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Cultural Nicknames: An Important Feature of Galdós' Art

Vernon A. Chamberlin

Throughout his lifetime Galdós had a special fondness for and a creative interest in the use of nicknames. Gregorio Marañón, for example, says that until the end of his life, Don Benito delighted in using “apodos y mote [. . .] con que designaba constantemente a las personas de su trato, llenos [estos apodos] siempre de un hiperbólico gracejo” (71). We also know that Galdós and Concha-Ruth Morell, during the period of their intimacy, continually used a rich variety of nicknames not only to refer to each other, but also to other persons (Smith 91-120). Thus it is no surprise that Galdós, like other nineteenth-century authors, should use nicknames in his creative works.

Sobriquets of cultural origin are among his most interesting. Consequently, this study will focus upon eight categories of cultural nicknames: opera, painting, sculpture, literature, religion, *costumbrista* theater, bullfighting, and the realm of the antiestablishment counter-culture.

Opera

Galdós's lifelong love of music is well known. Because he began his journalistic career in Madrid as a music critic and reviewed numerous operas, it seems appropriate to begin our consideration of cultural nicknames with those that come from this environment.

In *Miau* the character Milagros Escobio, who had once enjoyed some success as a provincial opera singer, is nicknamed “la puderosa Ofelia.” This sobriquet has its origin in a description of her singing, written by an enamored reporter who heard her perform at a soiree. One assumes that she sang a selection from an unspecified nineteenth-century operatic adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*,¹ because the reporter wrote, “Es la puderosa Ofelia, llorando sus amores marchitos y cantando con gorjeo celestial la endecha de la muerte” (VI, 133). The reporter also reiterated: “Ella es la puderosa Ofelia o el ángel que nos traía a la tierra las celestes melodías” (VI, 133). The narrator soon shortens the newspaper description, transforming it into the nickname “la puderosa Ofelia” (VI, 133-34), and shifts it away from its original complimentary meaning. He begins applying it to Milagros on her first appearance in the novel in order to playfully call attention to the ironic distance between Milagros's past achievements and her present circumstance (VI, 133-34).

A further comically sarcastic note is added by the narrator when he tells us that Milagros had considered Italianizing her name, as was then the custom for opera singers, but that “como la carrera artística se malagró en ciernes, el mote italiano [“Escobini”] no llegó nunca a verse en los carteles” (IV, 132).²

Othello was another of Shakespeare’s dramas which served as an inspiration for operas. Galdós not only owned sheet music of a solo sung by Desdemona in Verdi’s *Otello*,³ but also wrote a detailed review (16 April 1866) of Rossini’s *Otello*, praising many aspects, including the role and performance of Desdemona (Shoemaker 326-30).⁴ Twenty-one years after his review of Rossini’s opera, Galdós created a character of his own in *Fortunata y Jacinta* whose nickname is “Desdémona.” The narrator explains, “[L]a llamaba Ballester a Desdémona, por ser o haber sido Quevedo [su marido] muy celoso, y con este mote la designaré, aunque su verdadero nombre era Doña Petra” (IV, i, 11: 326).⁵ The narrator’s own use of this nickname, however, may have as much to do with Doña Petra’s size as her husband’s jealousy. The narrator employs the nickname “Desdémona” at least thirteen times for this very obese character as the novel continues. For many of the readers of Galdós’s time his description of Desdemona would ring culturally true, for newsprint caricatures and eyewitness reports concerning the divas who sang the leading feminine role in Rossini’s *Otello* emphasized their enormous size. For example, Galdós may have been influenced by the contemporary caricature of Marietta Alboni as Desdemona (Weinstock 375), or perhaps, like Frédéric Chopin, he may have seen a performance in which the diva was so huge that “it looked as if Desdemona would smother Otello” (Weinstock 181).

Verdi’s *La Traviata* is the source for a nickname in *Lo prohibido*. The Marqués de Fúcar has nicknamed the narrator-protagonist, José María Bueno de Guzmán, “Traviatito” and always greets him with this sobriquet. Also another character, a cousin of José María’s, repeatedly calls him “úsico” (II, 1778-79). Thus it seems certain that the referent for these nicknames is *La Traviata*, the famous opera by Verdi (based on Alexandre Dumas’s *La dame aux camélias*), where the Romantic protagonist dies of tuberculosis. The nickname “Traviatito” is quite appropriate for José María, for his sex life is as liberated and inconstant as that of the heroine in Verdi’s opera. Certainly Galdós’s protagonist never rebels against his *apodo*, and we may be sure that he understands its referent. This is demonstrated when he tries to cheer up his cousin Eloísa, who is gravely ill, by jesting: “Pues ¿Qué querías tú? Morirte como la *Traviata*, con mucho amor, tosesitas y besuqueo?” (II, vii, 4: 1831). In this novel the narrator chooses not to appropriate the nickname for further narrative purposes, but leaves it exclusively to the realm of the characters concerned.

