

A RUSSIAN VIEW IN 1884-85 OF THREE SPANISH NOVELISTS: GALDÓS, PARDO BAZÁN AND PEREDA

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Isaak Ia. Pavlovskii was a Russian journalist based in Paris, who translated Galdós' *El amigo Manso* in 1883 for *Vestnik Evropy* (The *European Herald*) as part of that journal's campaign to introduce contemporary Western literature to Russian readers. Later he wrote *Souvenirs sur Turgueneff* (Paris, 1887), and gave Galdós an autographed copy, which Don Benito kept in his Santander library.¹

In the French capital Pavlovskii also became acquainted with Pardo Bazán and, possibly at her urging, decided to spend several months of 1884-85 travelling throughout Spain. *Ocherki sovremennoi ispania* (St. Petersburg, 1889) (*Sketches of Contemporary Spain*) is a record of his impressions and one of its twenty-one chapters deals with Spain's leading novelists.

What follows is an annotated translation we have made of the most important section of the eighth chapter of Pavlovskii's *Sketches of Contemporary Spain*.²

SPANISH LITERATURE:

DON BENITO PÉREZ GALDÓS, COUNTESS PARDO BAZÁN,
DON JOSÉ MARÍA DE PEREDA, PEDRO SÁNCHEZ

Isaac Ia. Pavlovskii

One of my first visits in Madrid was to the young and renowned Pérez Galdós, the pride and glory of contemporary Spanish *belles lettres*. Fifteen years ago, the mother country of Cervantes represented a rare example of the decay and perversion of literary tastes. The reading public relished such delights as the novels of Paul de Kock, Xavier de Montepin, or of crude writers [such as] Fernández González, an artificial and pompous imitator of Walter Scott, the pretty but superficial Trueba, and others like them. The novels of Mme. Caballero and of Alarcón were rather an exception from the throng of the untalented. Caballero (she is not really Spanish, but German, and was educated in Germany) had a quite lovely descriptive talent and [acute] powers of observation. But all of her works are spoiled by a most crude and strained tendentiousness in an ultramontane cast; this zealous Catholic carried on a resolute battle against modernity, cherishing the impossible hope that Spain might return to the depths of the Middle Ages, having resurrected the significance of the clergy, feudalism, and knighthood.

Alarcón was not tendentious in the same sense as Caballero, but after the graceful *El sombrero de tres picos* he created nothing with vitality, and remained a pleasant and engaging author for dreamy Spanish ladies. Such was the state of Spanish literature in the last years of the reign of Isabella, when Pérez Galdós emerged with his «Episodios Nacionales,» which followed one another at intervals of several months in twenty-two volumes (sic). The young native of the Canary Islands set a daring goal for himself; to describe the brilliant and dramatic epoch of Spain's modern history in a series of true stories, scrupulously researched with documents and oral accounts —something akin to Erkman-Shatrian's «peasant's tales.» The undertaking was a success, and the author at once was noticed and singled out for distinction. Encouraged by the critics, Galdós then became engaged in a depiction of current public life in a series of full-length novels. These novels brought him European renown. They have been translated in many editions into English, German, Swedish, Danish, Dutch, Russian, and other languages. In them one sees Spanish life as it truly is, with all its joys and sorrows.

But they are not fantasies, these are pictures redolent with poetry and beauty. It has always seemed to me that there is something of Turgenev in these works.*

Galdós lives on the Plaza de Colón, one of the most poetic corners of new Madrid, at the end of the so-called Paseo del Prado; it is a long boulevard with leafy trees, with iron chairs stretching along on both sides. At about five in the evening, when the heat of the day subsides, all Madrid spills out onto that «Paseo,» the chairs are occupied by pretty Spanish women in their black dresses and coquettishly arranged mantillas with tucks of lace which marvellously accent the mat whiteness of their skin and the shining of their luxuriant black eyes.

Behind the chairs children play with their governesses, doing circular dances to strange, purely Asiatic melodies, which nevertheless pleasantly caress the listener's ear. Here too children's nurses pace about importantly, clad in black velveteen dresses trimmed with wide silver galloon; their necks, bodices, and backs are bedecked with large silver coins; on their heads are bright silk headdresses.

And in the center of the boulevard there extends an uninterrupted thread of open carriages of Madrid aristocracy, [and] riders pass by on spirited Andalusian horses. In Madrid there is no difference between the promenade of the common folk and that of better society. Cánovas del Castillo, a cigar in his teeth, chats with Castelar, and just to the side a crowd of peasants in picturesque Castilian dress listens to a blind guitarist singing historical songs and ballads with a jingling voice. This is very beautiful and unique.

