

PEPITA JIMÉNEZ AND THE ROMANCE TRADITION

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The term "romance," medieval in origin, was first applied to narratives written in the Romance languages, as distinct from Latin, both in prose and poetry. With the rediscovery of ancient prose fictions during the Renaissance, the term was applied retrospectively to some of these ancient texts as well. In Spain the word *romance* came to refer most frequently, but not exclusively, to ballads, while in England, France, and Germany it was used for prose narratives. For the latter in Spain the term *novela* was preferred (Sebold 137-46; Montesinos 139-40). But, in spite of these national differences in nomenclature, the elements of the romance tradition, as outlined by scholars such as Northrop Frye, persisted intact in all of these literary cultures. Juan Valera's *Pepita Jiménez* participates in this tradition through its borrowing of romance elements from *Daphnis and Chloe* (100-200 A.D.), an ancient Greek narrative by Longus, and its use of medieval quest elements.¹

Romance is generically often associated with summertime: solar imagery frequently supports the characterization of the male protagonist, and the story unfolds against a background of seasonal change as the protagonist almost invariably triumphs over all difficulties, entering into a happy marriage with his feminine counterpart during the summer.² *Pepita Jiménez* follows this pattern as well. The sexual union of Valera's protagonists at the summer solstice, with their marriage one month later, could alert the critical reader to the importance of romance in *Pepita Jiménez*, but Valera's narrator is somewhat misleading in this regard. Late in the novel he lists some typical elements of romance that do not appear and playfully describes other things he might have included:

Tal vez nuestros héroes, yendo a una nueva expedición campestre, hubieran sido sorprendidos por deshecha y pavorosa tempestad, teniendo que refugiarse en las ruinas de algún antiguo castillo o torre moruna, donde por fuerza había de ser fama que se aparecían espectros o cosas por el estilo. Tal vez nuestros héroes hubieran caído en poder de alguna partida de bandoleros, de la cual hubieran escapado merced a la serenidad y valentía de D. Luis, albergándose luego, durante la noche, sin que se pudiese evitar, y solitos los dos, en una caverna o gruta. Y tal vez, por último, el autor hubiera arreglado el negocio de manera que Pepita y su vacilante admirador hubieran tenido que hacer un viaje por mar, y aunque ahora no hay piratas o corsarios argelinos, no es difícil inventar un buen naufragio, en el cual D. Luis hubiera salvado a Pepita, arribando a una isla desierta o a otro lugar poético y apartado En vez de censurar al autor porque no apela a tales enredos, conviene darle gracias por la mucha conciencia que tiene, sacrificando a la fidelidad del relato el portentoso efecto que haría si se atreviese a exornarle y bordarle con lances y episodios sacados de su fantasía. (161-62)

Fourteen years later, moreover, when Valera openly acknowledges that *Dafnis y Cloe* served as the inspiration for *Pepita Jiménez*, he does not call Longus's work a romance but rather a "novela campesina," a "novela idílica." In the preface to this translation of *Dafnis y Cloe* (1880), he says: "*Dafnis y Cloe* más bien que de novela bucólica, puede calificarse de novela campesina, de novela idílica o de idilio en prosa; y en este sentido, lejos de pasar de moda, da la moda y sirve de modelo aún, *mutatis*

mutandis, no sólo a *Pablo y Virginia* sino a muchas preciosas novelas de Jorge Sand, hasta a una que compuso en español, pocos años ha, cierto amigo mío, con el título de *Pepita Jiménez*" (30). We may be certain of Valera's sincerity regarding *Daphnis and Chloe* in the above statement, because twenty years earlier he had devoted the final paragraph of his extended essay, *De la naturaleza y carácter de la novela* (1860), to Longus's romance, finding it the perfect work. A classicist by training and temperament, Valera recognized the classical ideal of universality in *Daphnis and Chloe*: "Feliz el autor de *Dafnis y Cloe*, que no consagró su obrilla a Minerva, ni a Temis, sino a las ninfas y al Amor, y que logró hacerse agradable a todos los hombres, o descubriendo a los rudos los misterios de aquella dulce divinidad, o recordándolos deleitosamente a los ya iniciados. ¡Ojalá viviésemos en época menos seria y sesuda que ésta que alcanzamos, y se pudiesen escribir muchas cosas por el estilo!" (48).