In *Fortunata y Jacinta*, concerning Plácido Estupiñá, the narrator says: “Los que quieren conocer su rostro, miren el de Rossini, ya viejo, como nos le han transmitido las estampas y fotografías del gran músico, y pueden decir que tienen delante al divino Estupiñá” (I, iii, 3: 177). In addition, as a previous study has shown, Estupiñá wears a green cape, engages in smuggling, delights in shopping for the best bargains, lives up many flights of stairs, and chatters like a magpie: all allusions to the life of Rossini (Chamberlin, “New Insights” 104-08). Thus it is no surprise that this character’s nickname should be “Rossini” throughout the novel as Galdós openly invites the reader to participate, at a time of near

Rossini-mania in Spain, in the kind of caricature of the Italian maestro that Rossini himself appreciated and encouraged.

Painting

Sardanapalus, the legendary final king of ancient Assyria, was well known in nineteenth-century Europe, because Delacroix, the leader of the Romantic movement in French painting, had popularized him in *La Mort de Sardanapole* (1828).⁶ A copy of this painting, which the narrator describes as “Sardanápalo quemándose entre sus queridos” (I, xiv, 1: 203), hangs in the home of Laura and José Relimpio in *La desheredada*. Whenever Doña Laura wishes to reprimand her husband (“un [mujeriego] andando”), she calls him “Sardanápalo” (I, viii, 1: 132; I, xiv, 3: 212). This nickname confirms that Doña Laura and the narrator are in agreement when the latter describes in detail José’s penchant for flirting with other women. Also the great discrepancy between the historical referent with his many women and Galdós’s timid, ineffective, nonactive name, “libertino platónico” (I, viii, 1: 133) is delightfully humorous. And further humor is achieved when Doña Laura changes the nickname’s gender marking and—more realistically now—calls Isidora Rufete “Sardanápala” after she has stayed out all night with Joaquín Pez (I, xviii, 1: 244).

In *Miau* the artistic nickname has its origin in a style of painting, rather than a specific work. The same reporter, who wished to ingratiate himself with Milagros Escobio by calling her “la puderosa Ofelia,” describes her mother, Doña Pura, as a “figura arrancada de un cuadro del Beato Angélico” (I, 89). The narrator once again appropriates this reporter’s words for ironic purposes, referring to Milagros as “la figura de Fra Angélico” (V, 127). Because prominent, distinctive halos around the heads of his sixteenth-century figures is a hallmark of Fra Angélico’s paintings, the reporter’s description of Pura contrasts markedly with her actions in the novel. Certainly Pura is not very angelic and, to say the least, not supportive of Don Ramón in his confrontation with the pressures which eventually cause his suicide.⁷

In *Fortunata y Jacinta* the historical nickname “Fornarina” does not become attached to a character. Rather it is uttered by Jacinta on her honeymoon as she attempts to wheedle from Juanito the name of his previous lover. When he stammers “For ...,” Jacinta exclaims (erroneously), “Fornarina” (I, v, 4: 223). Concerning the latter Francisco Caudet has said:

[Fornarina . . .] mujer romana, hija de un panadero (*fornaio* en italiano es panadero), que, al igual que Fortunata, no tiene apellidos por su condición de hija del pueblo. El pintor Rafael [1483-1520] la vió bañándose en el Tiber, y se enamoró de ella, llegando a ser amantes. La retrató en numerosas ocasiones. (I, v, 4: 223, n.171)

Ortiz Armengol, concurring with Caudet, adds, “Sorprende algo que Jacinta conociera el nombre de la amante del pintor Rafael” (217). Krow-Lucal, however, suggests ways that Jacinta might indeed have known about the historical “Fornarina,” because her famous portrait may have been in the first of the books which Ido del Sagrario attempted to sell to Juanito (and Jacinta): *Mujeres célebres* (393-401). Additionally, Ortiz Armengol also believes

that Jacinta was not thinking of the well-known Madrilenean *cuplista* Consuelo Bello, because “La existencia de una artista de variedades con ese apodo es posterior al momento novelesco” (217).⁸

However, Galdós may well have believed that many of his readers would respond emotionally to the nickname which Rafael gave to his beautiful model and mistress, in the same manner as did Don Benito’s friend Carmen de Burgos when she subsequently interviewed the actress Consuelo Bello. Concerning her own stage name of “Fornarina,” the latter said: “Sin duda no existe ningún nombre tan armonioso, tan musical [. . .con su] belleza dominante.”⁹ Carmen de Burgos agreed and added, “[. . .] pseudónimo áuro y brillante [. . .] que tiene un prestigio tan insinuante y una sonoridad tan argentina y melodiosa. [. . .] Rafael supo poner su *Fornarina* en los altares y hacer arrodillarse ante ella generaciones enteras. Penetra el canto de este nombre hasta el fondo misterioso del corazón” (Burgos 49).

