

NATURE AND CULTURE IN *PEPITA JIMÉNEZ*

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The socialist politician and post-Franco Mayor of Madrid, Enrique Tierno Galván, wrote in an essay “Don Juan Valera o el buen sentido” of what he called Valera’s “mentalidad empresarial,” which we might translate as a “managerial mind,” and which I have linked in a recently published piece (Introduction) to Valera’s experience as a diplomat, whose profession would typically involve working behind the scenes, obtaining agreements and managing political relationships.¹ Towards the end of *Pepita Jiménez*, but chronologically nearer its beginning, the *cacique* Don Pedro writes to his brother the Dean concerning the *cacique*’s plans to arrange a marriage between his son Luis, a seminarian, and Pepita, the young widow of the title. He sees the two most potent allies to further his plans as Pepita’s housekeeper Antoñona, who is about to be encouraged by Don Pedro to fan the flames of the young couple’s mutual passion, and the local priest, the Padre Vicario, who has acted as an innocent go-between, praising the one to the other in his talks with both, and unwittingly facilitating proxy communications between the two. This is how Don Pedro sums up his designs in the letter: “Tal poderosa combinación de medios naturales y artificiales debe dar un resultado infallible” (202). Another hint as to how Valera constructed his story of love and marriage in the agricultural and horticultural surroundings of a town in the province of Córdoba lies in the way that Pepita’s first husband Don Gumersindo is described by Luis in his opening letter to his uncle, the Dean: “será difícil hallar sobre la tierra persona alguna en cuyo mantenimiento, conservación y bienestar hayan tenido menos que afanarse la madre naturaleza y la industria humana” (145). From these two quotations, with their references, implied or explicit, to the intelligent cultivation of the available resources of nature and artifice, we can see how Valera in *Pepita Jiménez* created a dialectic between “la madre naturaleza” and the products of “la industria humana”: here, in the mutually-fuelled passion of the two young lovers and the social sanctioning of their shared desire, through the benign orchestration of the *cacique* of the area.

Jo Labanyi, in a densely argued chapter of her book (265-98), views Valera’s attitude in *Pepita Jiménez* as a defensive espousal of “countryside as cultivated nature” (284), blotting out in the process the uncomfortable and troublesome realities of a socially regressive rural Andalusia (288-90). We have already suggested in our first paragraph that there is indeed a strong manipulative element present in the novel, which Harriet Turner (349-50) believes works to its detriment, in the sections “Paralipómenos” and “Cartas de mi hermano”, where, she contends, Valera takes too much control as the “sujeto enteramente enterado de todo”, and we thereby lose the spontaneous if naïve worldview of Luis in the novel’s first half. At least we can say that Turner sees the novel as a kind of dialectic between spontaneity and manipulation, even if in her view the latter unfortunately wins the battle. No doubt, Valera was a sharply opinionated man, to judge by his letters, but I take him at face value when he describes himself in his Appleton Preface to

the novel as feeling “simpático a todos” when writing *Pepita Jiménez*, and hence ready to see the best in, and seek the best from, his reconstruction of his natal surroundings. Darker themes will emerge in *Las ilusiones del doctor Faustino* (1875), and *Doña Luz* (1878), for example; as Galdós also explores in *Doña Perfecta* (1876), where fatal imbalances between culture and nature surface. Valera, without becoming the puppet master that Thackeray seemed to have claimed for himself at the end of *Vanity Fair*, is able to hold the ring between the presentation of a rural, down-to-earth life involved in the cultivation and management of nature’s resources, including its cultural customs, and an opening for an appreciation of other types of “higher” cultivation of the arts and crafts that complement and enhance the natural world, this dialectic being mirrored in the language used by Valera in the novel.

The supposed narrator-cum-editor of the story sets out his stall immediately on introducing himself, and his role, in the “Prologue”. The severe, moralistic Latin tag that the Dean has given to the tale of young love, *Nescit labi virtus*, is replaced by the name of the heroine of the story, Pepita Jiménez: the cultured but cut-and-dried Latin phrase is demoted by the editor to the status of an epigraph, taking second place to the new title that focuses on a young woman in love. Valera also slyly suggests through the editor that the Dean’s papers have remained unread over the past few years since his death, because of the unappealing aura that the contents have given off by the presence of the Latin phrase, making it seem a “cosa de sermón o de teología.”² With this remark, Valera insinuates that his own story will not be emanating from the pulpit or a theological tome, but will create a more agreeably personal form, at least in Part I, that of letters written with “natural sencillez” (137): the spontaneity of a personal letter is here juxtaposed with that of the much more cultivated species of sermon-writing, or its close relative the theological treatise.