Within *Pepita Jiménez* itself Valera mentions *Daphnis and Chloe* on two occasions. As the novel approaches its climax, Luis comes to Pepita's house with the mistaken idea that he is going to say goodbye forever, but Pepita speaks to him "con la desnudez idílica con que Cloe hablaba a Dafnis" (168). Then in the novel's penultimate paragraph, Valera focuses upon a famous painting that "representa a Cloe cuando la cigarra fugitiva se le mete en el pecho, donde, creyéndose segura, y a tan grata sombra, se pone a cantar mientras que Dafnis procura sacarla de allí" (227). Yet beyond these two specific references to *Daphnis and Chloe* lies the entire structure of *Pepita Jiménez*, patterned in significant ways on the structure of the ancient romance.³

Set against a backdrop of seasonal change, *Daphnis and Chloe* is the story of two young people falling in love for the first time and not understanding what is happening to them. The reader has the pleasure of knowing what is going on, while the protagonists themselves do not. After a series of trials and contretemps, the lovers are united in a festive wedding. In *Pepita Jiménez* the reader again has the satisfaction of watching the unfolding of the natural mating process, even as the young protagonists, especially Luis, struggle to comprehend what is happening. And once more the protagonists are completely in tune with nature's cycle. From the very first paragraph there is an emphasis on luxuriant nature and Luis's sensitivity to it. Later, in the "Paralipómenos" section, the novel's climax is foreshadowed shortly before Luis enters Pepita's house. Although Luis imagines he is going to see Pepita to tell her goodbye forever, as he approaches the meeting place, "se sintió dominado, seducido, vencido por aquella voluptuosa naturaleza" (157). Within the house, green-eyed Pepita, now completely in tune with her own feelings (and functioning almost as a force of nature), soon has the same effect on Luis, causing him to renounce forever his desire to become a priest. Significantly, this meeting occurs on Midsummer's Eve as the *pueblo* is celebrating the Noche de San Juan—a festival of the "solsticio de verano" under whose Christian veneer, the narrator recalls, lie strong "resabios del paganismo y naturalismo antiguos" (159).

After the protagonists of *Daphnis and Chloe* are finally united in happy marriage, they express their gratitude to the forces that have been working in their lives, now externalized and expressed in well-known symbols. They give "especial devoción a Pan, a Amor, y a las Ninfas" (146). Not only do they paint new images of the Nymphs in their grotto, but outside they also raise "un altar a Amor" and build "un templo. . . [a] Pan" (146). Similarly, Luis and Pepita after their union recognize the forces that have brought them together and transform Pepita's *huerta* into a pre-Christian, classical garden adorned with an "aíroso templete." The latter contains not

only a statue of the Venus of Medici but two paintings: "Una representa a Psiquis, descubriendo y contemplando extasiada, a la luz de su lámpara, al Amor, dormido en su lecho; la otra. . . [of Chloe and Daphnis] cuando la cigarrá fugitiva se le mete en el pecho, donde, creyéndose segura, y a tan grata sombra, se pone a cantar, mientras que Dafnis procura sacarla de allí" (227).

In addition to ancient Greek romance, medieval quest romance was also a source for *Pepita Jiménez*. Although there is no consistent parallel to Valera's creative dialogue with *Daphnis and Chloe*, he does mention in passing the most famous of all Spanish medieval romances, *Amadís de Gaula* (c. 1350).⁴ Speaking of Luis's father, the narrator says that he treated Pepita with "un respeto y unos miramientos tales que ni Amadís los usó mayores con la señora Oriana en el período más humilde de sus pretensiones" (43). But the most significant contribution from medieval romance lies in the knightly experience of Luis himself.⁵ He experiences both an initiation into the realm of the life forces and the consequent transformation (for the sexual implications of the grail-initiation rite, see Weston 75-76, 183-88).

