me estrechó en sus brazos, y unió y apretó su boca a la mía, y me mordió la lengua y el pescuezo, y me besó mil veces, ...y me quería poner los besos en el alma, según lo íntima y estrechamente que me los ponía dentro de la boca. ...En fin, fue una locura de amor que duró hasta las dos de la mañana, desde las nueve. (*Correspondencia* 48: 208)

This letter caused a furor. The French government demanded that Brohan return to France. Moreover, her suitor in St. Petersburg was none other than Valera's superior, the Duque de Osuna, who was, to say the least, very angry at Valera when he obtained a copy of this and other letters. Both Valera and Magdalena Brohan were forced to leave St. Petersburg almost simultaneously, but they travelled separately to Paris, as Valera explained, «por no cargar más al excelentísimo Sr. Duque de Osuna» (*Correspondencia* 48: 338).

The Brohan affair was not the only time Valera's career suffered from his erotic indiscretions. His behavior in Washington, D. C., is well known. While ambassador to the United States, he entered into a liaison with the daughter of the Secretary of State, Katherine Lee Bayard. Now at the height of his diplomatic career, Valera joyously wrote of this affair to his sister—until Miss Bayard's suicide inside the Spanish embassy dramatically terminated his ambassadorship. Miss Bayard's death was reported in the newspapers as resulting from natural causes, but the fact that it was a suicide was immediately known on both sides of the Atlantic. Significantly, these events occurred in January 1886, some fifteen months before the publication of volume 1 of *Fortunata y Jacinta*.

Ten years earlier Galdós had engaged in an aggressive and successful «dialogue» with Valera's novel *Pepita Jiménez* as he wrote his own *Doña Perfecta* (see Chamberlin, «*Doña Perfecta*»), but in 1886 it was perhaps Valera's image as a compulsive philanderer, rather than his artistic output, that stimulated Galdós's creativity. After suggesting a parallel between the two men through the wordplay of «Juanito» at the beginning of *Fortunata y Jacinta*, Galdós confined himself to a series of loose associations. Literary convention as well as personal diplomacy, not to mention Galdós's artistic concern to create a more universal Don Juan figure, would dictate this pattern.

The loose parallels between the two are nevertheless striking when studied in isolation. For example, Juanito's introduction to an adult world and his first sexual adventures take place in Paris and provide the climactic close of the initial chapter. Although his mother had worried about «la Babilonia

parisiense» and its «mujeronas muy guapas y elegantes ..., ávidas de dinero que desplumaban y rescaban al pobrecito que en sus garras caía,» Juanito returns to Madrid, not «todo rechupado y anémico,» as his mother had feared, but «más gordo y lucio que antes, con mejor color y los ojos más vivos, muchísimo más alegre, más hombre, en fin, y con una amplitud de ideas y puntería de juicio que a todos los dejaba pasmados.» Then the narrator concludes the chapter with the festive observation: «¡Vaya con París! ... París es muy malo; pero también es muy bueno» (18). Valera was also a well-known disciple of París, which he had visited in 1857; he enthusiastically called the elegant streetwalkers of the French capital «doctoras,» while designating their «calles ... y *boulevards*, claustro pleno de la Universidad de Amor» (*Correspondencia* 48: 351). In addition, Valera, like Juanito Santa Cruz, retained a special liking for French women and «French» erotic pleasures.

Valera and Juanito Santa Cruz were also alike in their parsimony and its consequent effect on their diversions. Galdós's narrator says of Juanito: «Conviene decir también que el joven aquel no era derrochador. Gastaba, sí, pero con pulso y medida, y sus placeres dejaban de serlo cuando empezaban a exigirle algo de disipación... Y como conocía tan bien el valor de la moneda, sabía emplearla en la adquisición de sus goces de una manera prudente y casi mercantil» (85). Valera as well was perennially preoccupied with money, and this concern often became intertwined with his erotic needs and pleasures. His correspondence shows that, before marrying, he considered at length the potential dowries of various women and how he might invest their money (*Correspondencia* 47: 138, 143). He finally married for her dowry a woman whom he had once described as «fea como el pecado» (Sáenz 166). Like Santa Cruz, Valera was also looking for a bargain in dissipation. From Berlin he wrote enthusiastically about the uninhibited «mujeres de la plebe» (Fortunata's class), for they enter into liaisons «con la mayor sencillez y naturalidad imaginables, y asimismo reciben muy naturalmente el dinero o los regalillos que uno les da ..., para lo cual se necesita poco.» One might even obtain these same erotic favors (as he and Florentín Sanz did on 25 November 1856) by simply buying a fine meal and good wine for «menos de un duro en nuestra moneda» (*Correspondencia* 47: 216).

At the same time that the equally handsome Valera and Juanito were enjoying such success with «mujeres de la plebe,» both also had a compulsion to frequent brothels. The final chapter of volume 1 reveals climactically that Santa Cruz was a well-known customer in some of the most despicable establishments of the south Madrid slums. Valera, in turn, repeatedly mentions in his correspondence recourse to prostitutes in various parts of the world.