In the Prologue the editor goes on to state that while the contents of “*Cartas de mi sobrino*” could emanate from a frustrated literary ambition on the part of the Dean, they are, he concludes, copies of real letters, whose originals may have been lost, because the Dean probably “*rasgó, quemó o [las] devolvió a sus dueños.*” The editor at this point therefore opts for the literal rather than literary truth of the letters in his keeping, with a subsequent change of mind, however, as we note later in this paragraph. Happy with his claim that he has done his homework on the contents —“*mirando el asunto con más detención*”—the editor decides “*sin más averiguaciones*” to go ahead with the publication of the manuscript. This haste to publish is recalled in his later intervention, after Pepita and Luis have consummated their affair. The editor admits at this point that his first perusal of the manuscript is in need of revision, as regards the question of the authorship of “*Paralipómenos*,” because “*entonces aún no había leído con detención el manuscrito*” (179). There then follows a discussion of arguments for and against the case for the Dean’s authorship (Ruano) with no conclusive evidence either way, followed by the inclusion of a note from the Dean, glossing the transformation of Luis from religious mystical aspirant to passionate lover of Pepita. At this point the editor admits that he has suppressed many “*glosas y comentarios*” written by the Dean on the manuscript. Here again we sense that Valera is playing off the element of spontaneity—but on this occasion it is the Dean’s piece, written, as the editor notes, “*con desenfado íntimo*”—against the editor’s own doubts, rectifications and interventions, the spontaneous and the reflective in tandem. The reflective is the product of cultural selection (to create an up-to-

date work of art, the editor notes, inconsistently accepting here the argument for the manuscript as a novel, “no están de moda las novelas anotadas o glosadas”), while on the other hand the gloss he decides to publish is a spontaneous reaction that has been composed “como para él solo,” that is, for no one but the Dean himself to read.

A comment by the editor in the Prologue should also give us pause, as regards Luis’s education for the priesthood, when he tells us that Luis was “educado al lado del señor Deán, su tío, y en el seminario”(4). The use of the copulative “y,” and indeed the comma after “tío,” allow us to speculate that the role of Dean of the Cathedral and that of Rector of the seminary were separate positions.³ If this was so, then Luis could have lived with his uncle—he is his *tío carnal*—and been a day boarder at the seminary. Whatever may be the case, the phrase encapsulates that part of the double life of Luis, “at home” with his uncle in the Deanery, and attending for classes, recreation etc., in the seminary. An unusual arrangement, perhaps, for the time, but if we skip to the letter written by the Dean to Don Pedro we will be struck by the number of times that the Dean refers to Luis as “Luisito” in that letter (198-99): he appears to be as much a family member as a spiritual protégé. From the evidence of the exchange of letters between the brothers, Don Pedro wanted nothing more than a decent education for his son —“te lo entregué para que lo educases,” but that, as he writes to his brother, “[t]ú fuiste más allá de mis esperanzas y aun de mis deseos” (199-200), and, it is to be assumed, arranged for Luis’s admission to the seminary without the father’s consent: Luis’s spiritual and natural fathers have evidently had their conflicts in the past.

As just indicated, Valera can also use the close assimilation of paternity present in both the secular and religious term “father.” Thus, while the Dean employs the normal “mi querido hermano” when addressing his older brother, Don Pedro can extend the relationship in his reply of “Hermano querido y venerable padre spiritual.” This dual situation is also neatly summed up in Luis’s opening greeting to his uncle in his first letter, “Querido tío y venerado maestro”: both sides of his life, his blood relationship with the Dean and his status as student or intellectual apprentice are juxtaposed and coupled in this single phrase. Later on in the letter to the Dean, Pedro imagines the difference to him that it would mean if Luis, instead of “bringing home” “varios neófitos,” were to present him with his and Pepita’s children: “[¿]no será mejor que Luisito predique en casa y me saque en abundancia una serie de catecumenillos rubios, sonrosados, con ojos como los de Pepita[?]” (201). Here, the religious world of preaching and conversion is approximated with simple metaphorical ease by Valera to that of marriage, parenthood and grandparenthood, and the author misses few opportunities to show in *Pepita Jiménez* how states that seem worlds apart could coexist in ways unsuspected. (See Lott [208-12] for Valera’s ability to create “intricate relations” in the novel.) In the *cacique*’s letter the emphasis is on the natural bloodline from Pedro to Luis, as the former fears that if Luis were to bring home religious catechumens from abroad he would be afraid of catching an infection from them, and therefore would not feel able to hold them close to him as he would his own flesh and blood.