The historical nickname which Jacinta would bestow upon her rival does not continue in the novel, because Juanito confesses the true name of his former lover to his new wife. Thus the reader has only one opportunity to respond to a referent, one which since the Renaissance has been recognized as capable of evoking (with considerable sophistication) provocatively erotic feelings.¹⁰

Sculpture

The most obvious referent for the nickname “La Venus de Médicis” in *Fortunata y Jacinta* is the famous statue of the same name. Additionally, Galdós may have been influenced by a *costumbrista* type presented in *Las españolas pintadas por los españoles* under the rubric “La Venus caduca” (274-79). Galdós would have known of this sketch by Roberto Robert, for he was also a contributor to this same volume.¹¹

“La Venus de Médicis” first appears in *Fortunata y Jacinta* as the personal sobriquet that José Ido del Sagrario uses to designate his wife, Nicanora, when the bizarre effects of eating meat in the Santa Cruz home become noticeable (I, viii, 4: 301). The narrator later gives this *apodo* an ironic twist when he provides a physical description of “La Venus de Médicis” on the occasion of Guillermina and Jacinta’s visit to Ido’s home in the *barrios bajos*:

“La Venus de Médicis” [. . .] debió de tener en otro tiempo buenas carnes; pero ya su cuerpo estaba lleno de pliegues y abolladuras como un zurrón vacío. Allí, valga la verdad, no se sabía lo que era pecho ni lo que era barriga. [. . .T]enía los párpados enfermos, rojos y siempre húmedos, privados de pestañas [. . .], una mujer más envejecida que vieja. (I, ix, 2: 326)

The above description more nearly approximates that of Doña Palmira, the woman featured in “La Venus caduca,” than it does the statue of Venus. Whereas medical students in Roberto Robert’s sketch nickname the time-ravaged woman “Las ruinas de Palmira,” Galdós’s use of his nickname implicitly emphasizes the distance between his character and

her cultural referent. Thus he can very effectively say, “Jacinta no sabía a quién compadecer más, si a Nicanora por ser como era, o a su marido por creerla Venus cuando se *electrizaba*” (I, ix, 2: 326).

Literature

Another Shakespearean nickname is “Ladi McBeth.” In *Casandra* Clementina (the niece of Doña Juana) justifiably receives the nickname “Ladi McBeth” because she incited the eponymous protagonist to kill the novel’s villainess Doña Juana. Neither the characters who are aware of the nickname nor the extradiagetic narrator pick up and apply the nickname to Clementina. Rather, Galdós is interested in showing both the emotional reactions of the nicknamed and those of the nicknamer, as well those of the relatives of both. We first see this dynamic at the climax of a scene when Clementina tells her husband Alfonso:

Pues María Navalcarazo, capaz como sabes, de sacrificar a su padre por un epigrama, ha dado en llamarme «Ladi McBeth» [. . .] Ya sabemos que es broma. Pero bien se ve la intención aviesa. ¡Oh! me lastima horrozamente María con su «Ladi McBeth» y con la historia que me levanto dormida frotándome esta mano manchada de sangre. (IV, v, 154)

The husband’s reaction (indicating that it occurs to him that the nickname could be appropriate) is communicated by the narrator’s succinct parenthetical comment that before Alfonso reassures his wife, he is “Desechando una idea lúgubre” (IV, v, 184).

Subsequently the nicknamer’s son (Acuña) has to defend his mother (and his younger sisters as well): Do not mention that “remoquete,” he insists, it was only a joke. Besides, anyone hearing it and not understanding its “carácter festivo,” just might think that I am perpetuating the nickname. Significantly, at this point the choir is heard singing the powerful “Dies irae”—(“[que] le pone a uno carne de gallina”) (IV, vii, 189).

Finally, on the occasion of a social gathering in the Parque del Buen Retiro, two women upbraid María Navalcarazo herself for having given the nickname to Clementina. Navalcarazo maintains again that it was all a joke, and the nickname should not be repeated, because “Me la atribuirán a mí, que quiero ser la misma prudencia.” Navalcarazo insists, however, that she did indeed see Clementina “en un estado como sonámbulo, frotándose una mano.” Quickly one of the women retorts with one of the most riveting statements from Shakespeare’s tragedy: “Y diría: “Con todo el agua del Océano no me lavaré esta mancha” (V, 1, 199).

Moments earlier Navalcarazo confessed that she too had experienced “sueños trágicos [. . .], dejando entrar el monstruo del asesinato..., aunque por breves momentos” (V, 1, 199).

Whereas Galdós had used the nicknames “Desdémona” in *Fortunata y Jacinta* and “Ofelia” in *Miau* for humorous caricature, in the case of “Ladi McBeth” he was more interested in the tragic psychological artistry of Shakespeare and echoed that profundity in original

characterizations of his own, as he recalled one of the most famous of all Shakespearean scenes (*Macbeth* II, 2).