The final turning point in the life of Galdós's characters is strikingly similar to Valera's fate. After four volumes of misdeeds, Juanito Santa Cruz certainly would seem to merit a cruel punishment. And yet, at the end of the novel, Galdós lets him off with expulsion from his wife's bedroom—and her affections—forever. For such a conceited egotist and *mujeriego*, however, this isolation turns out to be the perfect punishment:

El pobre hombre padecía horriblemente... No ser nadie en presencia de su mujer, no encontrar allí aquel refugio a que periódicamente estaba acostumbrado, le ponía de malísimo talante. Y era

tal su confianza en la seguridad de aquel refugio, que al perderlo experimentó por vez primera esa sensación tristísima de las irreparables pérdidas y del vacío de la vida, sensación que... equivale al envejecer, en plena familia equivale al quedarse solo, y marca la hora en que lo mejor de la existencia se corre hacia atrás, quedando a la espalda los horizontes que antes estaban por delante. (543)

Juanito's emptiness in the face of approaching old age is a clear parallel to the reality of Valera's private life. After five years of marriage, like Juanito Santa Cruz, Valera found himself sleeping alone.<sup>1</sup> As early as 3 January 1877, Valera complained to his sister: «Mi mujer hace más de cinco años no es mi mujer. ... Tiene su cuarto al lado del mío, me hace a veces que la acompañe, y no me dirige la palabra sino para decirme una injuria» (*Cartas íntimas* 118). In a later letter (4 June 1885), Valera spoke specifically of the spectre that awaited him: «Me apesadumbra mucho pensar que en los últimos años de mi vida, cuando ya sea ridículo e imposible amar fuera de casa, no halle yo ni la soledad ... ni alguien en casa que bien me quiera, sino odio y desdén injusto. Pícara vejez va a ser la mía» (*Cartas íntimas* 266).

Even Juanito's surname had a significant connection with Valera. Repeatedly Estébanez Calderón had urged Valera to become another Santa Cruz. That is to say, he wanted his protégé to imitate «el famoso Santa Cruz» (Melchor Santa Cruz de Dueñas, the sixteenth-century author of *Floresta española de apothegmas*). Valera could do so, said Calderón, by collecting all the linguistic errors coloring the speech of his future father-in-law and «Gefe» in Rio, José Delavat y del Rincón. Valera had already included some of these comic utterances in his letters to Calderón, who found José Delavat such an «original chusco y entretenido» that he could easily be presented in a novel as «el carácter más entretenido e interesante que haya abortado la imprenta desde Cervantes.» Moreover, even a collection of his malapropisms, said Calderón, should result in «una floresta más entretenida que la de Santa Cruz» (Sáenz 170, 180-81). Because of their shared literary milieu, Galdós could easily have been aware of these jokes and could have used them as the source for his character's name.

This same milieu could have led others of the time to recognize the literary game that Galdós was playing. Two of the most likely to have known—and who perhaps helped Galdós—are Emilia Pardo Bazán and José Alcalá Galiano. Valera, Galdós, and Alcalá Galiano had all been together as officers of the literature section of the Ateneo at the time of the Realism-Idealism debates (Pattison 26-27); Alcalá Galiano continued to be a close friend with whom Galdós sometimes discussed his literary works. Moreover, Alcalá Galiano was a relative of Valera's, was also in the Spanish diplomatic service, and was actively corresponding with Valera at this time. Another who may have shared the secret was Galdós's friend and fellow novelist, José Ortega Munilla. In reviewing *Fortunata y Jacinta* on the front page of *El Imparcial* (25 April 1887), he said: «Lo mejor de la novela ... es la pintura del hogar de Santa Cruz ... donde ha derrochado Galdós su talento observador privilegiado.»

If the connections and parallels between Juanito and Valera are acknowledged, Galdós's attitude toward his literary rival's erotic activities is obvious as well. Juanito appears weak and ridiculous on his honeymoon as he brags about his amorous exploits after he has been unable to hold his liquor in

front of the new bride whom he wants to impress. Juanito breaks down in Valera's home territory of Andalucía shortly after he and Jacinta have visited Córdoba, Valera's birthplace. Galdós may have chosen this locale as another inside joke.

Although Galdós does not fail to parody Valera's conceitedness (86) and his lack of political commitment (85-86), he concentrates on his rival's womanizing. Sáenz de Tejada judges Valera a textbook case of antifeminine aggression caused by unresolved conflicts with his domineering, overambitious mother. (Their interchange of letters, even in our day, «harían enrojecer a cualquiera.») Valera's mother completely robbed him of any «imagen tranquila, reposada, 'femenina' ... de la mujer.» Thus he was compelled to pass «por la vida aplastando, despreciando, más que amando, violando mujeres, a las que sin duda no ama en cuanto posee» (Valera, *Cartas íntimas* 18). Consequently, it was impossible for Valera (like Juanito Santa Cruz) to have any true insight into his behavior, and he had no capacity for empathizing with his female victims.

