

Illustrating Pereda: Picturesque *Costumbrismo* in *El sabor de la Tierruca*

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The fact that José María de Pereda remained impervious to the debates on Realism and Naturalism for much of his career has finally caught up with his place in the canon. His literary creed, rooted in a eulogy for the traditional patriarchal values soon to succumb to capitalism, seems indeed so outdated as to arouse little interest among the specialists in nineteenth-century fiction. Vis-à-vis the depiction of an increasingly problematic reality on the part of the Spanish master novelists of that time—Galdós, Pardo Bazán, and Clarín—Pereda portrays his native region as an idyllic, pastoral *locus* devoid of social conflict.¹ As a result of this ideological stance, our appreciation of his novels has declined considerably in spite of the impressive work by critics like Cossío, Montesinos, Clarke, González Herrán, Bonet, García Castañeda, Miralles, or Germán Gullón. His linguistic proficiency notwithstanding, Pereda's reliance upon an authoritative narrator presiding over a static world no longer satisfies the imperatives of change and moral relativism vindicated by the Realist canon. Even the institutionalization of regional literature in Spain's autonomies has not turned the tide of public indifference to figures who, like our author, have long ceased to speak to a modern sensibility. Perhaps irremediably, Pereda has lost appeal among the majority of readers who approach literature in search of what he cannot offer: a timeless, global interpretation of human experience.

No small part of Pereda's discredit lies in the inability to blend harmoniously his penchant for the *cuadro de*

costumbres with the richness of plot and characterization common in the Realist novel.² As much as I may agree with those who attribute his shortcomings to a misunderstanding of what the art of the novel is all about, I would like to argue nevertheless for a re-examination of his fiction in a more embracing perspective. As we know, scholarly trends in the last two decades or so have been active in removing the text from its isolation by highlighting the role mediations play in the production, distribution, and reception of what we designate now as cultural artifacts. It is my contention, then, that one willing to suspend temporarily his or her artistic beliefs might derive important advantages from exploring critical paths within an interdisciplinary frame. After all, we are living in a time of transition—and confusion—in the humanities, when even so a established institution as Aesthetics has to reckon with a mounting number of discontents.

The type of analysis I advocate here will hopefully explain Pereda's adherence to his literary principles not so much as a stubborn divergence but rather in its relationship to the cultural constraints of his age. In the first part of this essay I purport to show how the alliance of painting and narrative throughout the 1800s originated in a lively debate on the picturesque that took place in England at the end of the eighteenth century. A subsequent stage in this alliance arrived in Spain during the Romantic vogue for the *artículo de costumbres*, which owed much of its popularity to the transformations brought forth by the illustrated press. With the aid of lithography and other engraving techniques, *costumbrismo* succeeded in exposing the nation's idiosyncratic variety

from the periodical page to collections such as *Los españoles pintados por sí mismos* (1843). The juxtaposition of text and image extended its domain to Realism as well, the presence of illustrations in the novels constituting by no means an unusual occurrence. This juncture of the picturesque, *costumbrismo* and illustrations left a permanent imprint on nineteenth-century narrative, reshaping its poetics in more profound ways than we have hitherto acknowledged.

Pereda's affinities to *costumbrismo* make up an even more compelling case because of his reluctance to Naturalism, the influence of which effected substantial innovations in the novelistic genre during the last quarter of the century. Not unlike some of his contemporaries, Pereda did his apprenticeship by circulating *cuadros de costumbres* in local newspapers and journals, prior to their compilation into *Escenas montańesas* (1864), *Tipos y paisajes* (1871), *Tipos trashumantes* (1877), and *Esbozos y rasguños* (1881). The *costumbrista* mode was displaced by a short flirtation with the ideological tendencies of the 1870s, a conservative response to Galdós' *romans à thèse* that comprises *El buey suelto* (1878), *Don Gonzalo González de la Gonzalera* (1879), and *De tal palo, tal astilla* (1880). Shortly thereafter, and much to the despair of Pardo Bazán and Clarín, Pereda's utmost refusal of Zola's doctrines cast him apart from his fellow writers. One need only compare Galdós' espousing of Naturalism in his *La desheredada* (1881) to the publication of *El sabor de la tierruca* one year after in order to realize their differing creeds. In the latter, Pereda contents himself with an expansion of *costumbrismo* to the novel, thematically articulated in the same el-

