

## Introduction

Emilia Pardo Bazán (1851–1921) is generally regarded as Spain's leading woman novelist. Always a controversial figure, she first achieved notoriety with the publication of such novels as *La Tribuna* (1883) and *Los pazos de Ulloa* (1886) in which the treatment of urban working-class or rural *mores* caused scandal because of its frankness and the debt it seemed to owe to Emile Zola. She continued publishing novels (nineteen in all) until 1911 and to the end of her life was admired as an astonishingly prolific short-story writer. And yet, despite the ready assent to her stature, her work is little known. With a handful of exceptions, her novels are unavailable in modern editions outside the collected works, and until quite recently have been largely forgotten. This is partly due, no doubt, to changing fashions and the customary decline in a writer's reputation in the years following his or her death. 'A significant writer, yes, but rather dated' is probably a common, though in my view mistaken, opinion. In a sense her early notoriety is to blame because her name has become too closely associated with the polemical issues (notably that red herring Naturalism) which surrounded the publication of her early novels.

The early 1970s saw a minor spate of new works on Pardo Bazán. Of these, Nelly Clémessy's *Emilia Pardo Bazán, romancière (la critique, la théorie, la pratique)* (Paris, 1973) is the most important and extensive (it is well over 300,000 words long), and, as its subtitle indicates, it is comprehensive in its scope. Professor Clémessy possesses both critical intelligence and a wealth of erudition, and her book is clearly the fruit of many years of research and reflection.

The present work is less ambitious: its primary intention is to trace what I believe to be Pardo Bazán's growth into maturity as a novelist in the late 1880s and the 1890s. I do not deal with her novels of the 1900s because I want to draw attention to and concentrate on the four novels published between 1890 and 1896 (*Una cristiana – La prueba, La*

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*pedra angular*, *Doña Milagros* and *Memorias de un solterón*). These novels have been almost entirely neglected, and all but the first seem to me to represent Pardo Bazán's work at its best.

In order to clear the ground I have put aside the generally accepted notion that Pardo Bazán was first and foremost a Naturalist, a disciple (albeit with reservations) of Emile Zola. This is not to say that Pardo Bazán was unaffected by Naturalism; as a progressive intellectual she was hardly likely not to have been affected one way or another.

Naturalism was the fruit of certain novelists' response to Positivism, which was one of the most influential schools of thought in nineteenth-century Europe. Positivism's rejection of metaphysical speculation and its concomitant faith in the experimental method implied a confidence in science's ability to explain and regulate all that man may need to have explained or regulated. The Naturalist novel (or 'experimental' novel, as Zola pointedly called it) is conceived as an experiment in which a hypothesis is (ostensibly at least) tested and proved. Behind this experimental conception lies a view of man as determined by forces over which he has no control (heredity, milieu and historical moment) and, moreover, as a creature whose behaviour is explicable and predictable by reference to these forces.

No one would deny that the great achievements and prestige of science in the second half of the nineteenth century impressed Pardo Bazán and that her mentality and sensibility were partly formed by it. But this period was not quite so monolithic as is sometimes thought (one need only consider the proliferation of 'isms', political, philosophical and aesthetic), and it is wrong to suppose that all individuals, novelists included, reposed confidently on the bedrock of scientism. In a recent important study of Baroja, C. A. Longhurst implies that the nineteenth century was an age which entertained 'a single, uncomplicated view of the universe', and he states that 'by and large the nineteenth-century novel reflects a stable world, with man in control of that world'.<sup>1</sup> Such generalisations certainly could not be applied to Pardo Bazán, in either her ideology or her novels. It is sometimes forgotten that Schopenhauer, who was, as Dr Longhurst points out (pp. 11 and 14), one of the fathers of the crisis of the twentieth-century novel, was enormously influential on many of those writers who are commonly classed as Realist or Naturalist. Pardo Bazán herself makes an indirect reference in *Una cristiana – La*

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*prueba* to Schopenhauer's belief that the external world is but an illusion of the senses (I, 688b).

In any case, who could suppose that Galdós and Alas, two of the leading Spanish Realists of the 1880s, were writing with a pre-conceived and unshakable view of the world and man's place in it? Equally, how could the same be supposed of Pardo Bazán? The 1880s, when she began her career as a novelist, saw a change in the intellectual climate, with serious doubts being cast on the apparent certainties offered by Positivism, certainties never wholeheartedly accepted by Pardo Bazán. I hope to show in the following pages that among the most important features of her mature work are a sense of the problematic and an awareness of the contradictions in her attitude to life.