In the first sentence of his first letter to his uncle, Luis talks of “tantos años de ausencia” from his father, the Vicario, and his relatives and friends from the place of his birth. Immediately the note of social life built around family and friends is struck, and it is this grouping that will stand as an alternative to the single, celibate life that he has just left behind. Next, it is to the world of nature that he is drawn, as he describes his reactions to coming home: “lo que ahora

comprendo y estimo mejor es el campo de por aquí" (5), so much so that he devotes two hours a day to walking through the semi-cultivated terrain of the *huerta*.⁴ After this we are told that the women who nursed and reared him have come to see him at home. The ritual of kisses and embraces so natural to Mediterranean countries we must assume has been absent from his seminary life, but now "Hasta cinco mujeres [...] me han abrazado y besado": the circle of natural affection and belonging is closing around Luis, and the books that he has brought from the seminary are left unread. And being called "Luisito" by his nannies is not only a term of endearment: they are convinced that he is physically undernourished and ply him with the natural produce of the area, not only in his own home but through invitations to other houses, among which is the house of Pepita Jiménez, and so the plot thickens.

There follows a potted history of this young woman's life to date. Of course, the reader needs to know this, but the Dean was brought up in the area, and might be expected to know much more than we do. Thus, Luis is able to interject comments in his first letter, such as "como usted sabe" (8), "y supongo que debe interesarle" (12) or "cosas que acaso usted ya sepa" (12) when mentioning Pepita's family. The letters, then, retain the thread of a series of family news, at least before the note of high drama when Luis's sentimental interest in Pepita is introduced, as well as being a line of communication and confession from the seminarian to his spiritual mentor ("confieso a usted" [14], "Casi no me atrevo a confesarme a mí mismo una cosa"[16]), who has helped him to arrive at the discipline of "un escrupuloso examen de conciencia" (16).

Another of the ways that Valera can compose variations on the theme of the social constructs of family ties and associated responsibilities that overlap with strong passions is Don Pedro's early plan to make Pepita his wife. This will provoke some claim of responsibility on Luis's part, since in such an arrangement Pepita would become not only his stepmother, but as he reminds the Dean, "cuñada de usted" (149). Valera brings the two elements together, allowing Luis full rein to "inspect" Pepita and her surroundings, and become more drawn into an amorous engagement with her. His account is relayed to the Dean, who is told that one of Luis's best informants on the character of Pepita is the Padre Vicario, "grande amigo de la casa y padre espiritual de Pepita" (24). Valera must have enjoyed winding and unwinding this dizzying skein of relationships, which involve a spiritual director and seminarian, formed by an uncle and nephew, the former also the Father Confessor of the latter, a much more intimate relationship than that of spiritual advisor; and another spiritual director, the Vicario, who is a great friend of, and also confessor to Pepita, his protégée. Both of these counsellors are involved to a greater or lesser extent in keeping the lines of communication wide open between the as yet only distant lovers. (Carmen Martín Gaité even includes the Dean in her list of "Celestinas" in the novel.)

Azaña (liv) quotes Valera when the latter writes about what he describes as "la novela 'que podemos llamar *psicológica*,'" and the tangled web of family, friendship, spiritual and ecclesiastical relationships between these four characters aptly captures this aspect of *Pepita Jiménez*, in which much of the motivation and action stems from a complication of social relationships that might seem natural but are cleverly contrived by the author. One might think that the Padre Vicario, in any manner that could be conceived of as proper verisimilitude, would not confide Pepita's secrets to Luis, or indeed that Luis would not then go on to confide them to his uncle, but present or future ties of blood and close friendship are so bound up together that "spiritual"

discussion can go in tandem with social configurations, actual and proposed.

The question as to why the Dean sent Luis home in the months immediately prior to his ordination is left open. Ostensibly it is to “pasar algún tiempo con mi padre” (153). Yet in the previous sentence Luis had referred to the presence of “algo en mí del ardor de la juventud y de la vehemencia de las pasiones propias de dicha edad” (152): here, the obedience that is to be given to his spiritual director is overlaid with the presence of not just passions, but vehement ones, appropriate to his age perhaps, but inappropriate for one destined to the celibate priesthood. A seemingly casual example of this skein of relationships emerges in the “Epilogue,” where the deathbed scene of the Padre Vicario is described by Don Pedro. It is not the local doctor or a housekeeper but Pepita who is at the head of the bed, and it is she who closes the priest’s eyes and makes sure also that his mouth is properly closed⁵: we note, too, that although death may be in the natural cycle of things, its presentation is also part of the social compact.

Luis’s letter of 8 April encapsulates in the description of the irrigation system in Pepita’s *huerta* the blending of natural effects and human intervention which is central to the novel, not forgetting that it is Luis who is describing the management of the water in the area:

[A]nteayer tarde fuimos a la huerta de Pepita. Es hermoso sitio, de lo más ameno y pintoresco que puede imaginarse. El riachuelo que riega casi todas estas huertas, sangrado por mil acequias, pasa al lado de la que visitamos; se forma allí una presa, y cuando se suelta el agua sobrante del riego, cae en un hondo barranco poblado en ambas márgenes de álamos blancos y negros, mimbrones, adelfas floridas y otros árboles frondosos. La cascada, de agua limpia y transparente, se derrama en el fondo, formando espuma, y luego sigue su curso tortuoso por un cauce que la naturaleza misma ha abierto, esmaltando sus orillas de mil hierbas y flores, y cubriéndolas ahora de multitud de violetas. (33-34)

The description is of Pepita’s *huerta*, and its agreeable and picturesque impact is noted. The river, by contrast, is described as a “riachuelo,” a poor volume of water that needs to be properly managed for the work that it is called upon to do. This is achieved by damming the river to enable the build-up of water to flow back into the irrigation channels; the subsequent drop when the dam is opened creates the rushing waterfall effect, with foaming water cascading over the artificial precipice, and it then follows a meandering and more natural course out to the limits of Pepita’s garden.