Of the common phases in storytelling that usually occur in romance, five are clearly present in *Pepita Jiménez*.⁶ The first phase indicates mysterious circumstances surrounding the birth of the hero, who must be hidden away. In *Pepita Jiménez* Luis is illegitimate, and his father never marries the mother, concerning whom there are no details. Further, Luis is sent away at an early age to be raised by his uncle (el Deán), who helps train him for the priesthood. Like many a hero of romance and myth, Luis returns to the locale of his birth as an adult and there begins the quest-adventure, which leads eventually to full psycho-sexual maturity, with marriage to the most beautiful and desirable local woman.

The second point in the romance pattern is that the male is completely innocent in erotic matters. Luis's innocence stems from his seminary training. Moreover, the paternal uncle, who, in Spanish culture, might arrange the sexual initiation of a nephew, has, in this case, done the opposite: Luis's uncle helped him establish a goal of lifelong priestly celibacy. Thus Luis, like most protagonists of romance, faces a significant barrier to sexuality. While this barrier is often symbolized in romance as a geographical obstacle (such as a river separating the protagonist and the maiden), in *Pepita Jiménez* the barrier is the internal obstacle of Luis's religious training, reinforced by the incest taboo of his father's suit of Pepita.

The third phase of romance is the quest, certainly one of the most important features of *Pepita Jiménez*. As the work opens, Luis is on the point of taking his final vows of priestly celibacy. Nevertheless, he responds emotionally, if not intellectually, to the traditional "call to adventure," here presented by twenty-year-old Pepita. Joseph Campbell and others have pointed out that the typical quest is really a metaphor for the passage through adolescence to adult maturity (124), which Valera shows through the archetypical masculine symbol of the horse. At first Luis has no equestrian skills at all. On an outing, he must, in humiliation, follow behind his father and Pepita on a mule in the company of the aged Vicario and an obese woman. But after Pepita urges Luis to learn to ride horseback, his progressive mastering of a fiery steed suggests his progress toward maturity. Moreover, this horse, on one significant occasion, functions as an almost independent sexual symbol when it disregards Luis's attempts to calm him, bucking, snorting, and doing fancy steps in honor of Pepita in front of her house.

The knight errant as lover had to proceed across an often perilous threshold to

reach his beloved. Having become as good a horseman as was the medieval knight, Luis enters the "realm of initiation" (Barth 44-47; Raglan 173-93) through physical contact with Pepita. First they shake and hold hands, then their knees repeatedly touch under the card table, and finally their lips unite in a kiss. All the while, in keeping with his seminary training, Luis has tried to resist crossing the threshold: "En esta batalla de la luz contra las tinieblas yo combato por la luz" (96).

Traditionally the questing hero is aided in his adventurous struggle by one or more older male and female characters. In *Pepita Jiménez* both Luis's father and Pepita's *nodriza* urge Luis along the path to secular masculine maturity.⁷ Luis's father encourages his son to learn the arts not only of horseback riding and card playing but also of knife and pistol. Then, when the father perceives that Luis and Pepita are definitely falling in love, he absents himself from Pepita's nightly *tertulia* and has Luis take his place (86-87). Subsequently, the earthy Antoñona prevents Luis from turning back toward the sacerdotal life—and keeps him in the realm of initiation—by giving him "seis o siete feroces pellizcos" and making him promise to see Pepita once more (108).

During Luis's journey from his father's house to Pepita's bedroom, the narrator evokes parallels to Santa Teresa's spiritual progressions through *siete moradas* to the ultimate experience of fusion and unity. Luis significantly passes through six rooms in Pepita's house before having his transforming experience in the seventh: her bedroom. Like many a quest romance protagonist (and the even earlier mythic hero), Luis experiences a kind of death-rebirth. His old self, which desired mystical union with God, dies and is reborn as the secular man who will function henceforth as husband and father of children.⁸