egy for the home land on the verge of extinction Mesonero Romanos had advanced half a century earlier. Pereda's attention to picturesque landscapes and characters increased successively in *Sotileza* (1885) and *La puchera* (1889), until its culmination in *Peñas arriba* (1895).³ While certainly Pereda's genius was a consequence of his political ideals and the intricacies of his own temperament, other components must be taken into account as well. Among them, the extent to which his poetics was determined by pictorial conventions—from the theoretical notion of the picturesque to *costumbrista* literature and painting—deserves thorough consideration. As I will attempt to demonstrate in the second part of the paper with regard to *El sabor de la tierruca*, the ramifications of the Horatian *pictura ut poesis* all the way through the nineteenth century can provide us with a unique insight into Pereda's world, and ultimately perhaps into the foundations of the *costumbrista* house of fiction.

From the Picturesque to *Costumbrismo*

In Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), the thoughtful Elinor warns her sister Marianne against exhausting the topics of conversation with her lover Willoughby should they continue to speak with such improper familiarity. After all, she adds, they have already discussed "almost every matter of importance" in their first meeting, and another "will suffice to explain the sentiments on picturesque beauty, and second marriages, and then you can have nothing further to ask" (42). The reference to "picturesque beauty" might well be deemed irrelevant

if it were not for its reappearance in the novel. Sojourning at the sisters' cottage in Barton, Edward—a favorite of Elinor's—decides to take a morning walk to the village seeking solace in his melancholy. Upon his return he comments on the surrounding valley in laudatory terms, describing its "rich meadows and several neat farm houses scattered here and there" (85). A dispute ensues between Edward and Marianne concerning the picturesque, to which the young man has no inclination. Replying to Marianne's enthusiasm for the extravagant charms of nature, Edward shows his preference for landscapes whose beauty is not defined by "picturesque principles":

I do not like crooked, twisted, blasted trees. I admire them much more if they are tall, straight, and flourishing. I do not like ruined, tattered cottages. I am not fond of nettles, or thistles, or heath blossoms. I have more pleasure in a snug farm-house than a watch-tower—and a troop of tidy, happy villagers please me better than the finest banditti in the world. (85)

Unlike Willoughby's counterfeit gallantry, Edward's refusal to abide by fashion dictates bespeaks his earnestness and independence, making his cause sympathetic to the reader.

Besides illustrating Austen's mastery in taking recourse to details without ever losing sight of their possible novelistic effects, the passage interests me from a socio-historical viewpoint as well. More specifically, and despite the author's ironic overtones, Edward's eloquent speech points to a controversy around the picturesque among the cultivated English class at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Its

main tenets were expounded by William Gilpin in a series of three essays, *On Picturesque Beauty*, *On Picturesque Travel*, and *On Sketching Landscape*, as early as 1792, preceding by almost twenty years the first edition of *Sense and Sensibility*. Gilpin's distinction between the beautiful and the picturesque was based mostly upon perception criteria: beautiful objects "please the eye in their *natural state*," while picturesque ones "please from some quality, capable of being *illustrated by painting*" (3).⁴ The latter tended to privilege a certain decadent atmosphere—the "blasted trees," and "ruined, tattered cottages" alluded to by Edward—where the scenery was represented in its unevenness and coarseness, as opposed to the gentleness of the beautiful: "in a word, instead of making the whole *smooth*, make it rough; and you make it also *picturesque*" (3).

The publication of two separate volumes by Sir Uvedale Price, *An Essay on the Picturesque* (1794), and *Essays on the Picturesque* (1798), added fuel to the debate by expanding on Gilpin's definition. In Price's view, a person contemplating a picturesque setting would at first be puzzled by its ugliness. However, a gradual process of reacquaintance with the subject matter would follow in which he or she would notice the irregular lines and colors to be there for their singular effects:

for the variety produced by sudden and irregular deviation, the strongly marked peculiarity of their appearance, the manner in which the rugged and broken parts caught the light, and the contrast that such lights presented with deep shadows, or for the rich and mellow tints produced by various stages of decay. (Hussey 14)

A separate category from the beautiful and the sublime, the picturesque was by no means inferior, and could equally elicit a strong aesthetic response. Of more consequence still than the establishment of the critical concept of the picturesque at the dawn of Romanticism were its repercussions on the arts all over the century, including the novel. Precisely because the theory of the picturesque had gained acceptance among the majority of the public, the English novelists of the time learned how to conform to its conventions so that they would not disappoint their readers' expectations (Ross 25-26). The representational traces of the picturesque may have thus accounted for some of the realistic tendencies—especially the descriptive—in Victorian fiction.