In *El doctor Centeno* one of the students nicknames the moneylender Francisco Torquemada “Gobsek,” after the moneylending title protagonist of the well-known Balzacian novel. This once-mentioned sobriquet (II, iii, 1: 1411) is an integral part of Torquemada’s character delineation, and the dynamics of nicknaming are clear and appropriate, because the student, Arias Ortiz (like Galdós himself), is “muy devoto de Balzac, lo tenía casi completo, y a los personajes de la *Comedia humana* conocía como si los hubiera tratado” (II, i, 7: 1382).

In *Mendizábal* when Fernando Calpena arrives by stagecoach in Madrid, he is met by a special government agent. The latter is named Filiberto Muñoz, and, as he accompanies Fernando to a *casa de huéspedes*, he tells him that during a three-year period when he did not have a government job he was forced to become an actor to survive. The manager of the guest establishment subsequently confirms that Muñoz is indeed a policeman and that his nickname is “*Edipo*, porque fué, según dicen, del teatro” (I, 421). Galdós gives no more details, leaving the reader free to extrapolate that Sr. Muñoz’s nickname may have come from the character that he portrayed on the stage. Subsequently, this assumption is confirmed when, during a confrontation, Calpena says to him, “*Explicame esto, maldito Edipo o aquí perece un rey de Tebas*” (XVI, 471).

More important than the dynamics concerning the origin of the *apodo* is the fact that it identifies the plainclothes policeman with classicism—at a novelistic time when romanticism is bursting upon the scene. Thus when the protagonist Fernando Calpena moves from classicism to romanticism in all aspects of his life, “el feo Edipo” (XXIV, 497) with his acute “olfato” (XXXIII, 532) is in the opposite camp. Indeed as one character affirms, “No puede ser más clásico” (VII, 441), although he does not actively personify any aspect of Oedipus legend or plays. Usually in the background, and referenced by the narrator via the *apodo*, “Edipo” serves also as a framing character, for at the denouement of the novel, he is again involved in the securing of lodging for the protagonist—now at Madrid’s Saladero prison (XXXIII, 531-32).

Nicknames from the world of Dante are numerous in *Tristana*, where the love story between Horacio Díaz and the title protagonist parallels that of the real-life intimacy between Galdós and Concha-Ruth Morell. Just as the mutual invention of affectionate nicknames was a hallmark of the real-life relationship, so too in the fictional account this phenomenon is given prominence. The narrator says of Horacio Díaz:

Dante era su única pasión literaria. Repetía sin olvidar un solo verso, cantos enteros del *Infierno* y *Purgatorio*. Dicho se está que, casi sin proponérselo, dió a su amigueta lecciones del *bel parlare*. Con su asimilación prodigiosa, Tristana dominó en breves días la pronunciación, y leyendo a ratos como por juego, y oyéndole leer a él, a las dos semanas recitaba con admirable entonación de actriz consumada el pasaje de Francesca, el de Ugolino y otros. (XV, 1574)

From this shared enjoyment of Dante, nicknames arise spontaneously. The narrator explains: “Rara vez la llamaba por su nombre. Ya era *Beatrice*, ya *Francesca* o más bien la Paca de Rimini [. . .]. Estos mote[s] [. . .] eran el saborete de su conversación, variaban cada pocos días, según las anécdotas que iban saliendo” (XV, 1575). Tristana joyfully accepts these nicknames and also adds her own variations: “Beatricita” (XIX, 1585), “Curra de Rimini” (XIX, 1585), and “Panchita de Rimini” (XVI, 1579). Here art perhaps reflects life as experienced by Don Benito and Concha-Ruth Morell, since the narrator goes so far as to use his characters’ *apodos* when presenting their point of view (XXII, 1593) and quoting from their letters (XVI, 1578-85).

Religion

In *La desheredada* Galdós presents a minor character (Agustina) whose nickname is “A tí suspiramos.” This sobriquet is appropriate for the character, “porque no resuella como no sea para lamentarse. Verdad es que ella está enferma, su marido es borracho, su padre, ciego” (I, 2, 45). “A tí suspiramos” is also an emotionally charged nickname, for it is readily recognizable to the reader as a phrase from the *Salve regina*, a well-known prayer and hymn to the Virgin.¹² Moreover, this nickname can serve to illustrate the integrity and continuing originality of Galdós’s character creation, because he had already presented a character in *El audaz* called “Tío Suspiro” (XIV, 334).¹³ Also in *Doña Perfecta* he had the Troya sisters bestow on María Remedios Tinieblas the sobriquet “Suspiritos” (XII, 444 and *passim*), where once again the narrator chooses not to pick up and utilize the nickname.¹⁴ Thus we see that each *personaje* who is characterized by sighing has a different nickname to designate a common character trait.