Pardo Bazán's novelistic production has usually been divided by critics into two halves, a Naturalistic period and a 'Spiritual' period. Some make the division at *Una cristiana – La prueba* (1890) and others at *La quimera* (1905).<sup>2</sup> Clémessy, in part II, chapter 7 of her work referred to above, has sensibly corrected this discrepancy by seeing in the novels of the 1890s a transition between the Naturalist and Spiritual phases. She points out that after 1891 Pardo Bazán abandoned popular milieux and turned her attention first to the middle classes and then to the upper classes. The novelist, she argues, maintains Realist objectivity and delight in description, but the latter is less marked than in the 1880s. The atmosphere of the novels between *Una cristiana – La prueba* and *Memorias de un solterón* (1896) is still 'prosaïque'. After this, in *El tesoro de Gastón* (1897) and *El saludo de las brujas* (1897), it is more refined; this change Clémessy sees as a step towards the more subjective *modernista* style of Pardo Bazán's last three novels – *La quimera* (1905), *La sirena negra* (1908) and *Dulce dueño* (1911). Her main point about the novels of the 1890s, however, is that they are all idealist.

While I accept the validity of Professor Clémessy's arguments, my own view of Pardo Bazán's development as a novelist is somewhat different. For me, the crucial factor in this development is not a change of milieu or atmosphere, but an increasing interest in psychology, and the turning-point is not *Una cristiana – La prueba*, but the most famous of Pardo Bazán's novels, *Los pazos de Ulloa* (1886). I shall be arguing in chapter 1 below that in *Los pazos de Ulloa* one can detect a decisive change in her view of the novelist's activity; whereas before she saw this as being fundamentally the depiction of the

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external world, now she saw it as being the dramatisation of human psychology. Although there is no doubt that Pardo Bazán's novels of the 1890s are influenced to a greater or lesser degree by her Catholicism, it seems to me that to describe them as 'spiritual' is to overstate the case and divert attention from the central issue of psychology. Even in her last three (undoubtedly religious) novels a major interest is the psychology of religious experience. (The four novels published between 1896 and 1905 stand out from the rest of Pardo Bazán's *œuvre* as rather lightweight pieces, although the parable, *El tesoro de Gastón* (1897), is not without charm.)

In this move towards psychology Pardo Bazán was, of course, not alone. During the 1880s there was a general renewal of interest amongst French novelists in the mental and emotional lives of their characters. This was due partly to their misgivings over Zola's, as it was thought, reductive view of human personality, partly to their discovery of the works of the Russian novelists as these became available in French translation, and partly to the growing prestige of the relatively new science of experimental psychology. Pardo Bazán could also look to the example of her admired Galdós, and I shall be pointing out in passing certain correspondences between the work of the two novelists. Much more, I am sure, could be said of this.

My discussion of the novels is not constrained by a consistent 'approach', except a fundamental desire to 'get back to the text'. The questions I deal with are those which seem to me to be raised by the works themselves, for example, the different strategies adopted in the dramatisation of psychology, and, in the case of three novels, the first-person narrative method; but, above all, Pardo Bazán's ambivalent attitude towards the moral status of her characters. In the discussion of psychology I have attempted to identify her philosophical and medical sources and to consider her successes and failures in the imaginative use of them. For convenience, I refer to the third-person narrator as 'she'. I do not intend to imply, however, that the voice of the narrator is necessarily to be identified with that of the novelist.

Appendix I contains biographical details of the novelist. Appendix II lists some of the French works in Pardo Bazán's private library, and is intended to complement the discussion in chapter I and elsewhere of French influences on the novelist. I have omitted Zola because Pardo Bazán's comprehensive knowledge of his works is well known.

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## I

## The development of Pardo Bazán's ideas on the novel in the 1880s

'She is probably right. Something human should, indeed, be dearer to one than all the topographies of the world.' Ford Madox Ford on Jean Rhys, from her *Tigers Are Better Looking* (London, 1968), p. 149