While the controversy around the picturesque did not spread to the Continent, the imprint of painting on literature was carried forward due to the fashion of *costumbrismo* in France, Spain, and other countries. Montesinos' extraordinary erudition and acumen captured once and for all the nature of *costumbrismo*, its nostalgia for types, places, and customs about to become extinct in the rapid transition to the modern world:

dar fe de un cambio, de una revolución, de una evolución que ha transformado la faz de todo el país o de alguno de sus rincones pintorescos, y desahogar, entregándose al recuerdo, la nostalgia de todo lo desaparecido y olvidado. (*Costumbrismo* 44)

Less satisfying, however, is his disavowal of *costumbrismo's* role in the development of Realism in the second half of the century. To be more precise, Montesinos does

not so much deny the influence of *costumbrismo* as he does assert its negative effects. By preventing the novel from outgrowing its dependence on the *cuadro*—with its corollaries of scarcity of plot, flat characterization, and overt moralization—Montesinos held *costumbrismo* responsible for the damage it inflicted upon Fernán Caballero, Pereda, and other regional writers:

el punto de vista del ‘cuadro de costumbres’ no es nunca el del *roman de mœurs* ni puede serlo [...] en el primero los personajes [...] son figuras *típicas*, y *pretextan* un estudio [...] de ciertos *modos de vida*, mientras que la novela [...] se interesa por la *manera de ser* de personajes bien determinados. (*Fernán* 33)

Recent studies have finally begun to break away from Montesinos’ authority to acknowledge *costumbrismo*’s modern notion of literature, as manifested in its focus on the contemporary and on minute details. Despite its indulgence in the vanishing past, the “mimesis costumbrista” was actually grounded in a dynamic, historical conceptualization of reality:

el nuevo objeto de mimesis es la sociedad, referente cultural e ideológico de la literatura surgida al amparo institucional de la vida pública burguesa. (Escobar 262)

Costumbrismo played, therefore, a significant part in the consolidation of the novelistic genre because of its interest in ordinary experiences of middle-class citizens. It is also worth mentioning that the Spanish novelists in the 1870s would frequently contribute *artículos de costumbres*

to periodicals and collections. Enrique Rubio Cremades has referred to that cooperation as “symbiosis,” underscoring its importance in the rise of the novel:

la conexión entre lo puramente novelesco y el estudio de los distintos tipos agrupados en estas colecciones costumbristas se produce con total perfección. (470)

Ideologically at odds with Realism, *costumbrismo*’s precursorship led nevertheless to an appreciation of the aesthetic potentialities of daily life. No novelist in the last quarter of the century could then deprive himself or herself of so useful a traveling companion.

Aside from the anticipation of motifs further introduced in the novel, a change towards narrativity occurred in the *artículo* as a result of illustrations being placed next to it. Without a doubt, the mechanical progress in the art of engraving was intended to attract a wider audience by combining word and image on the same page. But still more crucial than marketing and economic benefits—at least for our purposes here—is the realization of how illustrations effected a fundamental transformation at the core of *costumbrismo*. Lee Fontanella has shown how at the outset *costumbrismo* paid sole attention to universal types and scenes untouched by historical change. This “essentialist ideal” (185) was by definition non-narrative, and as such could not have much prerogatives on the novel. However, no sooner did *costumbrismo* accommodate the latest techniques of engraving than a reformulation of its poetics started to take place. Since the main function of the illustrations was to complement the writ-

ten text and fix its semantic field, they did not usually compromise the immobility of the *cuadro* by posing ambiguities. A moment came, however, when the merging of the two media was so prevalent as to having procured a maximum degree of stasis in the *artículo*. *Costumbrismo* was, at that point, forced to shift gears and move “in the direction of narrative elaboration, or, if one prefers, in the direction of the nineteenth-century novel” (185). In other words, the *artículo de costumbres* cleared the way for the *novela de costumbres* once its status had been instituted in the illustrated press. *Costumbrismo* had consequently to expand its frontiers to a less ephemeral medium, that of the novel, in order to keep its position without growing out of date. It was Fernán Caballero’s pioneering enterprise in *La Gaviota* (1849), which, for all its shortcomings, catapulted the genre and ushered in some of its most recognizable features. Illustrated *costumbrismo*, in conclusion, not only furnished Realism with numerous scenes and characters but likewise promoted narrativity as the *raison d’être* of the new canon.