One of the similes used to describe Pepita after her time of love with Luis is that of the containment that nature visits upon trees in hard winters, which causes their leaves to shoot forward when the ice and snow have disappeared:

La bulliciosa actividad y travesura que una madre adusta y un marido viejo habían contenido y como represado en ella hasta entonces, se diría que brotaron como de repente en su alma, como retoñan las hojas verdes cuando las nieves y los hielos de un invierno riguroso y dilatado han retardado su germinación. (174)

The same could be said analogously of Luis and his time in the seminary, and in the passage from the *huerta* that we have quoted we see that what Luis describes is a subliminal image of his own

life and that of Pepita passing before him, in which they have both had a surfeit of responsibility, but have yet to find the release from the damming up of their lives, the one in the seminary, the other in an arranged marriage of filial obedience. The opening out after the rush of passion that is yet to come, appears to Luis as “limpia y transparente,” proceeding to the more tranquil, natural and fuller waters that will flow gently along to the boundaries of Pepita’s life.

This latter part, of course, has yet to be realized in the novel, but towards its end Luis will give us a revealing image or cluster of images in his long dialogue with Pepita that enables us to analyse his account of this part of the *huerta* with more precision. The basic initial dialectic between himself and Pepita is that of Luis’s extravagant imagination in contraposition with Pepita’s more down-to-earth view of life as based on experience. Luis, disdaining every obstacle, romantically imagines his soul as a swashbuckling hero, bursting free from captivity and leveling all before him in his flight to God:

Ingentes peñascos, montañas enteras, si sirven de obstáculo a que se dilate el fuego que de repente arde en el seno de la tierra, vuelan desechos por el aire, dando lugar y abriendo paso a la amontonada pólvora de la mina o a las inflamadas materias del volcán en erupción atronadora. Así, o con mayor fuerza, lanzaba en mi espíritu todo el peso del universo y de la hermosura creada, que se le ponía encima y le aprisionaba, impidiéndole volar a Dios, como a su centro. (305)

Returning to the *huerta*, one can see from this later quotation how Luis’s eye is attracted to the excitement of the foaming waterfall, an unconscious metaphor for his own imagined life as a priest. Yet, to his as yet not fully understood view of his own life, it is this final portion of the river’s progress that will create the real flowers and fruits of the earth in abundance, not the disdained “hermosura creada” of his imaginings. Later in the same letter, after having said some severe things about Pepita, he wonders whether he is in fact talking about himself: “¿Acaso, al creer que veo su alma, no es la mía la que veo? (39)”; unwittingly, as in the river scene, their lives are coming so close together that it is difficult to maintain perspective, and the mind of the narrator of the letters blends in with that of their main subject in subliminal ways. The Dean calls Luis a “vano espíritu poético,” but the latter’s eye and visual memory are sharp enough to enumerate the various trees, both for giving shade for walking, and fruit and nuts for eating, and the flowers that cover the banks, the useful and the sweet clustered together, recalling the Horatian dictum for the best poetry, “omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci,” in Valera’s mixing of human invention and nature’s offerings. One notices, too, in the description of the river the use of the metaphor from enameling to describe the herbs and flowers: in his letter of 20 April Luis will cast his eye on Pepita’s beautiful teeth, “el nacarado esmalte de los dientes que descubre a menudo cuando sonrío,” hastening to add, “y otros mil atractivos que Dios ha puesto en ella” (52).

After the dramatic encounter between Pepita and Luis in her *huerta*, the Pozo de la Solana, the letter of 4 May ends on a quiet note with a description of the ceremony in Pepita’s house to celebrate the feast of the Finding of the True Cross, traditionally held on 3 May. Chamberlin and Hardin (73) have mentioned the origins of the traditions of the Finding of the True Cross as those of dancing around the flower-decorated maypole, with ribbons tied to its apex, part of the primeval Rites of Spring. In *Pepita Jiménez* there is a similar ribbon dance performed around

the Cross, festooned with flowers. This piece of *costumbrismo* is not just a rescue for posterity by Valera of an intriguing blend of a Catholic custom and its prehistoric source. The religious significance of the ceremony of the Cross in the novel is unavoidable, because the eight children who act the part of the seven Sacraments (two for matrimony) and who dance around the Cross, are dressed in the representative costumes of the Sacraments: Luis takes care to itemize each of these costumes and describes how each child is dressed. The most significant aspect of the ceremony, however, is that it takes place, not in church, but in one of Pepita's grand reception rooms, thereby removing it from the ambit of the conventionally sacred and into the realm of polite society, where instead of the church organ there is a piano, albeit to be played by the church organist, who is praised by Luis for playing "con bastante destreza." The dance, because it is done reverently and with great precision produces "un espectáculo sencillo y poético" (70).⁶ Luis understandably stresses its religious side and describes it as "más que baile [...] una serie de reverencias, pasos, evoluciones y genuflexiones."