In the literary arena, Valera and Galdós not only competed as writers, but each held a completely different philosophy concerning life and art. Moreover, each was the leader of an entire school of writers. Valera, the conservative, championed most of the causes against which Galdós, the liberal, campaigned throughout his long career. First opposed to realism and later to naturalism, Valera had made his ideas known as early as 1860 in *De la naturaleza y carácter de la novela*. In 1874, he exemplified these ideas in his best-known and most successful novel, *Pepita Jiménez*. The appearance of this work occasioned a polemic in the learned journals, as well as a subsequent multi-session debate at the Madrid Ateneo during the 1875-76 term. Valera himself was the presiding officer during these discussions, and there is every reason to believe that Galdós also attended.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1880s, with the advent of French-inspired naturalism, the battle renewed along the very same lines. During the winter of 1881-82, while Valera was in Lisbon, the Ateneo again sponsored a debate on current aesthetics. Whereas the polemic in the 1870s had concerned idealism versus realism, in the 1880s it was idealism versus naturalism.<sup>3</sup> At this time Pardo Bazán (with whom Galdós was, or soon would become, intimate) also began publishing her articles on naturalism, which subsequently became the book *La cuestión palpitante*. These articles stimulated Valera to take up the struggle again. He even believed that it was his patriotic duty to «combatir la barbarie» (*Epistolario* 287), and he said: «El realismo o naturalismo que hoy se estiliza es un horror» (López Jiménez 40). Valera's main reply to Pardo Bazán was *Apuntes sobre el arte de escribir novelas*, which he first began to publish in article form in the fall of 1886.<sup>4</sup> Undoubtedly, such a reply was anticipated by the realists, for Galdós was able to come out the following spring (1887) with the first volume of *Fortunata y Jacinta*. Angel Tarrío is right when he says: «Galdós, cosa rara en él, siente verdadera antipatía por este personaje [Santa Cruz] y lo somete a un proceso de degradación» (127). Tarrío's opinion echoes Galdós's statement in chapter 1 to the effect that some people did not like Valera. Galdós was one of these, and he expressed himself accordingly throughout his novel, reducing his referent from the

boastful, self-congratulatory Don Juan of real life to a fictive, immature Don Juanito.

Once again, as with the writing of *Doña Perfecta* in 1876, Galdós was able to be the champion of the realist school and to carry the fight aggressively to Valera and his followers. In *Fortunata y Jacinta*, Galdós vigorously defends the realist cause while also using humor and parody to put down the idealists (Chamberlin, «Idealism versus Reality»). His playful exposé of Valera's private life by means of Juanito Santa Cruz occurs in this humorous vein and is part of the same process. The use of Valera as the only named referent for Juanito Santa Cruz in the entire novel allowed Galdós to be completely true to the realist aesthetic, which Valera hated.<sup>5</sup> There was, indeed, as Galdós knew (and Valera might have recognized), a person similar to Juanito Santa Cruz in real life, equally handsome, shallow, and despicable, who received the same punishment.

Before the contributions of Sáenz de Tejada that highlighted «el sexo para Valera,» first in 1971 and then in 1974, we did not have an imperative to consider seriously the playful «Juanito Valera» clue presented in the first chapter of *Fortunata y Jacinta*. Now, however, there is so much evidence showing similarities in the lives of Valera and Galdós's character that it would be remiss not to take seriously the mention of «Juanito Valera.» Our increasing knowledge of the relationship between Galdós and Valera also corroborates this opinion (Pattison 26-27; Chamberlin, «*Doña Perfecta*»). There is, thus, good reason to believe that Galdós did have a definite purpose in mind when he mentioned «el autor ... de *Pepita Jiménez*» (15). He was, in fact, acknowledging the leader of the opposing school of writers—his own main rival—and expressing his antipathy. Then Galdós sublimated these (aggressive) feelings in his art, amusing himself all the while by giving a sustained exposé of Valera's private life as he deflated the suave Don Juan image, which Valera did so much to cultivate, into one of a selfish, immature Don Juanito. For the reader who can join Galdós in this fictive game, there is the reward of a new dimension to the character of Juanito Santa Cruz as well as a greater appreciation of Galdós's realism and his creative playfulness.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Juanito Santa Cruz married Jacinta in May 1871; in April 1876 she shut him out of her bedroom forever. Valera married Dolores Delavat in December 1867. His letter of 3 January 1877 would indicate that their intimacy ceased about 1872, also after five years of matrimony. As time passed, Valera understandably became less precise about this matter (cf. letters of 17 March 1885 [*Cartas íntimas* 257]; and 23 June 1885 [Bravo Villasante 257]).

<sup>2</sup> Galdós had been elected vice-president of the Ateneo's literature section in 1872 (Pattison 26).

<sup>3</sup> For details of the 1870s debates, see Davis 1649-56; for the 1880s, López Jiménez 21-22.

<sup>4</sup> Galdós, of course, knew well what Valera's reaction would be. Moreover, Valera repeatedly mentioned his forthcoming articles in letters to friends and asked for their help (López Jiménez 56-61).

<sup>5</sup> Valera even complained that his wife sent him details of their son's death in order to «afligirme... con pormenores dignos de esto que llaman ahora novela realista» (*Cartas íntimas* 286).

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