In *Doña Perfecta*, one of the ways the socially isolated Troya sisters express their aggression against the townspeople is to give everyone a nickname. When, for example, Nicolás Hernández passes beneath their balcony, they shout “Cirio Pascual, Cirio Pascual, [. . .] un apodo[do] que tanto le hace rabiar” (XII, 445). Galdós does not tell us why Sr. Hernández gets so upset. However, we should not rule out the possibility that the Troya sisters (who also send “anónimas a graves personas,” throw “piedrecitas [. . .] y cáscaras de naranja] a todos los transeúntes,” and during Carnival put on masks “para meterse en las casas más alcurniadas, con otras majaderías y libertades [. . .]. [XII, 444]) might go so far as to express their own aggressions by using a nickname, which, since the Renaissance, has been a popular euphemism for the phallus.¹⁵ In his *Diccionario secreto*, Cela confirms that this usage is still valid today (330), and one can only speculate why this meaning for “Cirio Pascual” has seemingly never been glossed by editors and translators of *Dona Perfecta*.

In *Zaragoza* the character Pepe Pellejas explains that “me llaman por mal nombre *Sursum Corda*, pues como fuí hace veintinueve años sacristán de Jesús, y cantaba...; pero esto no viene a caso, y prosigo diciendo que yo soy *Sursum Corda* y pue que hayan ustés oído hablar de mí en Madrid” (II, 671). Although the character does not specify what he was singing, the reader of Galdós’s day would easily recognize the words *Sursum Corda* (“lift your hearts”) as from the Mass itself, as the officiant invites the congregation to respond with *Habemus ad Dominum*. (“We hold [them] to the Lord”). If the reader should assume, when Pellejas says “hayan ustés oído hablar de mí,” that he is implying that he is an important person, then

one is entitled to be amused.¹⁶ The usual spelling of his nickname then should be *sursuncorda* (which Moliner defines as “Nombre con que se alude a un supuesto persona de mucha importancia” [II, 1239]). Certainly Galdós knew this meaning, for he has both Francisco de Bringas in *Tormento* (IV, 1466) and the eponymous protagonist in *Mendizabal* (XXXI, 522) use *sursuncorda* correctly.

Bullfighting

Certainly one of the most important features of Spanish popular culture is the bullfight, and an unforgettable aspect of this contest is the *verónica*: “Lance del toreo que consiste en sortear el torero la acometida del toro con la capa extendida sostenida con ambas manos” (Moliner, II, 1512). In *Lo prohibido* the narrator-protagonist explains that his uncle Rafael suffers from chronic rhinitis and often has a handkerchief in front of his face, holding it in a manner reminiscent of a bullfighter. Consequently, his nickname has appropriately become “La verónica” (I, i, I: 1676).

Every bullfighter is best known by his nickname and two of the most famous rivals of nineteenth-century Spain, “Lagartijo” (Rafael Molina, 1842-1900) and “Frascuero” (Salvador Sánchez, 1842-1890), are mentioned in *La desheredada*, *Lo prohibido*, and *Fortunata y Jacinta*. In *La desheredada*, for example, Isidora’s last lover-protector, the vicious gambler “Gaitica” (Frasquito Surupa), indicates that he considers himself an important personage because he is going to have lunch with “Frascuero” and a *marqués* (II, xvii, 2: 465).

Having an *apodo* is such a hallmark of the bullfighter that all the playmates of Isidora Rufete’s brother Mariano in *La desheredada* are proud to sport nicknames. Mariano himself, to Isidora’s dismay, is willing to accept the pejorative “Pecado” (imposed by his aunt), just so he can have a nickname like the bullfighters (I, xiv, 2: 1045). Somewhat analogous dynamics are in play in the case of young Felipe, the eponymous protagonist of *El doctor Centeno*. He strongly resists the derogatory nicknames aggressively supplied by others and chooses for himself instead the sobriquet of a well-known bullfighter: “Iscuelero” (I, ii, 9: 1327). So, although Galdós himself disliked bullfighting, he nevertheless used enthusiastically the custom of toreros’ nicknames to flesh out his mimetic world of Madrilenean nomenclature.

Costumbrista Theater

It is well known that Madrid’s *majos* and *majas* (lower-class proletariat from certain south Madrid neighborhoods) not only abound in the popular *sainetes* and *zarzuelas*, but also have colorful nicknames (Kany, 227-28). In *El audaz* Galdós entitles a chapter “La maja” and says, “Acabado modelo de la maja era Vicente Garduña, conocida por *la Pintosilla*, emperatriz en los barrios bajos [. . .] temida en las tabernas, respetadas en las zambras y festejos populares; mujer que había aterrado el barrio entero dando de puñetazos a su marido” (XIII, 1, 328). We may be sure that this nickname is culturally accurate, for it is the same as that of an important character in Ramón de la Cruz’s *Las castañeras picadas* (I 73). Galdós’s “la Pintosilla” also participates in his next chapter (fourteen), whose title “El baile del candil” recalls Mesonero Romanos’s *costumbrista* sketch, “La capa vieja y el baile de

candil.” In Galdós’s presentation of popular dancing, “la Pintosilla” is joined by characters with such *apodos* as “Zancas Largas,” “Pocas Bragas,” “Mochuelo,” “Cuchara,” “Rendija,” “la Fraila,” and “la Naranjera” (XIV, 334-37).