Discussion of Pardo Bazán's work has tended to concentrate on the extent to which she was influenced by Zola's Naturalism, and such a concentration has obscured the fact that her literary flirtation with the French novelist was brief. More fundamental was her relationship with the French Art-for-Art's-Sake school, a school chiefly represented by the poet Théophile Gautier, but embracing also such novelists as Flaubert and the Goncourt brothers.<sup>1</sup> Pardo Bazán's affiliation to *l'art pour l'art* is evident in her repeated assertions that the primary aim of art is the realisation of beauty. In her early broadside *La cuestión palpitante* she declares, when discussing Zola's didactic pretensions, that 'el artista que se proponga fines distintos de la realización de la belleza, tarde o temprano, con seguridad infalible, verá desmoronarse el edificio que erija' (III, 624a). The criterion of beauty is invoked on other occasions in *La cuestión palpitante*, and indeed throughout the whole of the novelist's career. For example in 1916 she expresses the same sentiment, but more succinctly: 'Como artista antepongo a la utilidad la belleza' (III, 1550a).<sup>2</sup> Such declarations do not, however, take us very far in the practical business of criticism unless we can define with some clarity what she meant by 'beauty'. As her career progressed her understanding of the word changed, but in her early years she followed the ideas of Gautier and the Art-for-Art's-Sake movement.<sup>3</sup>

Because Gautier and his associates were reacting strongly against the use of literature as a weapon of propaganda, they tended to minimise the importance of the content of a work and to emphasise (perhaps exaggerate) the importance of its form or style, that is, the sound and appearance on the page of words and combinations of words themselves, and, in poetry, rhythm and rhyme. And in their defence of the autonomy of form they found an ally in the visual arts, because our enjoyment of a painting, for example, need not depend

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on our apprehension of any theme the painting may illustrate: we may simply enjoy its representational qualities or its combination of masses and colours. Few people demand, moreover, that a painting be morally improving. Gautier's desire to emphasise the influence of painters and painting on the group of writers to which he belonged is illustrated in the following passage:

Cette immixtation de l'art dans la poésie a été et demeure un des signes caractéristiques de la nouvelle Ecole, et fait comprendre pourquoi ses premiers adeptes se recrutèrent plutôt parmi les artistes que parmi les gens de lettres. Une foule d'objets, d'images, de comparaisons, qu'on croyait irréductibles au verbe, sont entrés dans le langage et y sont restés. La sphère de la littérature s'est élargie et renferme maintenant la sphère de l'art dans son orbite immense.

Telle était la situation de nos esprits; les arts nous sollicitaient par les formes séduisantes qu'ils nous offraient pour réaliser notre rêve de beauté.<sup>4</sup>

It is not easy to grasp, from this passage, the exact nature of the influence of painting on literature, partly because Gautier's remarks are not explicit. What in fact were these objects, images and comparisons which entered the language of poetry? Furthermore, how far is it valid to make a comparison between painting and writing? Clearly the raw materials of the artist and the writer are essentially different. Marble, bronze and pigments, unlike words, do not speak immediately to the intellect; they appeal first to the senses. Yet for Gautier, more concerned with form than content, this was precisely their attraction. 'Trois choses me plaisent', we read in *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, 'l'or, le marbre et la pourpre, éclat, solidité, couleur'.<sup>5</sup> That is, the visual and the palpable. Gautier was attracted to words, just as a painter or sculptor is to his raw materials, for their sensuous qualities ('éclat, solidité, couleur') at least as much as for their meaning. This delight in the sensuous appeal of words has its classic statement in the 'Notice' which Gautier wrote for the 1868 edition of Baudelaire's *Les fleurs du mal*:

Pour le poète, les mots ont, en eux-mêmes et en dehors du sens qu'ils expriment, une beauté et une valeur propre comme des pierres précieuses qui ne sont pas encore taillées et montées en bracelets, en colliers ou en bagues: ils charment le connaisseur qui les regarde et les trie du doigt dans la petite coupe où ils sont mis en réserve, comme ferait un orfèvre méditant un bijou. Il y a des mots diamant, saphir, émeraude, d'autres qui luisent comme du phosphore quand on le frotte, et ce n'est pas un mince travail de les choisir.<sup>6</sup>

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The poet's task, then, was not so much to convey meaning, or even feelings, as to create a sensuous artifact out of words, and the activity of the artist, from painter to goldsmith, was an inspiration in the attempt to enrich poetic language by enlarging its sensuous appeal.