Another trace of this ubiquitous cooperation between the arts is to be found in the frequent references to “pintar,” “boceto,” “píncel,” “cuadro,” “paleta,” etc., in Mesonero Romanos, Fernán Caballero, Pereda, and the rest of *costumbristas*. These metaphors constitute evidently more than a rhetorical strategy, even if the rudimentary state of Spanish criticism at the time did not usually account for them. One exception with regard to Pereda’s poetics will suffice to convey, though, the relevance of that simile. Every time the novelist was attacked by the liberal critics for what they allegedly regarded as his narrow-mindedness—both ideological and

artistic—Menéndez Pelayo would come to his aid to champion his cause. The erudite was convinced that his friend could only do justice to his talent were he to confine himself within the familiar settings of the Santander province. A consequence of this certainty was that, for Menéndez Pelayo, Pereda would succeed as long as he remained exclusively committed to *costumbrismo*. Don Marcelino defended his views in several articles, even indirectly in his well-known response to Galdós’ acceptance speech to the Real Academia Española on February 7, 1897. Notwithstanding his general admiration, Menéndez Pelayo could not help there regretting Galdós’ excessively crude display of realism in his *Novelas Contemporáneas*—a result of his tribute to Zola:

no se puede negar que la impresión general de estos libros es aflictiva y penosa, aunque no toque en los lindes del pesimismo; y que en algunos la fetidez, el hambre y la miseria, o bien las angustias de la pobreza vergonzante y los oropeles de una vanidad todavía más triste que ridícula, *están fotografiados* con tan terrible y acusadora exactitud, que dañan a la impresión serena del arte y acongojan el ánimo con visiones nada plácidas. (*Contestación* 84-85, my emphasis)

That the ugliness of Naturalism was apprehended photographically posed a striking contrast to the pleasure derived from the pictorial conventions Galdós had adhered to in his *Episodios Nacionales*:

¡Qué distinta cosa son las escenas populares, de ese mismo pueblo de Madrid, llenas de luz, color y alegría, que Pérez Galdós había puesto en sus *Epi-*

sodios, robando el lápiz a Goya y a D. Ramón de la Cruz. (Contestación 85, my emphasis)

Menéndez Pelayo was suggesting thus that the *costumbristas'* *Volksgeist* be compared to the placid immobility of the picture, whereas he explicitly chastised the Naturalists for their photographic descriptions of vice. As he had stated earlier in his prologue to the novelist's *Obras Completas*, "el señor Pereda no es *fotógrafo* grande ni chico, porque la fotografía no es arte, y el señor Pereda es un grande artista" (*Pereda* 203).⁵

On the other hand, Pereda's affinity for the landscape artists of his time—Carlos Haes, for example—did not escape Montesinos' keen eye either, for whom that attachment revealed an obsolete conformance to tradition that prevented its practitioners from adopting the impressionist gaze:

estos realistas [here 'costum-bristas'] españoles partían de un principio cuya falsedad comenzaba justamente a demostrar el impresionismo: que las cosas *son como son* y que la misión del artista es reproducir ese ser estático suyo. (*Pereda* 264)

Owing to its connections to a specific school of art, Montesinos and others could not but adversely associate *costumbrismo* with the representation of immutable reality, a complacent authorial attitude, or an unwillingness on the part of the artist to include his or her subjective vision. Lower-case realists at best, the *costumbristas* proved unable in their view to overcome the subservience to contemporary Spanish painters, much too imbibed in their

formulas to acquiesce to any modernity claims.