Additionally, the well-named *majo* “Pujitos” (“little pusher”)¹⁷ appears in six *Episodios Nacionales*. An antecedent for this moniker can be found in Ramón de la Cruz’s *El fandango de Candil* (where “Pujitos” is accompanied by “Cuchara” and “Medio-culo”). Galdós acknowledges that “Pujitos era lo que en los sainetes de Ramón de la Cruz se señala con la denominación de *majo decente*.” One of the leaders of the revolt at Aranjuez, “Pujitos” becomes “gran maestro de la obra prima, miliciano nacional, patriota cuasi orador, cuasi héroe”; but in dress and personal habits, nevertheless, he is a true *majo*, similar to “Tres pelos,” “Roquito,” and “Majoma” (*El 19 de marzo*, VIII, 399).

Counterculture Nicknames

Galdós records that the *pueblo* delighted in expressing its aggression against the government by inventing derogatory nicknames for people, buildings, and coinage associated with the establishment. Already in his first novel Galdós gives an excellent example of this phenomenon. Although he does not wear a pigtail, Elías Orejón y Paredes in *La Fontana de Oro* is nicknamed “Coletilla.” The narrator explains how this came about:

[...Este] apodo [fue] elaborado en la barbería de Calleja algunos días después del famoso aditamento que puso el rey al discurso de la Corona [del 1 de marzo de 1821]. Aquel apéndice literario, que tan mal efecto produjo, era designado en el pueblo con la palabra *Coletilla*. La idea de que Elías era amigo del rey unió en la mente del pueblo la persona del fanático y aquella palabra; los nombres que el pueblo graba en la frente de un individuo, con su sello de fuego, no se borran nunca. Así es que Elías se llamaba así por todo el mundo. (IV, 34)

Certainly this nickname would ring culturally true for Galdós’s contemporary reader, because there was an equally conservative, historical personage with the same moniker: the War Minister, Lieutenant General Francisco Eguía. Because the latter purposely sported a pigtail,¹⁸ the Liberals nicknamed him “Don Coletilla,” and he appears in four *Episodios Nacionales*.¹⁹

Another case in point would be that of Isabela II’s confessor, Father Claret, whom the Liberals designated as “Clarinete”—and also vilified in the pornographic *Sem: Los Borbones en pelota* (134, and *passim*). In *El doctor Centeno* the narrator presents a character (Polero) who enlivens boardinghouse conversation by usually taking a contrary point of view: “Si alguien abomaba de la revolución, ya le teníamos sacando a relucir las famosas llagas [de Sor Patrocinio] y el padre Claret o *Clarinete*, que eran la comedia más sabrosa y gustosa de aquellos días” (II, i, 1369).

Concerning nicknames assigned to government buildings, we note that a railroad station in *Misericordia* in the south Madrid slums has been reduced in popular terminology from

Estación Imperial to “estación de las Pulgas” (XXVII, 228). Undoubtedly this occurred because its location “estaba rodeada de escombreras y desperdicios que venían de la población” (García Lorenzo, 228, n. 176). Also in *Misericordia* the *Monte de Piedad* or *Casa de Empeños* is nicknamed “Peñíscola” (XXXVII, 291) and “Peñaranda” (XL, 311). With delightful atavism, Madrid’s *Cárcel de Mujeres* was popularly known as “la Galera.”²⁰ This is the prison to which in *Fortunata y Jacinta* Doña Lupe threatened to send “Papitos” (II, ii, 5: 499). Further, in *Miau* one sees how the nickname for this prison has become part of a personal *apodo*: Isidoro Cuevas, who happens to work at the prison, is “comunmente llamado en la vecinidad *el señor de la Galera*” (18, 218).

As regards government personnel and coinage, let us note first that because of the *pompón colorado* on their tricones, auxiliary policemen in *Misericordia* are called “guindillas” (XX, 187; XL, 308). (After the color white was substituted on the hats of the policemen and the nickname nevertheless continued, a law was passed prohibiting the term “guindilla.” The *pueblo* responded by calling the policemen “la gente sin mote” [García Lorenzo 187, n.303]). We know also that two denominations of small coins with a lion on them were called “la perra chica” and “la perra gorda” (*Misericordia* I, 66). This probably occurred because the animal depicted, “según la imaginación popular, más parecía un perro que un fiero león” (García Lorenzo 66, n.15). In *Torquemada en el purgatorio* the eponymous protagonist warns his wife and sister-in-law that if they do not curtail their spending, the new family nickname will be “los marqueses de la *Perra Chica*” (II, x, 1072).