At the end of Paseo del Prado is a broad square, at the center of which, on a high pedestal, is a huge marble statue of Columbus with a banner in his hands. The white color of that monument . . . [against] the background of the bushy greenery of the trees is so fine that you will not move from that

* In the last three numbers of *Vestnik Evropy* (*European Messenger*) for 1883 I published a translation of one of Galdós' best novels, *El amigo* [sic].

spot, once you have gotten there. Directly across from Columbus, in a building trimmed in pink and white, lives Galdós.

One ascends a wide staircase, brightly illuminated by large windows with varicolored glass, to the third floor. On the right is a large door in the middle of which there is a brass plate with open-work ornamentation; there is another one like it on the other side, only it opens.

One rings. In a minute steps are heard; the inner [brass] plate is opened and two black eyes look you over suspiciously.

—Quién está (sic) (Who is it)?

I give my name. The door opens and a serving girl, as like a girl of the Poltava province as two peas in a pod, appears on the threshold.

—¿Señor Galdós?

—Está aquí —pasa usted (sic).

I enter a modestly furnished parlor with several oleogravures and upholstered furniture. My host himself came in a minute. He is a very well-built, slender young man (he is thirty-nine, but he seems much younger), with a very swarthy face, close-cropped hair, and a small mustache. His dark eyes shine with intelligence and good nature. Through correspondence, I had earlier become somewhat acquainted with this representative of contemporary Spanish *belle lettres*. Having found out who I was, he accepts me as an old acquaintance and our conversation goes in a simple and unconstrained manner.

—Turguenev's death was a terrible blow to me, says Galdós. He was my great teacher; I know all his works, and I loved him as a friend, although I never met him personally. He wrote to me twice and I cherish his letters like holy relics. You must know that he is very famous here.

I informed Galdós that several of his works have been translated into Russian. That made him very happy.

—We thought until now that Spain is only a land of guitars and mantillas; we have learned from your books that you have the same joys, the same sorrows as [people] everywhere.

—It is the same everywhere, especially now, when civilization is striving to equalize all peoples, to deprive them of anything original. It is sad that diversity is being lost—but it is unavoidable. Spain is a country which has been slandered, primarily by French writers, such as Dumas. It has preserved many peculiarities, but they are not easy for a foreigner to grasp. Therefore, those who write about Spain compose fictions rather than tell the truth. The one man who faithfully described our country was Washington Irving, but his book has become obsolete.

I shall mention parenthetically that this is the same book which the late Mr. Botkin translated [into Russian] with several changes, and which is so famous under his name.

To my question whether the realist literary school had many adherents in Spain, he answered:

—Among the general public there are few; for the most part they still read any kind of fantastic rubbish, but the youth and the educated classes are beginning to be interested in realism. The neophyte writers are already taking a new road; we have several young persons who are developing into good writers, for example, Ortega y Munilla, Palacio Valdés, and the young

woman of letters, Countess Emilia Pardo Bazán. The latter is a very interesting person. She is a zealous Catholic, and at the same time the most vociferous propagandist of naturalism in Spain. Last year she published a book: *The Stirring Question (Cuestión palpitante)*, which would do honor not only to a woman, but also a man, and even to an educated specialist. It reveals in the author a colossal erudition, a clarity, and a force of thought far surpassing the ordinary. Pardo Bazán is also the author of several novels: *Un viaje de novios*, *La tribuna*, and others, written with great talent and in beautiful language.

—Do Spanish books sell well?

—Alas, no. Our public loves to read, but they do not buy books. A book which will be read by thirty thousand persons will sell eight hundred or a thousand copies. Furthermore, we have no publishers; an author publishes his book himself, at his own risk and peril. It is rarely that you will find a man who cultivates literature as a profession. Our renowned Juan Valera, quite beloved of the public, is a professional diplomat; others are professors, live on income from their estates, or are engaged in trade, as does, for example, one of our best realists, Señor Pereda, who has a soap and perfume factory.

I became acquainted with Countess Pardo Bazán in Paris. Daily, in mid-winter, her original figure appears in the Parisian salons and literary circles. She is very dark and stout, with a handsome Roman profile, and with a pincez on her nose. She is an incorrigible debater and chatterer, and turns up everywhere: at Mme. Adan's salon or that of the «priest-gobbler» Mme. Garnier, at *premières*, at boring balls given by ministers or the President of the Republic, at gatherings of young writers, at the Goncourts's Sunday mornings, or at the intimate soirées of Don Carlos's agent, the Count de Aguirre. On weekdays until four you will invariably meet Doña Emilia in the main reading room of the National Library immersed in reading enormous folios. Mrs. Prado Bazán is herself a novelist, but in leisure hours she becomes a critic, spreading fear and terror in the Spanish literary world. Recently, she has added another enormous task to those activities, one that will occupy no fewer than ten years of her life: she is writing a history of Spanish literature in ten large volumes. Mrs. Pardo undoubtedly will see her task to its successful end, as she is but 33, and truly has an energy of iron.