The English debate on the picturesque, the juxtaposition of text and image in the *artículos de costumbres*, the emergence of the *novela de costumbres*, and in general the synergy of canvas and text may lead us to favor the pictorial as the most representative mode of perception in nineteenth-century literature. The depiction of people in their extraordinarily diverse appearance, moods and occupations on the one hand, the abundance of quaint sceneries in secluded provinces on the other, were all susceptible to being interpreted after the manner of painting. For the most part, they exuded that peculiar charm characteristic of people or things untainted by civilization, left to the contemplation of an audience far more trained in the visual than in the literary.⁶ The adjective *pintoresco*, one must remember, was used in Spain during the first half of the century as a synonym for illustrated—thus Mesonero Romanos' famous periodical, *El Semanario Pintoresco Español*—and not until later did it take on the present meaning which still retains the pictorial flavor: either a "quaintly attractive, charming," or a "strikingly expressive, vivid" quality in an object or person (*Webster* 529). Indeed, one could easily argue that *costumbrismo* and picturesqueness went hand in hand from the beginning, their identity stemming from epochal conventions geared towards the visualization—through the brush or the pen—of whatever peculiarities a region had to offer. From the picturesque to *lo pintoresco*, from eighteenth-century England to the splendor of Spanish *costumbrismo* in the 1830s and the 1840s, the Horatian topic oper-

ated in full motion during the Romantic period, its repercussions reaching as far as the most prominent figures of Realism as well.

Illustrating the Idyll

When *El sabor de la tierruca* was published in 1882, it disconcerted the readers who might have been expecting a prolongation of the political theses in *Don Gonzalo* or *De tal palo*. The reaction of the critics was likewise tepid, mostly disapproving of its non-novelistic elements: overabundance of scenes, discontinuities in the story, multiplicity of characters, and absence of a protagonist.⁷ The corrosive Clarín could not hide his disappointment in what he regarded as a specimen of “cantonalismo literario” (205), unworthy of being called a novel: “[l]a última novela de Pereda, apenas es novela, por lo pronto” (205). But before rushing to examine whether the assemblage of scenes was detrimental or not to the narrative as a whole, let us turn our attention to the particulars surrounding the publication of *El sabor*. Pereda’s reputation had induced the editor Doménech to buy out the rights to the first edition of *El sabor*, in exchange for its inclusion in the collection, “Biblioteca Arte y Letras.” A business enterprise on the part of Doménech, the series was known for combining text and illustrations in deluxe volumes targeted to a burgeoning middle class. Pereda must have been too flattered by the prospects of a wide circulation at the hands of the Catalan publisher to even think of potentially troubling editorial demands. The truth is, though, that the composition and printing of *El sabor* pushed Pereda’s frag-

ile patience to the limit, making the overall experience far less rewarding than he could have initially imagined.

First of all, it was decided that the illustrator, Apelles Mestres, would travel to Pereda’s summer residence to familiarize himself on site with the scenery. Our author was not exactly delighted with this intrusion upon his vacation in Polanco, the place where he used to relax and work at ease. The situation only worsened after Mestres’ departure, when Doménech urged Pereda to complete his manuscript by October. In a letter to Gumersindo Laverde dated October 30 of 1881, Pereda complained about the tremendous amount of writing he had to catch up with:

Como tienen mucho empeño en publicarla pronto y han de hacer los grabados antes de empezar la impresión y para hacerse éstos es indispensable conocer el asunto [...] figúrese el rebentón [sic] de trabajo que me habré dado esta temporada. (Clarke, *Sabor* 19)

The ordeal did not end there yet, as Pereda decided to ask Galdós for a prologue to his novel. The latter gladly obliged, but his multiple occupations would not allow him to fulfill the promise until almost one year later, thus delaying the appearance of *El sabor* until June of 1882.⁸

While the purpose of this paper is not necessarily apologetic, I would like to pursue those mediations a little further by focusing on how Pereda dealt with the hybrid nature of his novel. We must insist on *El sabor* being a commissioned project, which means Pereda knew well in advance about the illustrations. As mentioned above, he even agreed to host