Also at some time in Spanish history, a coin with an eagle on it became satirized as a “pavo.” In Galdós’s time—and until the advent of the Euro—the “pavo” was equivalent to a “duro” or five pesetas. Appropriately, in *Fortunata y Jacinta*, Maxi Rubín’s moneylending aunt is popularly known as “la de los pavos.” In his Alpha MS Galdós had said that Lupe “prestaba a putas con interés de un duro [pavo] por once al mes” (743). In the novel’s final version the first character to use Lupe’s nickname is Mauricia la Dura (II, vi, 2: 609), a former prostitute who could well have borrowed money from Lupe before she became a door-to-door salesperson for her. However, instead of saying that the nickname came from former client prostitutes, the narrator affirms that Lupe inherited the sobriquet from her husband, “el de los pavos.” The latter was so nicknamed because he had commercial dealings with turkey growers (I, ii, 3: 531). Thus, when Lupe inherits the nickname it has already been invested with word-play humor²¹—and she still ends up with an appropriately characterizing nickname grounded in popular speech, but one which creates a constant *double entendre*. Repeatedly the narrator also refers to Lupe as “la de los pavos,” as he takes the point of view of those who have so named her (IV, iii, 5: 388; IV, v, 16: 646). And Juan Pablo Rubín later confirms and corroborates his aunt’s basic occupation (and expresses his personal aggression) by means of his own nickname for her: “la casa Rothschild” and “la baronesa de Rothschild” (IV, iii, 8: 401, 403).

Although Galdós delights in recording antiestablishment witticisms during the Monarchy, in *La primera república* he is not amused by the derogatory nickname applied to the new parliament:

En su estreno, las [Cortes] Constituyentes fueron bautizados por un profesional del chiste con el apodo de “Tren de tercera,” grande necedad e injusticia, pues el pueblo español dió su representación a bastantes hombres de gran mérito. (VIII, 1105)

Then Galdós gives a list of twenty-two (obviously “first-class”) names. Thus one sees that although most of Galdós’s antiestablishment sobriquets are a realistic reflection of monarchical times, he can also faithfully record an anti-republican *apodo*. On this occasion, however, he feels free to rebut it—and reveal his own personal political convictions.

In summation, this study has shown that cultural nicknames—whose referents are to be found in the world of opera, painting, sculpture, religion, *costumbrista* theater, and the realm of counterculture witticisms—are a perennial facet of Galdós’s creativity. Not only do they reflect the cultural knowledge and tastes of the author, but also those he would seemingly expect for his ideal reader—one who can bond intellectually and emotionally with him as he tells his stories and presents his social messages. Rewards for such a culturally informed reader include the enjoyment of greater insights into Galdós’s characterizations, his reflections of quotidian realism, and his delightful humor. Additionally, the *apodos* reveal narratological techniques as the storyteller sometimes appropriates and utilizes nicknames created by his characters, not only for ironic contrasts vis-à-vis the referent but also to identify more closely with his characters and their point of view. Certainly, Galdós’s novels are much enriched and enlivened by his continual creation, reporting, and narratological employment of cultural nicknames.

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Notes

- ¹ *Encyclopedia of the Opera* lists twenty nineteenth-century versions of *Hamlet* (37, 307).
- ² Leopoldo Alas in *Su único hijo* confirms Galdós' observation concerning the Italianization of opera singers' names with his character Cayetano Domínguez, whose surname for the billboards becomes Mingetti y Gaetano (XII, 397-401). In the short story "La reina Margareta," however, Alas creates a tenor who resists the pressure of his touring company to Italianize (168), and Alas also records that even local newspapers tended to Italianize surnames, even if the performer did not choose to do so (167, 168).
- ³ The selection is from Act 4, scene 2. Photocopy in my possession, with permission of the Casa-Museo Pérez Galdós, Las Palmas.
- ⁴ For more on Desdémona's characterization and her role in the novel, see Chamberlin, "Echoes" (91-92).
- ⁵ Because the Villaamil family are opera-goers, it seems appropriate to focus our attention on Rossini's opera rather than Shakespeare's play. Galdós, of course, knew Shakespeare's *Othello*. In fact, in his review of Rossini's opera, he said, "Rossini espiritualiza á Shakespeare, sustituía á su lenguaje demasiado preciso otro más vago, pero más expresivo y profundo; la Malibran cantaba á Shakespeare, García representaba á Shakespeare. ¡Admirable fusión del genio que crea y del genio que expresa! ¡Fraternidad misteriosa del drama y la música!" (Shoemaker 326).
- ⁶ Delacroix was inspired by Lord Byron's drama *Sardanapalus* (1821), and there were also nine nineteenth-century operas concerning the eponymous protagonist.
- ⁷ For details of the animalistic aspects of Pura's characterization and actions, see Chamberlin, "Social Darwinism" (299-305).
- ⁸ For some details concerning the career of the Spanish cuplista "Fornarina," see Porset, (169-74).
- ⁹ Concha Bello also remembered that she once naively resisted the name "Fornarina"—and had to be persuaded to give up the appellation "Rosa de té." However, she added, "Ahora agradezco aquel bautizo ["Fornarina"] como el más grande favor" (Burgos 49-50). Another actress who responded enthusiastically to the nickname was Galdós's mistress Concha-Ruth Morell. After reading *Fortunata y Jacinta*, she changed the gender of the nickname and affectionately referred to Don Benito in some of her letters as "Fornarino" (Smith 101, 105). She explained "Desde que imaginaba (te lo he dicho mil veces) que Fornarina era la suma perfección. . .te estoy queriendo. [. . y ahora] tengo un Fornarino de carne y hueso superior en todo al imaginario" (Smith 101).
- ¹⁰ For the most famous Raphael portrait of "La Fornarina"—and its evocative potentials—see Craven 371-94.
- ¹¹ In *Las españolas pintadas por los españoles* Galdós presented four social types of contemporaneous females under the title *Cuatro mujeres* (II, 97-105).
- ¹² The Salve prayer begins: "Dios te salve, Reina y Madre de misericordia, vida, dulzura y esperanza nuestra. Dios te salve. A Ti llamamos los desterrados hijos de Eva, a Ti suspiramos [. . .]"