The preference for a quasi-secular cultural event, in which the Cross is smothered with spring flowers, over the dramatic Holy Week ceremonies is retrospectively highlighted by Valera's deliberate inclusion of the latter in his novel *Juanito la larga*, where he devotes a whole chapter to the customs commemorating the Passion of Christ.⁷ The ceremony of the Cross, therefore, stands out contrastingly with the omission by Valera in our novel, of the Holy Week and Easter commemoration of that year. It is inconceivable that Luis would not have commented on the rites, ceremonies and processions of Holy Week in the district, in one of his letters to the Dean, but Valera has instead highlighted two Christian festivals in the novel, the Finding of the Cross in "Cartas de mi sobrino" and St John's Eve in "Paralipómenos," that have their origins in pre-Christian fertility rites and associated summer solstice celebrations.

The emphasis on the artistic rendering of the ceremony of the Cross is typical of Pepita's household, where Luis notes her extreme socialization of the domestic animals: her dog is "una perrita de lanas muy lavada" (160), and where the cats are "mansos y sociables" (García Bajo 70). For the children, the celebratory evening of the Cross takes on the air of a fancy-dress parade, an opportunity to dress up and then to go home "muy regalados y agasajados"; and when they are gone the adults treat themselves to suitable refreshments, which are also duly itemized by Luis. Pepita marks this date as the first day when she will have left off her mourning dress, put on lighter clothing, and will entertain nightly from now on. In general, the ceremony of the Cross, as depicted in the novel, is more a cultural and social event than a religious one, whose origins in the dance around the maypole suggest male and female fertility rites of courtship and mating that have begun to find their way surreptitiously into the lives of Luis and Pepita.⁸ Hence, in the next letter Luis begins to question whether he might be in love with Pepita: "¿Será esto amor?, me pregunto" (74).

The supposed dialogue of farewell between Luis and Pepita in "Paralipómenos" might rank among the most cultured forms of such conversations in the history of the Spanish novel. Valera has brought this about by the bizarre circumstances of the crisis in the relationship between the passionate young widow and the learned, not to say pedantic, cleric, with the consequent extensive dialectical exchanges concerning the nature and purpose of the latter's vocation. Jesús Gómez has drawn our attention to one of the more traditional formats of the literary dialogue,

that of the experienced teacher and the student eager for knowledge (53).⁹ Valera neatly turns the tables on this format in *Pepita Jiménez*, in which the apprentice dialogist, Pepita, is more than capable of dealing with the rhetoric of the aspiring professional preacher. At the same time, there is little to match among Valera's novelist contemporaries, Galdós included, Pepita's outspoken descriptions in the dialogue, of what she finds attractive in Luis's person, for their prolonged focus on his seductive physical demeanour.

Although already the most drawn-out part of the novel, in terms of the advancement, or rather non-advancement, of the plot, Valera extended the dialogue between the lovers in the first book edition, after its original publication in the *Revista de España* (Romero 302). He may have had in mind that Luis's speech was inordinately long at this point, and it is the case that the seven short exchanges that he interpolated in the book edition reduced somewhat the length of Luis's original discourse in its earlier form by giving Pepita a chance to speak, although increasing the overall length of the dialogue. It certainly gave Valera the opportunity to introduce what will become Pepita's primary argument against Luis's protestations of being called to a higher state, one in which he claims that he can distinguish between what he has just called "lo soñado" from "lo real," and "lo vivo" from "lo pintado" (302). In the interpolated passage Pepita gives what will be her consistent answer to Luis: "Lo vago y aéreo de un fantasma, por bello que sea, no compite con lo que mueve materialmente los sentidos." Luis replies that his imagination can create a more powerful reality, and this dialectic between Pepita's reliance on natural instinct and Luis's championing, firstly of Divine love, then of Platonic love, forms the basis of the rest of the dialogue—until its end, that is, when Pepita turns Luis's Platonic arguments against him, and convinces him of the responsibilities that he has incurred in his relationship with her, as we shall see. The question that Valera leaves hanging for the reader to decide is whether Pepita's rhetoric has won the battle, or whether nature has asserted its primacy over the young couple. In typical Valera fashion, the answer may be as much "either... or" as "both... and."