Mestres in Polanco and show him around in order that the artist could sketch the details of the village at his leisure. That somehow this collaboration must have altered Pereda's original plans has been acutely observed by Clarke: "hubo de describir e inventar escenas, situaciones, momentos determinados en el texto que dieran pie para las ilustraciones" (*Sabor* 19). At the same time, Clarke notices the "elevado porcentaje de *momentos pintorescos* o dramáticos en comparación con las demás novelas peredianas de esta época," intentionally displayed to give the illustrator a chance to turn them into "*formas plásticas y dramática dinamicidad*" (*Sabor* 19, my emphasis). Those *costumbrista* scenes had perforce to disrupt the narrative process in *El sabor* to the point of jeopardizing its novelistic status vis-à-vis the expectations of the Realist canon—thus Clarín's objections. A list of the most notorious will determine their paramount importance, both quantitatively and qualitatively: the millennial oak—*cajiga*—in Cumbrales, followed by the two villages, Cumbrales and Rinconeda (ch. 1); Don Valentín, and his dwelling (ch. 6); the clientele at the *taberna* (ch. 11, "Apuntes para un cuadro"); the annual husking of the corn (ch. 16, "Una deshoja"); the livestock grazing, and the *cachurra* (ch. 17, "La derrota");⁹ the small-town market (ch. 18); the *magosta*, or threshing of the chestnuts (ch. 21); the *ábrego*, a strong wind of the South (ch. 22); lastly, the climactic battle between Cumbrales and Rinconeda (ch. 23). Keeping in mind that these descriptions generally take one whole chapter, we conclude that roughly a third of *El sabor* is devoted to scenes. And though all but two—*la derrota* and *la cachurra* in chapter 17—connect at least partially to the story lines, the amalgam of characters

and places may render the cohesion of the novel problematic.

The multiple subsidiary stories in *El sabor* makes the task of summarizing them a daunting one. According to the narrator's famous last words, the novel purports to convey a sense of rural Cantabria's flavor as embodied in the habits, virtues, and obsessions of the inhabitants of Cumbrales:

¡Qué suerte la mía si con este libreo
[...] consiguiera yo, lector extraño y pío,
darte siquiera una idea, pero exacta,
de las gentes, de las costumbres y de
las cosas; del país y sus celajes; en fin,
del *sabor de la tierra!* (314)

Primarily centered around the vicissitudes between two respectable, well-to-do patriarchs, Juan de Prezanes and Pedro Mortera, the novel includes an array of other events as well. In fact, don Juan's and don Pedro's fluctuating periods of war and peace merely constitute a link in a chain of paratactic, non-hierarchical developments: Don Valentín's Quixotic liberalism; the harmonious love between don Juan's daughter, Ana, and don Pedro's son, Pablo; Nisco's infatuation with Pablo's sister, María, which leaves behind the constant—and socially equal—Catalina; María's own attachment to the son of one of don Pedro's political foes; El Sevillano and Chiscón, two troublemakers who try to exploit the rivalry between Cumbrales and Rinconeda for their benefit; the pathetic Rámila, an old widow falsely accused of witchcraft who has to endure once and again the prejudices of her neighbors; last but not least, Tablucas' irrational fears regarding the nightly apparition of a dog on a wall near his home. It should not come as a surprise that commentators of

El sabor were unprepared for so extraordinary a deployment of sub-plots interwoven in a narrative “sin principios ni fin” (Miralles 291-92).

Clarín’s dogmatism apropos of the novel as a genre can no longer be sustained in view of the multifarious diversity of twentieth-century fiction. In this paper, therefore, I will consider both the novelist and the illustrator to examine how each of them made use of the possibilities afforded by their medium in a different manner. Unfortunately, scholars of nineteenth-century literature have more often than not neglected the illustrations in the novels. In so doing, they have deprived us of a line of research that would potentially reveal important insights into the production and consumption of narrative artifacts. Marianna Torgovnick has sharply noticed that “the study of illustrations, while not exactly a red herring in interdisciplinary approaches to the novel, has sometimes been a fairly robust pink” (90). We usually take for granted that illustrations assist in highlighting themes and motifs that might otherwise go unnoticed, thus providing a hermeneutic function not unlike the authorial digressions so prevalent in *costumbrista* fiction. They can equally inhibit the reader’s visual imagination, however, by making him or her accept the illustrations as “an accurate and adequate representation of how people and events in the novel ‘really looked’” (Torgovnick 93-94). Even more so, discrepancies between text and image may arise that shake up the structure of a work, and ultimately distort its meaning. As I will attempt to demonstrate with respect to *El sabor*, these predicaments should alert us against relying too much upon the illustrations’ allegedly neutral effects.