In Spain, as anywhere, it is difficult for a woman to occupy a respected place in the literary world. Spanish women receive very poor educations in general —indeed it is possible to say more precisely that they receive none at all. Moreover, as in all countries where life is concentrated on the street and in the cafés, a Spanish woman leads a life of imprisonment, comes rarely into society, and her freedom is reduced to having the right in the evenings to talk from her balcony with her *novio*, or to dance [sic] at *tertulias*. A woman's mixing into social life and literature is met by Spaniards with scorn and derisive laughter. Even such an important European figure as the recently deceased Fernán Caballero, because of those circumstances, was able to begin her literary career only in old age, under the cloak of a pseudonym and under the personal protection of Queen Isabella.

Mrs. Pardo Bazán quite successfully circumvented all of these obstacles. The daughter of a hereditary Galician aristocrat (who was an ardent republican and a very enlightened person), she grew up in his ancient castle, in the country not far from Coruña, and before age fifteen had read his entire huge library. At fifteen she married a Galician, Señor de Quiroga, and soon thereafter this daughter of a republican threw herself into the maelstrom of the Carlist Uprising. She quickly attained such influence in that party of peasants and priests, and agitated so vehemently, that she became one of its leaders not only in Galicia, but in all Spain. Don Carlos entrusted to her the purchase of 30,000 guns in London, and risking her neck in the face of bandits and government forces, she crossed the Portuguese border at night in order to carry out the assignment. At that time she had behind her waistband several hundred thousand francs in (gold) Spanish doubloons, which turned her bosom into one large wound. But [she said] for a «holy cause,» it is flattering to suffer thus.

Returning home from London via Paris, where at that time the pretender to the Spanish throne was leading a life of leisure, the young woman nearly paid with her head for her allegiance to Carlist ideas: a prepared cell awaited her at the Coruña prison, and the military authorities were preparing to have her shot. A friend of the family, the governor of Coruña, who knew her as a child, daily sent his adjutant with messages, «imploring Emilia to go into hiding, for, in the unpleasant event that he would be forced to have her arrested, he would not be able to answer for the consequences.» But the young zealot steadfastly answered each time: «Let Don Francisco do his duty. I will fulfill mine.» In the end, however, the government did not dare adopt «stern measures» concerning the daughter of a tried and true republican, and, like it or not, they were forced to close their eyes to her agitational activity.

After the final suppression of the uprising, Mme. Pardo, somewhat disenchanted with Carlism, first emerged on the literary scene with a critical-historical essay on the life and work of the mystical poet Feijóo [sic]. She went over the proofs of this, her first piece, while lying abed after childbirth. The essay, despite its overly specialized [frame of] interest, met with great success, and even received first prize at the *Juegos Florales* in Galicia. This work already displays the basic qualities of the authoress's literary productions: the uncommonly pure and powerful language, the ardently polemical tone, and the boldness to carry her thought to its conclusion —no matter what. The clerical-Carlist press joyfully welcomed the young debutante, hoping to have in her a talented defenderess of its ideas. It was justified in thinking that, because Doña Emilia continued to remain an avid Catholic and spent her time . . . [aside] from household tasks and literary endeavors, in conversations with Franciscan monks. Imagine the horror of the good fathers when one fine day the novel *Pasqual López* went on sale, a novel signed *en toutes lettres* with the name of the «holy woman.» This was quite scandalous in itself. But the scandal was all the more colossal in that the novel was naturalistic, based wholly on observation, and frank in its language and imagery. Moreover, in the foreward, with which Spanish authors are wont to preface their books, Mme. Pardo came out openly as a defender of the French naturalists. And this in Spain, where novelists heretofore had diluted their bom-