Pepita opens her argument by maintaining that if Luis has succumbed to her charms (they have kissed intimately, as recorded in one of Luis's last letters) when she has done nothing to provoke him, what chance would he have as a priest when he meets accomplished ladies of society? Luis replies that he does know something about women from his readings of the Bible and of the non-religious poets. Pepita counters that there is no comparison between women in books and a real woman. Luis appeals to his high calling to Divine love, and invites Pepita to raise herself to that level, so that they can love each other spiritually. Pepita responds that since she can only love Luis as he is, and cannot conceive of him without his bodily form, which captivates her completely, she cannot follow him to those higher regions. She deserves to die; indeed he should kill her, and death will free her spirit, enabling it to be with Luis wherever he is. When she receives no reply from Luis, Pepita moves quickly out of the room, with the words "Adiós para siempre," to be followed irresistibly by Luis.

Such, in very abbreviated form, is the lovers' dialogue and its immediate aftermath. As remarked earlier, its most striking feature, in the context of this present discussion, is the contrast between the high-minded, elegantly argued propositions for much of the time, and the earthy confessions of Pepita towards the end, having made her position clear earlier, with her emphasis on the importance of "lo que mueve materialmente los sentidos." Particularly in the respective

speeches summing up their views, the cadences and rhythms of rhetorical argument are to the fore, but with much different intent. Thus, for spiritual purposes, Luis uses the extended simile of the metal purified by the fire of the furnace: “sin dejar de ser metal, reluce y deslumbra, y es todo fuego, así las almas se hinchen de Dios, y en todo son Dios, penetradas por donde quiera de Dios” (309). Pepita immediately picks up Luis’s image and returns it to him: “Ahora conozco cuán vil es el metal del que estoy forjada y cuán indigno de que le penetre y mude el fuego divino” (309). Having matched him rhetorically, Pepita then goes on to list the irresistible attraction that Luis has for her. Accusing herself of being an “espíritu grosero,” she then enumerates his charms in an extraordinary passage, at great length and in great detail. Pepita’s listing of Luis’s seductive power starts with his mouth, eyes, dark hair, that she wishes to caress with her hands, then moves to his voice, the way he uses words, that touches and enchants her. She not only confesses to loving Luis’s body, but the shadow of his body, its reflection in mirrors and water, his name, his surname, his blood, the timbre of his voice, his gestures, the way he walks. “Y no sé qué más digo,” the besotted Pepita concludes. In its own way, as a piece of rhetoric and at the same time an expression of the impassioned outburst of desire, emptying, it would seem, all artifice from the dialogue, Valera has denounced as elegantly and yet as passionately as he could, any ascetic denial and downgrading of bodily attraction, and of the latter’s place in the pursuit of human happiness.

Gabriel García Bajo has rightly drawn special attention to the dialogue sequence that follows the one just analysed. This is when Pepita abases herself before Luis, on her knees, with her head touching the ground, and uttering, “Seré siempre tu esclava, pero lejos de ti, muy lejos de ti,” in a scene that seems more suitable to the *Arabian Nights* than a contemporary novel. Indeed García Bajo calls this Pepita’s “pleno sometimiento” to Luis (73). Yet, we must balance the choreography of the scene against its underlying reality, whereby Pepita, who has been forced into an unsuitable, not to say unspeakable, early marriage is determined not to marry again unless she has the choice of spouse, and her irrevocable choice is Luis. Who has lowered himself/herself more here? Pepita, literally, of course, but Luis’s admission that his last ten years, or a portion of them, have been lived as a lie, is also a striking piece of self-abasement. The final act of the couple at this point underlines the craftsmanship of Valera as a writer, as he links the natural act of kissing and embracing with the socio-cultural moment of sanctioning or sealing the pact between the lovers: “Don Luis rompió el hilo del discurso de Pepita sellando los labios de ella con los suyos y abrazándola de nuevo” (314).

One of the “corporal” hints that Valera give us in Pepita’s last attempt at persuading Luis of her enduring commitment lies in the way that she uses Luis’s argument in favour of Platonic love to suggest that such an unbearable erotic closeness would be impossible to maintain in practice. She imagines herself in death, forever invisibly beside Luis, “velando su sueño, contemplándole con arrobos, penetrando sus pensamientos más ocultos” (310). The intertextual link here is with some version of the work of art mentioned in the novel’s second-last paragraph, itself a link with its original rendering in Part Three of Apuleius’s *The Golden Ass*. At the end of our novel, a painting hangs that “representa a Psiquis, descubriendo y contemplando extasiada, a la luz de su lámpara, al Amor, dormido en su lecho.” The most likely candidate as artist for this painting is Simon Vouet, whose famous picture, in the dramatic chiaroscuro style of Caravaggio, shows a

transfixed semi-naked Psyche in a dark bedroom, holding an oil lamp and gazing in rapt contemplation as the lamp casts its light on the sleeping Cupid's exposed thighs¹⁰ (See Appendix). Now that his couple are safely married, Valera can take the implied comparison between the painting and Pepita's fantasy further into the realm of the erotic, showing Psyche "descubriendo" (to be understood here as "uncovering") and removing the bedclothes, so that she then "discovers" that the monster she thought was her husband was the naked God of Love himself, the beautiful Cupid, who could only come to visit her in the darkness of the night, so that his true identity might be concealed.