The 60 plates that accompanied the first edition of *El sabor* were evenly distributed along its thirty chapters.¹⁰ In most cases, they perfunctorily replicated certain events or descriptions of characters, without adding much to the text’s signifying fabric.¹¹ My own interests veer logically toward the illustrations that exhibit those non-narrative, scene-like qualities that shocked Pereda’s peers. Let us begin by verifying that each major scene was duly accompanied by the corresponding illustration: the *cajiga* (Fig. 1), don Valentín (Fig. 2), the regulars at the *taberna* (Fig. 3), the carts for the *deshoja* (Fig. 4), the *derrota* (Fig. 5), the *cachurra* (Fig. 6), the market (Fig. 7), Chiscón’s threats at the *magosta* (Fig. 8), the *ábrego* (Fig. 9), and Juanguirle’s attempts to stop the fight (Fig. 10). As Gutiérrez Sebastián confirms us, Mestres was always generous in stressing “el ambiente tradicional y costumbrista que Pereda había querido transmitir al lector con su relato” (133). Still more, he would at times rejoice in minute aspects at the expense of overlooking essential facts in the denouement of the action. Chapter 22, “Entreacto ruidoso,” describes the devastating effects of the *ábrego* on Cumbrales, a prelude to the evening battle. Even though Mestres depicts the wind as a symbolic force in the middle of the chapter (Fig. 9), the opening illustration represents a shepherd blowing his horn nearby, crook in hand (Fig. 11), the presence of whom in the text is simply ancillary: “el silbido del pastor y el sonar de las esquilas del ganado, llegaban claros y perceptibles al oído desde los cerros del Mediodía” (241). Mestres’s *costumbrista* zeal was such, therefore, as to end up disrupting the narrative syntax through an excess of picturesque imagery.



Fig. 1 The *cajiga*



Fig. 4 The *deshoja*



Fig. 5 *La derrota*



Fig. 2 Don Valentín



Fig. 6 The *cachurra*



Fig. 3 The *taberna*

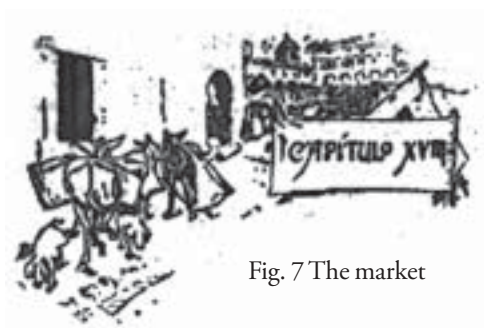


Fig. 7 The market

Fig. 8 Chiscón at the *magosta*Fig. 9 The *ábrego*

Fig. 10 Juanguirle tries to stop the battle

Fig. 11
The shepherd

A conclusive proof of how Pereda far outdid Mestres in embedding scenes into the narrative frame can be found in chapter 18, “El secreto de María,” which sets the love between María and the young Calderetas against the backdrop of a small-town market. Given Pereda’s penchant for the descriptive, it is not difficult to anticipate the festive ambiance of the *mercado de la villa* diverting his pen from the couple. As it turns out, “El secreto de María” starts off with a detailed report of the walk to the market place. Upon their arrival, María, Ana, and Pablo are exposed at length to a visual feast of crowds, stalls, merchants, products, and animals. If we are to trust the narrator’s chauvinistic stance, the market merits elaboration because its dimensions are almost unrivaled:

Quisiera yo que el lector de ultrapue-
tos no tomara a broma *esta pintura que*
le borrajeo de un pueblo montaños, que
es, en España, quizá el primero entre
los de su modesta categoría. (210, my
emphasis)

These claims notwithstanding, one might object to the large descriptions when compared to the presentation of the lovers’ rendezvous: in only half a page, the reader sees Calderetas approach the group hesitatingly, looking for a brief intercourse with María. In spite of its conciseness, though, the episode does not entirely lack artistry on account of a sudden shift in focalization from an extradiegetic agent to a witness within the fiction. Prior to the meeting, it is still the third-person narrator who comments on how María, Pablo, and Ana are inquiring about the price of the products to satisfy the curiosity of their relatives:

los que no han estado allá hacen muchísimas preguntas; y es bueno saber entonces a cómo iban las alubias, y el maíz, y las patatas, y los cerdos de cría y los de matanza, para responder a todos. (211)

The next paragraph, by contrast, brings Ana to the fore: “Y brujuleando así entre calles, *vio Ana* que por la acera de enfrente venía un mozo muy guapo y apuesto; que este mozo miraba mucho a María,” and so on (211, my emphasis). Ana’s gaze, as a matter of fact, suits the secretive nature of María’s passion by allowing the point of view of the only person who could understand and sympathize with her anxieties.¹² Overall, the change in perspective establishes a clear separation of scenes and plot, *cuadro* and novel, serving as a remainder of Pereda’s diligent command of narrative techniques.