Luis's transformation in Pepita's house is emphasized by the framing device of the before-and-after encounters in the local casino with the Conde de Genazahar. On the first occasion the Count publicly casts aspersions on Pepita's reputation, but Luis can only respond with a priestly homily. After his initiation into the rites of sexual love, however, Luis returns to the casino and enters, "dando taconazos recios, con estruendo y aire de taco. . . [y] los jugadores se quedaron pasmados al verle" (199). Frye has observed that most romances in their narrative development "exhibit a . . . descent into a night world and then a return to the idyllic world or some symbol of it like a marriage" (*The Secular Scripture* 54). Once Luis has entered ("penetró") the "dark room" following Pepita, he has descended into the shades of passion and unreason, the arena of romantic *Liebestod* and of contention with the night forces. For Luis, in the logic of romance, to love Pepita means to face death from the Conde de Genazahar; for Pepita, to love Luis means self-immolation, as she herself indicates when shortly before the consummation of their love she urges Luis to kill her (181). Luis's powerful sexual drives may be viewed as projected onto the Count, a kind of Jungian shadow to Luis. The Count embodies all the qualities that Luis has until now disavowed—in his aggressive courting of Pepita, his insatiable love of women, gambling, and alcohol. (Luckily for Luis, he has never pursued swordsmanship with the same energy.) Luis's cousin Currito, who earlier taunted him as "teólogo" (72), is now the Count's companion and a kind of adjunct-adversary in the casino. If the Count is the chief antagonist in the story's polarities, Pepita stands in several respects on the middle path guiding Luis: between eroticism and sterility, decadent civilization (suggested by the Count's rank) and unadorned nature, extreme worldliness and obsessive spirituality. In romance what emerges from the night-world struggle is always a new

identity or a renewed self-knowledge. Frye states that the hero's return to the upper world is attended by "the growing of identity through the casting off of whatever conceals or frustrates it" (*The Secular Scripture* 140), and Luis has found new identity as a lover and husband.

The fourth phase of romance is that of a happier society in which "the central theme . . . is that of the maintaining of the integrity of the innocent world against that of experience," while "consolidating heroic innocence in this world after the first great quest has been completed" (*Anatomy* 201). In *Pepita Jiménez* Luis and Pepita, as already noted, are united in a summer wedding, and Luis has no inclination for further adventures. Like the typical quester, Luis is reconciled with the novel's father figure, Don Pedro, who is pleased to have a secularized son to manage his properties, inherit his social prestige, and participate in the community. The *pueblo*, whose members early on repeatedly expressed a desire for Luis's secularization, turn out *en masse* for the wedding celebration: "Criados y señores, hidalgos y jornaleros, las señoras y señoritas y las mozas del lugar asistieron y se mezclaron en él, como en la soñada primera edad del mundo" (216).

The fifth phase serves to conclude *Pepita Jiménez*. Frye indicates: "It is a reflective, idyllic view of . . . [what has happened in the] erotic world, but it presents experience now as comprehended and not as a mystery" (*Anatomy* 202). With the help of Pepita, Luis adjusts to the loss of his sacerdotal ideal and finds happiness in his newly created family. Most important, at this juncture Luis and Pepita show their comprehension of and appreciation for their erotic experiences by building in their classical garden a little temple that contains a statue of Venus and the pictures, not only of Amor and Psyche, but also of Daphnis and Chloe.

To recognize *Pepita Jiménez*—with its elements of ancient erotic romance, the medieval quest, and seasonal transformation—as part of the romance tradition allows one to approach the work with expectations quite different from those engendered by other important novels of this realist period. For example, in *Pepita Jiménez* all important elements of the novel work toward the final overcoming of obstacles and adversaries to effect a happy ending to the love story.⁹ Thus, the novel as an authentic microcosm of society presented within a specific historical period is no longer a criterion in this singular case.¹⁰ The only two instances of *costumbrismo* in *Pepita Jiménez* can be appreciated primarily for their intended furthering of the love plot and their relationship to romance seasonal patterns.

The first concerns the Día de la Cruz, a Christian sublimation of the Maypole festivities. In the same letter (4 de mayo) in which Pepita urges Luis to become an equestrian, like her neighbors, she places a large cross adorned with flowers in front of her home. Then, at night, she brings the cross indoors, attaches streamers to its top and "ocho niños . . . asidos de las siete cintas que pendían de la cruz, bailaron a modo de contradanza" (77). Shortly after describing the dance, Valera's narrator reveals that the young widow has experienced an important change, one that contains both seasonal and erotic implications (an appropriate change for one who has participated in Maypole festivities). Henceforth Pepita will hold nightly *tertulias* in her home and in different garb: "ha dejado el luto, y está ahora más galana y vistosa con trajes ligeros y casi de verano" (78).