bastich chatter in rose water, and did not dare present heroes except in high positions and with sonorous titles. Only two persons stood as exceptions in that crowd: Pérez Galdós and Pereda. Though, indeed, all so-called honorable people hated the former, recognizing him only as the author of the *Episodios Nacionales*, and the latter was read by no one. A hail of excoriation and diverse opprobrium came down on the head of the young countess. But she remained steadfast. Continuing to live in her castle, raising her children which she herself breast fed, she soon brought out another novel: *Un viaje de novios*. It should be remarked that the Spanish word «novio» is the Spanish for [the Russian] *zbeniks* [bridegroom], and *novobrachnii* [newlywed]. Mme. Pardo used it in the latter sense. Her task was, in describing a trip abroad by newlyweds, to give a series of types and scenes of foreign life, and thus more sharply define the peculiarities of the Spanish character. With regard to artistry, this novel lacks plot; it is predominantly descriptive, even somewhat tedious and dry. But Doña Emilia's enemies, without having read the work itself, cavilled at its title, and proclaimed their countrywoman a proponent of vice. Various cardinals and bishops, who but recently had been prepared to canonize the young authoress for her pilgrimages to monasteries and participation in the [Carlist] uprisings, now turned to her with pastoral admonitions on account of her «delusion.» This time the shouts of the benign personages reached the mark, as it were: Mme. Pardo published an extensive study on St. Francis of Assisi, written with deeply religious and impassioned feeling. Not only does she exult in the pure life of her beloved saint, not only does she devote tens of pages to a lyrical eulogy of his good works, but she indignantly assails those scholars who, for one reason or another, deny the authenticity of St. Francis's miracle working. The clerical press and all the Catholic clergy brought about the unbelievable success of this book, dedicated to the memory of Pius IX. Suffice it to say that the Havana monastery alone bought up 600 copies of *St. Francis* on the day of publication. More than ten cardinals and bishops, who read the book in manuscript, affixed their blessings and prefaces to it. The first edition sold out quickly, and then the French publisher Garnier purchased the rights to publish a special edition of the book for South America. All elevated Mme. Pardo to the heavens for having returned to the path of truth.

In fact, it was nothing of the sort. As she was, so she remained: at once a faithful Catholic and a vehement naturalist in matters of art. When I say «naturalist,» one should not be given to understand a Zolaist; there is absolutely nothing unseemly in Mme. Pardo's books. She is a devotee of Flaubert, Goncourt, Daudet, Turgenev, and Tolstoy, and in them prizes above all their truthfulness and knowledge of life. The success which *St. Francis* garnered was not at all to the author's liking; her militant and forthright character was sickened by the thought that she was taken to be a traitor to her convictions for the sake of popularity and gain. Therefore, several months after the appearance of the above-mentioned book, she brought out another, quite small in size, but which effected a genuine revolution in the Spanish literary world. Several years have passed since then, but they are still talking about that booklet in Spain; swords still clash for and against it. It is entitled *Cuestión palpitante* and contains a series of analyses of works of French and

Spanish naturalists: Galdós, Pereda, and several *diorum minorum*. On this canvas Mme. Pardo lays out her *profession de foi*. I decidedly do not know a book on this question which is more brilliantly, intelligently, and energetically written. As if with a cudgel's blows, she smashes old theories and lays low idols, and their pedestals as well. Her analyses and, if you will, her erudition, are striking for their refinement, broad scope, and keenness of argument. Without any pedantry —on the contrary, with a great deal of humor, sometimes with passion— in the heat of an argument, she unostentatiously reveals how enormously well-read she is, [and shows] her most detailed familiarity with the ancient and modern literatures of all peoples. The thoughts expressed in that work, certainly, are not at all new in themselves; but one must journey [in thought] to Spain, where backwardness in literary views is truly monstrous, and where routine and common opinion in the Tartuffian sense reign with all their might, in order to understand the kind of storm that could be raised by a defense of realism, particularly on the lips of a woman Carlist. And Mme. Pardo did achieve her goal: she turned the attention of the literary youth to a whole series of major writers heretofore unknown in Spain, made them study [these writers], and, it might be said, opened a new era in Spanish literature. In 1887 she published an entire volume on Russian literature, which she presented as a series of public lectures on Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy, in the autumn of that year at the Ateneo. It is a very curious and cleverly written book. Pardo Bazán's importance is now publicly acknowledged, and this was made manifest at a banquet given in her honor in Madrid in the spring of 1885. What is especially attractive in this gifted woman is that her literary activity does not run counter to her maternal duties and does not deprive her of even one of the pleasant qualities of a woman of society. She herself tutors her children at their lessons, attends to household matters, and is always gay, unaffected, and witty. Several years ago, King Alfonso came to Coruña; the city municipality, hoping somehow to mark the occasion of his visit, arranged a grand ball in the town hall, to which the king was invited.

—And will Pardo Bazán be there? —asked Alfonso.

—If it is pleasing to your majesty... answered the mayor, surprised at this wish (because Pardo Bazán still had a reputation as a Carlist).

—Without fail, ask her to be there. I very much want to make her acquaintance.