Pardo Bazán undoubtedly knew Gautier's 'Notice', as her copy of *Les fleurs du mal* was the 1868 edition (see Appendix II), and she quotes from the 'Notice' in *La cuestión palpitante* to illustrate the sensuous appeal of words (see III, 613a). A comparison of an extract from the *Apuntes autobiográficos*, which prefaced the first edition of *Los pazos de Ulloa* (1886), with the words of Gautier quoted above is revealing. Pardo Bazán describes how in her early years she became increasingly interested in the sensuous qualities of the Castilian language:

descubriéndome sus arcanidades y tesoros, su relieve y numerosa armonía, y convirtiéndome en coleccionista infatigable de vocablos, en cuya sola hechura (aislada del valor que adquieren en el período) noto bellezas sin cuento, color, brillo y aroma propio, bien como el lapidario antes de engarzada la piedra admira su talla, sus luces y sus quilates. (III, 712a)

The similarity between these words and those of Gautier in both the 1868 'Notice' and *Mademoiselle de Maupin* is striking: Gautier's taste for 'éclat, solidité, couleur' is matched by Pardo Bazán's appreciation of the 'color, brillo y aroma' of words. Both writers point out that the beauty of a word is distinct from its meaning, and both use the simile of a jeweller admiring the qualities of precious stones.

Similar descriptions of style in terms of the plastic arts appear frequently in her early criticism and *obiter dicta*. Writing to Giner in 1882 she compares her preferred style to filigree.<sup>7</sup> In the *Apuntes autobiográficos* she describes herself as innately disposed to the cult of beauty and form (III, 710a), and, in a phrase indicative of her artistic aspirations, she tells how she abandoned a projected history of Spanish mystical literature because such a 'beautiful subject' deserved a 'pen of fine gold, encrusted with diamonds' (III, 721a). In a letter to Juan Montalvo written in 1886 she likens the style of one of his works to bronze and alabaster sculptures, and there was obviously no greater compliment she could pay him.<sup>8</sup> Another highly approving reference to Montalvo's style describes his books as cherries; the form of the books is 'the sweet flesh' and the content merely 'the stone'.<sup>9</sup> So the analogy of taste is added to those of touch, sight and smell to express the sensuous appeal of literary form (Pardo Bazán was not particularly musical – see III, 704b).

What this conception of form meant to Pardo Bazán in practical

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terms is impossible to discuss without reference to the question of Realism. She spent the 1870s, the decade in which Galdós came to prominence, first in travel in Europe and then in the serious study of philosophy, theology, science and literature. Her first publications were of poetry, studies of the eighteenth-century philosopher Feijóo, Darwin, Milton and Dante, and articles on physics. By her own account she dismissed the novel as a trivial form and had never heard of Galdós or Pereda (see III, 711b). She believed the novel to be in any case beyond her capabilities as a writer because she felt it was entirely a product of the imagination (III, 706b). Her conversion was brought about by her reading of Valera, Alarcón, Pereda and Galdós in the late seventies, and of Balzac, Flaubert, Daudet and the Goncourt brothers when taking the waters at Vichy in 1880.<sup>10</sup> From the material gathered at Vichy she wrote her second novel, *Un viaje de novios*, the preface to which is her first major statement of a Realist aesthetic: ‘La novela ha dejado de ser mero entretenimiento, modo de engañar gratamente unas cuantas horas, ascendiendo a estudio social, psicológico, histórico – al cabo, estudio –.’ (III, 572a)<sup>11</sup> The novel, having incorporated the modern disciplines of sociology, psychology and historiography, was now a form entirely worthy of her serious mind and, moreover, no longer beyond her capabilities as a writer.

But such a serious approach does not imply that Pardo Bazán set about using the novel as a didactic instrument: nothing would have been more contrary to her belief that art exists primarily for its own sake. The modern writer, in the view of novelists such as Flaubert and the Goncourt brothers, should seek to create beauty through the imitation of contemporary reality, and this requires not only literary craftsmanship but also thorough research.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the fruits of such research are tools of and subordinate to the depiction of reality. Pardo Bazán found her initial inspiration for such a depiction of reality in the works of the Goncourt brothers, taking from them the principle that the aim of the Realist writer should be primarily the rendering of the external world, particularly colour, in words.

In chapter 2 of *La cuestión palpitante*, which is given over to the Goncourts, she describes them as ‘mis autores predilectos’, and explains her devotion to them by referring to her ‘temperamento de colorista’. The greater part of this chapter concentrates on the *colorista* aspect of the Goncourts’ work, that is, their use of language to produce ‘vivid chromatic sensations’ (III, 614b). But the concern for



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colour in her work, inspired by the Goncourts, goes beyond a simple search for brilliance of visual effect for its own sake, and is incorporated into the attempt to reproduce the world as it appears to the eye, that is, *la verdad* and *lo real*. In *La cuestión palpitante* she aligns herself with the Goncourts in the following expression of praise to colour:

¡Cuán bella y deleitable cosa es el color! [. . .] no dejo de creer que el culto de la línea es anterior al del colorido, como la escultura a la pintura; y pienso que las letras, a medida que avanzan, expresan el color con más brío y fuerza y detallan mejor sus matices y delicadísimas transiciones, y que el estudio del color va complicándose lo mismo que se complicó el de la música desde los maestros italianos acá. (III, 614a)

Modern writing aims at richness of colour rather than purity of line. Other references to 'línea', to be found in the *Estudio preliminar* to her translation of Edmond de Goncourt's *Les frères Zemganno* (III, 963b), show that Pardo Bazán associated line with ideal beauty (the fruit of the imagination rather than observation), whereas the most striking quality of observable reality was colour. When she speaks of the 'realismo ideal' of the Russian novelists and the reconciliation which, she believed, they had effected between spirit and matter, poetry and truth, she completes the list of opposing terms with 'la línea y el color' (III, 952a).<sup>13</sup>

A comparison of this standpoint and Zola's famous *écrans* is revealing. Zola regarded different aesthetic standpoints as analogous to screens through which objects are perceived in a more or less distorted form. The Classical screen is 'un verre grandissant qui développe les lignes et arrête les couleurs', while the Romantic screen is 'un prisme, à la réfraction puissante, qui brise tout rayon lumineux et le décompose en un spectre solaire éblouissant'. The Realist screen is 'un simple verre à vitre, très mince, très clair, et qui a la prétention d'être si parfaitement transparent que les images le traversent et se reproduisent ensuite dans leur réalité'.<sup>14</sup> The latter screen, although slightly darkening colour, shows it more clearly as it is in reality than either of the other two. The problem facing the Realist is to create intensity of colour without succumbing, like the Romantic, to the temptation to distort or magnify features of observable reality. It is interesting to note that Pardo Bazán regarded the *colorista* element in Zola's work as his greatest strength and disagreed with him when, looking upon these 'escalas cromáticas y complicados arpeggios' as a defect, he aspired to classical simplicity: '¿No será más bien que esas

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puras y esculturales líneas que Zola ambiciona y todos ambicionamos excluyen la continua ondulación del estilo, el detalle minucioso, pero rico y palpitante de vida, que exige y apetece el público moderno?’ (III, 628a) The Realist is trying to create a work ‘throbbing with life’, and colour is an indispensable means to this end. Looking back at the Goncourt brothers some ten years after she had first read their work, Pardo Bazán esteemed above all their influence in the elaboration of a Realist language:

En cuanto a su influencia indirecta, es forzoso que se deje sentir [. . .] en el estilo literario de todo verdadero artista, que habrá de propender cada día más a reemplazar la pálida abstracción, la nebulosa generalidad, con la palabra gráfica y pintoresca, la intensidad de la sensación y la visión lúcida de las cosas exteriores, que ya no nos parecen materia inerte, que gracias al esfuerzo del arte expresan, hablan y hasta lloran. (III, 962b)

This remarkable statement takes us a long way towards an understanding of Pardo Bazán’s early view of language and the representation of reality. That all-important phrase ‘la palabra gráfica y pintoresca’ denotes not, of course, an ornamental prettiness, but an attempt to render in language ‘la intensidad de la sensación y la visión lúcida de las cosas exteriores’, that is, a very immediate picture of the external world. The intensity and particularity of such a style are contrasted with ‘la pálida abstracción, la nebulosa generalidad’ of a previous or still current use of literary language, and it is reasonable to suppose that the contortions of syntax and other deviations from normal usage in Pardo Bazán’s early novels are all part of the effort to achieve this intensity and particularity. It should be noted that such a concept of style is entirely unspiritual (in the broadest sense of the word): there is no mention of ideas, ideals, feelings, or psychology. Alas’s comment on her early work confirms the view that it is fundamentally ‘unspiritual’: ‘Mira con cierto desdén *los intereses del alma*, prefiriendo siempre la luz de fuera, las formas plásticas, y en el ineludible *argumento*, someras relaciones sociales, y, cuando más, estudios de caracteres sencillos y aun vulgares.’<sup>15</sup>

I do not want to suggest, however, that Pardo Bazán considered the rendering of the external world to be the only possible aim of the novelist. On the contrary, in an early article on Galdós (1880) she writes that there are two paths the novelist can tread, the observation of either the external or the mental world.<sup>16</sup> It may well be that her reading of the Goncourt brothers encouraged her to follow in her