The painting, along with its partner displayed in the couple's salon, the picture of Daphnis searching for the cricket that has become lodged between Chloe's breasts, leading to the awakening of sexual desire, is a private joke that Luis and Pepita can now enjoy, in the security of their married happiness, but this second painting may also be an equally irreverent joke on Valera's part in which the chattering cricket that has unwittingly brought the two innocents together can be linked to a similar result in the case of the Padre Vicario through his proxy conversations with Luis and Pepita. On their Grand Tour the couple have visited Paris, Rome, Florence and Vienna, and it is likely that some version of the painting of Psyche gazing in wonder at the beautiful naked form of Cupid in her bed reminded Pepita of her own death fantasy with regard to contemplating the sleeping form of Luis, and that this was the reason why they brought home a copy. What Valera omits from the brief description of the painting is that Psyche is usually portrayed holding a dagger (as in the Vouet painting) with which to slay what she believes is the monstrous creature she has married. Returning to the dialogue, at its end, when faced with Luis's silence, Pepita responds: "con ese justo desprecio me matará usted mejor que con un puñal, sin que se manche de sangre ni su mano ni su conciencia" (310): the tables have been turned on Luis, who is now to be imagined as the figure of Psyche complete with dagger ready to slay his beloved. For Luis, Pepita as erotic woman, was a man-slayer, or at least he has dreamt of her as Judith the beheader of Holofernes, and as Jael, killer of Sisera (233) (from the Books of Judith and Judges respectively), only to discover her fundamental human beauty, as artists have done with their paintings of the two Biblical women. Valera has left it to the reader to make the intertextual link between the death and assassination fantasies of Pepita, and the "happy end" of this part of the drama of Cupid and Psyche, when the latter, who cannot resist Cupid's beauty, covers him with kisses instead of stab wounds: the idyllic ending of *Pepita Jiménez* has also taken into account the near misses of misunderstanding along the way, if only in a more prosaic nineteenth-century context.

There is a brief reference in the Epilogue to the parlous social conditions of the region, when Don Pedro blames the so-called enlightened local people who cannot wait to settle in the city and consequently leave behind the "campos [...] abandonados" (350). With Pepita and Luis, says Don Pedro, the opposite is the case and "Todo lo van mejorando y hermoheando para hacer de este retiro su edén": Valera has through Don Pedro acknowledged the problem of rural backwardness, and has, in the term Toni Dorca's has borrowed from Bakhtin, settled for the "provincial idyll" (116). To the question *Cui bono?*, García Bajo answers that it is the bourgeoisie only who benefit from the exploitation of the region's resources (65). He quotes the example of the two young servant girls of Pepita, who dress "con suma pulcritud y elegancia" while serving the notables of the district invited to Pepita's *tertulias*, and claims that this is meant exclusively to

reflect well on Pepita. I would rather stress Valera's "reformist" description of the serving girls in the same quotation as "criadas y como confidentas de Pepita" (76). The most likely definition of "confidenta" is a "persona a quien otro fía sus secretos o le encarga la ejecución de cosas reservadas" (DRAE), creating a human bond that mitigates the social hierarchy of power structures between mistress and servant. Incidentally, a note from Romero Tobar's edition (160) shows that in Valera's view the malodorous unwashed of his own social class were not to be excused because of their equal status with him.

The final picture, then, is that of a progressive acculturation of the area, through the intelligent exploitation of good harvests of oil and wine, the profits from which enable imports of art, very comfortable furniture and "primores de libros" (348) from the cultural capitals of Europe. Notably, too, the *huerta*, or market garden area, has been intensively acculturated to house South American monkey puzzles and Indian banyan trees that are more like sculpted creations than natural arboreal growths, together with the creation of a heated conservatory for even more exotic plants. Luis had already anticipated his situation as an enlightened Maecenas when he decides to stay with Pepita, and make their home a centre of religion, charitable work, culture and friendship (185). His final thought on the matter is a rare expression of belief, for the Spanish literature of the time, in the heterodox idea of the priesthood of believers. Couched in quasi-cultural terms (and with more than a hint of "protestant" references to a "temple" rather than a "church", and to "ministros y sacerdotes") the thought expresses its independence of orthodox Catholic dogma, even while at the same time Luis's blithe assurance that he and Pepita would end their lives at the same time and be brought together to an eternal "mejor vida" might have made both contemporary realists and neo-catholics grind their teeth in dissent. Luis imagines a new union of married love and Divine love, with Pepita and himself as its High Priests, "uniendo [...] el amor conyugal con el amor de Dios para que Dios santificase y visitase la morada de ellos, haciéndola como templo, donde los dos fuesen ministros y sacerdotes, hasta que dispusiese el cielo llevárselos juntos a mejor vida" (185).