When on the appointed evening the king entered the hall, he went directly to Pardo Bazán's side and chatted the whole evening away with her. Almost from the first words he entrusted the most intimate things to her. He said, for example:

—My sister Eulalia (who later married Duke Montpensier) is a notorious coquette; when we are in public both my wife and I must be with her constantly.

Continuing this sort of candor, the king suddenly asked:

—Tell me, what is your opinion of me, only candidly, without flattery.

—I have already expressed my own opinion of you, your majesty, in my novel *La tribuna* (a most favorable report).

—That was a published opinion; you flattered me; I want to know what you do in fact think of me.

—Your majesty, answered Pardo, smiling, —You are intent on my telling you something impertinent.

—Precisely, precisely, —tell me something impertinent.

—Very well, your majesty, they say that you are a great *granuja* (a word with a double meaning: a rascal, a naughty boy, or a bastard).

—And you are another, answered the king with a chuckle, because you tell me things I like.

—Is it true, asked Alfonso a little while later, that some novelist has described my palace?

—Oh, your majesty, that novelist is Galdós, your glory. Haven't you read him?

—I have, but not everything. Could you loan me his latest novel? I would like to read it.

And Pardo Bazán, whose library was out in the country, was required to buy the novel the next day (it cost two francs!), in order to present it to the king.

I have never met Don José María de Pereda. He leads a life of a recluse in his village near Santander, dividing his time between managing his estate, a perfume factory which he recently opened, and literary endeavors. At the present time he is a man of sixty, dry, tall, and with the physiognomy of a Don Quixote. His way of life and his outlook make him a typical Spanish landowner of the good old days—a simple, devout, practical man of the soil, nurturing the greatest disdain for the din and tinsel of Madrid life. Just so is Pereda the writer. He made his debut at the end of the '50s with the volume *Escenas montaÑesas*, which in any other country—indeed, in Spain at another time—would have brought him fame immediately. His scenes from the life of peasants and the fishermen of Santander are depicted with rare truthfulness and power; it is impossible in Spanish literature to point to anything which might compare to them. His style is sober and condensed, a trifle archaic, and recalls Cervantes's style. Pereda loves an ironic tone; but his irony is seldom malevolent—only when he draws pictures of life in the capital. In drawing characters and scenes from the life of the common folk or the generally downtrodden and unfortunate, there is perceived beneath his irony a profound feeling of pity and compassion. The shortcoming of the bulk of Pereda's novels is their tendentiousness. A Carlist by conviction, although he has never taken a part in militant politics, he tries to foist these opinions on his readers. This circumstance—in addition to his taking nearly all his subjects from the provincial life of Santander [and] intentionally constricting his sphere of observation (for Pereda the principle is that it is possible to describe only that which one has personally seen)—serves as a reason why in Madrid, for a long time, they intentionally ignored his very great talent. When the capital's critics did chance to drop a word about him, it was only to deride him and to tell him something unpleasant.

—Mr. Pereda —the prime writer of his own rural area, was how one influential critic expressed himself about him rather recently.

The first book, the one which made Pereda famous and which caused talk about him even abroad, was his novel *Pedro Sánchez*. It is indubitably one of the masterpieces of modern Spanish literature, a sort of Spanish *Dead Souls*. Its French critic, Albert Savine, in an excellent study included in his book *Les étapes d'un naturaliste* (1885, Paris, Nouvelle librairie parisienne), calls this novel «a nineteenth-century *Gil Blas*.»³ The book is fully worthy of that name in the sense that it presents a broad picture of the mores of contemporary Spain. In it, as in a kaleidoscope, there pass before the reader all strata of Spanish society before, during, and after the 1868 revolution: political and literary worlds, the aristocracy, the petty bourgeoisie of the province and the capital, the world of petty bureaucrats, bohemians, and the like. All facets of Pereda's talent are concentrated in this novel, and therefore I shall permit myself to analyze them in some detail.

[A fourteen-page plot summary —but no critical analysis— of Pereda's *Pedro Sánchez* concludes the chapter.]

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NOTES

¹ H. Chonon Berkowitz, *La biblioteca de Benito Pérez Galdós* (Las Palmas, 1951), p. 199. Alexandre Zviguilsky also reported having seen two letters from Turgenev to Galdós, «Tourguéniev et Galdós», *Revue de Littérature Comparée*, 41 (1967), 119. These letters have since disappeared; Zviguilsky and I have both searched for them without success.

² Prof. Chamberlin is pleased to thank his former teacher, Sam F. Anderson (Univ. of Kansas) for valuable help with this translation.

³ Albert Savine also translated Pardo Bazán's *La cuestión palpitante* in 1886 and wrote a preface to J. Lugol's French translation of Galdós' *Doña Perfecta* in 1885.