The second instance of *costumbrismo* concerns the Christian adaptation of the erotic pagan festivities accompanying the summer solstice. Like many authors from medieval times to the present (Newberry 239), Valera is not so much interested in present-

ing realistic details of *la noche de San Juan* as he is in highlighting the mood and erotic significance of the night. His narrator says: "Las guitarras sonaban por varias partes. Los coloquios de amor y las parejas dichosas y apasionadas se oían y se veían a cada momento Todo era amor y galanteo. En nuestros viejos romances y leyendas siempre roba el moro a la linda infantina cristiana y siempre el caballero cristiano logra su anhelo con la princesa mora, en la noche o en la mañanita de San Juan, y en el pueblo se diría que conservaban la tradición de los viejos romances" (159).¹¹

Luis's path, seen through the light of the romance tradition, begins to take on new significance. Hayden White says that the typical romance protagonist's struggle is one "of self-identification symbolized by . . . [his] transcendence of the world of experience, his victory over it, and his final liberation from it—the sort of drama associated with the Grail legend or the resurrection It is a drama of good over evil, of virtue over vice, of light over darkness, and the ultimate transcendence of man over the world in which he was imprisoned by the Fall" (8).

A reading of *Pepita Jiménez* as part of the romance tradition adds a new dimension to the understanding of Valera's work and makes less important the perennial controversy about whether it should be classified as a realistic or idealistic novel. The reader can apprehend it more fully by keeping in mind a prose tradition older than either of the two aesthetics so ardently championed during the most important polemic of the second half of the nineteenth century in Spain.

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NOTES

¹ It is a pleasure to thank Kay Engler for suggesting the present study and contributing important ideas.

² For extended discussion of romance as "The Mythos of Summer," see Frye, *Anatomy* (186-206). In an earlier essay, as Wimsatt notes (Krieger 102), Frye associates the genre with spring. The setting is both spring and summer in *Pepita Jiménez*.

³ Although Valera's translation of *Daphnis and Chloe* is well known, there has been to our knowledge no study of the relationship between Longus's and Valera's masterpieces. Such a detailed study falls outside the scope of the present essay and would include much more on nature, as well as on the themes of art versus nature and city versus country life.

⁴ In 1877 Valera wrote a review of Ludwig Braunfels, *Kritischer Versuch über den Roman Amadís von Gallien*, in which he demonstrated a thorough knowledge of *Amadís* and of the history and essence of romance (*Obras* 24: 169-218).

⁵ For a discussion of other archetypes reminiscent of medieval romance, see Cammarata and Rodríguez.

⁶ Frye (*Anatomy* 198-203) identifies six "phases" of romance, any one of which a particular text may inhabit. It seems to us that many romances will inevitably incorporate several, even all, of these motifs.

⁷ Another helper is Pepita's confessor, who unwittingly instructs Luis and Pepita in a role not unlike that of old Philetas, who tells Daphnis and Chloe the fable of Eros in the garden (pt. 2). The eighty-year-old Vicario brings the wisdom of an uncerebral Christianity of love and forgiveness, though Luis still needs the midwifery of the female sage Antoñona to bring his love to birth.

⁸ For parallels between Luis's love for Pepita and the ascent of the mystics toward union, see Lott (14-18).

⁹ Failure to consider that *Pepita Jiménez* is a romance has caused even perceptive critics like Harriet Turner to deprecate "the hollow, happy ending of the wedding dance of Luis and Pepita" (347) and Carmen Martín Gaité to complain that "esa contribución al happy end es la única mancha que ensombrece la modernidad y perfección de la novela" (23).

¹⁰ The publication of *Pepita Jiménez* caused an immediate polemic both in the learned journals and in Madrid's *Ateneo* (Davis 1649; Chamberlin). Following the dichotomy already existing in other countries,

Pepita's author and defenders considered themselves idealists in contradistinction to the emerging realists. Although Valera repeatedly abominated realism (*Cartas íntimas* 286, *Apuntes* 14, *Cartas inéditas* 239 [cited by López Jiménez 40]), some critics (see Medina 119-34) still try to force *Pepita* into the realist canon.

¹¹ Here, of course, Valera speaks of ballads, not romance.

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