Yet Carlos Feal has rightly perceived some ambiguity in the "idyll" in the "Epilogue" with regard to the presentation of Luis, with his nagging memory, which never goes away, of the ideal that he has left behind. This leads us to a final question: why did Valera make Don Pedro take the time and trouble to write so extensively about these things to his brother the Dean? Of the ten extracts in the Epilogue (and these only "pocos y breves fragmentos," we are told), the last one is by far the longest, and of this, the longest section in it is devoted to Luis's religious beliefs. From the evidence given to us generally, and particularly in these last fragments, there is more of the enlightened than the despot in Don Pedro's character, and it is difficult to see how Gabriel García Bajo concludes that the *cacique* shows "indiferencia hacia los elementos espirituales e intelectuales" (67): it is Don Pedro who suggests that the couple do the Grand Tour of Europe and bring home examples of the best of its cultural heritage (348); and of course he quotes Lucretius's Latin as one who knows what it means, in both its syntax and semantics. The principal conclusion that suggests itself is that Valera in the "Epílogo" is describing a state in which the love of what he calls "lo terrenal y caduco" (350), humans included, of the fruits of the earth, of arts and crafts, is not an improper form of love, and can, and indeed should, co-exist happily with deeply-held religious beliefs, of whatever hue. There are no recorded replies from

the Dean in the “Epilogue,” as there were with Luis’s letters, and so Valera leaves us with the thought that while the silence of and from the Cathedral is to be respected, it is to be left to its own constructions of reality. Expressed culturally, by bringing home the products of the Grand Tour and of botanical discovery, Valera evidently wanted to achieve a blending of the sophisticated urban life of books, paintings and sculptures with a natural yet cultivated rural life, in a mutually sustaining relationship of nature and culture from which all who participate in it will find benefit in body, mind and spirit.

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Appendix



With acknowledgement to <http://comminfo.rutgers.edu/~mjoseph/CP/PV2.jpg>

NOTES

¹ It should be noted that Tierno Galván's phrase is not used in a positive way to describe Valera, but as a description of a short-term pragmatism, a "fixer" mentality that, Tierno Galvan suggests, Valera struggled to integrate with an idealistic view of life.

² Turner's view is that this Latin epigraph turns the tables on Valera as author, since it ends up meaning, "a person who knows everything has a lot to learn" (355). Her thesis requires that the novel's second half and its ending be read as somewhat stale, flat and conventional, in which Valera imposes, or attempts to impose, his worldview on the characters. Incidentally, Carmen Martín Gaité (10-12) also takes the same view that Valera extinguishes the passion and rebellion of "Cartas de mi sobrino" in favour of "una explicación tajante y razonable de los hechos" in "Paralipómenos". Turner would probably concur with Tierno's political view of Valera's "managerial mind", since she argues that, aesthetically, it spoils the outcome of the novel. My view of his "managerial mind" is more benign, seeing it as bringing together the best of what is thought and experienced in nature and culture, avoiding at the same time the excessive ironing out of inconvenient truths that ruffle the social surface.

³ There is no direct evidence in the novel that the Dean also holds the position of Rector of the seminary. Thomas R. Franz (39) refers to the "Dean of the Seminary," which mixes the titles of Cathedral Dean and Seminary Rector (*Director* in Spanish). Valera could have made the relationship clear, but apparently chose not to do so. The balance of probability is that he was Dean of the Cathedral only, since he is always given that title.

⁴ For the way that Valera organized the presentation of the topography of the region in *Pepita Jiménez*, see Whiston, "Campo..."

⁵ Valera omitted in a later edition the reference to Pepita closing the dead priest's eyes, but left in the reference to her closing his half-opened mouth (Romero Tobar 347). The first reference would appear to be more "romantic," while the second seems more practical, and it is with this latter image of Pepita that Valera leaves us.

⁶ Ana Navarro and Josefina Ribalta (124, note) make the point that what is described as a "contradanza" is a complicated piece of choreography (the dancers weave in and out of the ribbons) and we are told in the text that it was "muy bien ensayada" (71), as it needed to be, for sound cultural reasons.

⁷ Chapter 36 of *Juanito la larga*, in which Valera also mentions the Cross adorned with ribbons that is used as a part of the procession of Good Friday.

⁸ Chamberlin and Hardin also note that Pepita's change of dress has "both seasonal and erotic implications" (73).

⁹ Gómez (163) also reminds us that many Spanish Renaissance dialogues were associated with Erasmian reformism, which may have interested Valera.

¹⁰ Reproductions of this painting are nowadays for sale on coffee mugs and similar merchandising items.

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