- ¹³ Galdós's narrator describes "Tío Suspiro" as "maestro de las escuelas establecidas en la Carrera de San Francisco para alivio de bolsillos y desconsuelo de caminantes" (*El audaz* XIV, 334).
- ¹⁴ The character Pepe Rey momentarily picks up the nickname, referring to María Remedios as "La señora Suspiritos," but soon changes to "Esa señora de los suspiros" (XIII, 446). The narrator is not interested in appropriating the nickname, but rather concentrates repeatedly on the habit of María Remedios that occasioned the nickname: her sighing.
- ¹⁵ The Troya sisters are responding also to a dare by Juan Tafetán. Because of its length and diameter, the Holy Saturday Candle early on became "uno de los eufemismos jocosos frecuentes" for a very large phallus. This usage has been documented in *La lozana andaluza* by Alonso Hernández: "[L]a hornera está allí, y dice que traxo a su hija virgen a Roma, salvo que con el palo o cabo de la pala la desvirgió; y miente que el sacristán con el cirio pascual se lo abrió" (Lozana, XVII; Alonso Hernández 304). This same meaning for "cirio pascual" is confirmed by Gillet in Torres Naharro's *Comedia Calamita*, where he also reminds us that in Judeo-Spanish "Kandela" is used for male sexual parts (654, n.136). Cela cites other examples for "cirio pascual," including Quevedo, "Sátira a una mujer que, viéndole enamorado, se casó con un capón" (330).
- ¹⁶ Another character (Don Roque), "cediendo a un impulso de generosidad," answers: "Sí [. . .] me parece que allá he oído nombrar al señor de Sursum Corda. ¿No es verdad, muchachos?" Then the narrator also uses the nickname as he refers to the character in question (*Zaragoza* I, ii: 671-73).
- ¹⁷ Ward Dennis believes that "Pujitos" is absolutely superficial and characterized by his name of "little pusher," by his lack of comprehension of what he is fighting for, and by a speech tag of mispronouncing words. The triple label, rare in Galdós's characters, is effective and makes him memorable. This is reinforced by having him appear in two novels of the first series [*El 19 de marzo y el 2 de mayo*, *Napoleón en Chamartín*] as well as four in the next [*El equipaje del Rey José*, *El Grande Oriente*, *El 7 de julio*, *El terror de 1824*] (89).
- ¹⁸ General Eguía wore his pigtail as an indication of his opposition to liberalism—as had been the custom during the reign of Carlos III (Dérozier 287-88).
- ¹⁹ For a description of General Eguía (who has some physical features in common with Elías Orejón), see *Memorias de un cortesano de 1815* (XVIII, 1314). He also appears in *El 7 de julio*, *Los cien mil hijos de San Luis*, and *Un faccioso más y algunos frailes menos*. For more details on the common characteristics of the two Galdosian "Coletillas," see Dérozier (287-88).
- ²⁰ *La Cárcel de Mujeres*, located at Ancha de San Bernardino 81, was the former convent adjoining the Monserrat church, just across the street from the home of the Villaamil family in *Miau*.
- ²¹ Regarding the business dealing of Francisco Torquemada and Lupe's husband, Ortiz Armengol has stated: "El de Francisco era la usura y el de don Pedro Manuel recibir huevos y otros productos de corral y girar dinero a las tres provincias de donde eran

los paveros que le situaban género. La de “los paveros” era un gracioso equivo al referirse al mismo tiempo al averío del moco tendido y a los “pavos” o monedas de cinco pesetas que manejaba en su comercio” (332).

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