A cursory glance would have likely sufficed for Mestres to realize the possibilities of the episode. Overindulging again in the *costumbrista* mode, he came up with the highest number of illustrations in any chapter—five: a panoramic view of the market (Fig. 7); a lamb hanging from a pole, with the head down (Fig. 12): “los corderos en capilla, quiero decir, atados de pies y manos, jadeantes, con los ojos revirados y la punta de la lengua fuera de la boca” (209); the *ferretero*, calling attention to his wares by beating a pan with a hammer (Fig. 13): “tocaba con el martillo una *palillera* sin fin sobre la mayor de sus sartenes” (209); a group of young women playing the tambourines (Fig. 14): “resonaban las panderetas probadas por mozas de buena mano” (209); finally, a peasant displaying his pig for sale next to another feeding grain to the animal (Fig. 15), with no explicit textual correspondence. The

illustrator portrayed exclusively scenes that would accord with the picturesqueness of the novel regardless of their relatively scant relevance to the plot. Rather than apprehending Pereda’s ultimate goals by dint of an attentive reading, Mestres hastened to take the declaration of local flavor at face value. Furthermore, the fact that he neither would attempt to capture the subtle switch in focalization, nor would he even represent the rendezvous at all, attests to his reluctance to challenge himself beyond the technicalities of his craftsmanship. Disappointing at it sounds, it does not appear as if Mestres tried to match Pereda’s accomplishments with anything but a reiteration of *costumbrista* motifs.¹³ I must agree, in conclusion, with Clarke’s assertion that “una proporción subida de los dibujos [deja] bastante que desear” (*Sabor* 25), the reasons for my dislike having more to do with their misrepresentation of the story lines than with their quality per se.



Fig. 12 The lamb



Fig. 13 The *ferretero*



Fig. 14 Young women playing the tambourines



Fig. 15 The pig

A final contention in this paper will be that the interaction of text and engravings does indeed postulate a new formulation of *El sabor*'s generic attributes. Early on I referred to the links between Pereda's fiction and the idyll, as expressed in the subtitle of Montesinos's *Pereda o la novela idilio*. In this respect, *El sabor* would herald a positive reacquaintance of Pereda with the countryside that left the satirical overtones of his preceding work behind, launching the most prolific stage—and arguably the best achievements—in Pereda's forty-year career. I also noted how the majority of his contemporaries were incapable of assessing the values of *El sabor* because of their fixation on the overabundance of scenes. It took half a century, in fact, before José María de Cossío began to turn the tide with his identification of the novel as a realist eclogue tinged with epic elements:

A la sombra de este gran roble nace entre nosotros la égloga realista y así Polanco se convierte en la Sicilia y la Arcadia de este nuevo género de poesía pastoral [...] un poema novelesco [...] trémulo de emoción épica. (Clarke, *Sabor* 30)¹⁴

Expanding on Cossío's words, Montesinos added another favorable reading which accounted for the dream-like atmosphere of the novel: "se abre y despliega la vasta lejanía del ensueño, hacia la que huye cuanto no cabe en estas angosturas de la vida cotidiana" (*Pereda* 119). Those fore-runners paved the way for a reinterpretation of *El sabor* which would not necessarily depend upon its conformance to the tenets of the Spanish fiction in the 1880s. From that moment onwards, then, critics were at liberty to dispense with the Realist canon to explore other critical paths.

Three decades after Montesinos's conclusions, Clarke finally availed himself of the opportunity to produce the most insightful explanation of *El sabor* to date. Calling attention to "las discrepancias y, en general, la desatención de la crítica" (*Sabor* 16), he vindicates Pereda's gathering of picturesque scenes as a meditated, conscious effort that sought to elicit a concrete response:

nadie parece haberse percatado de que este predominio de lo costumbrista o descriptivo sobre lo novelesco pudiese obedecer a ciertos fines artísticos del autor, y no al hecho aceptado por todo el mundo, por lo visto, de que Pereda era incapaz de combinar fluidamente historia y cuadro, o sea, novela y costumbrismo. (*Sabor* 37)

For Clarke, the accumulation of scenes does not so much presuppose a shortage of novelistic skills as it does proclaim Pereda's will to reflect on the vicissitudes of human existence. The magnitude of the natural elements—the *cajiga*, the *ábrego*, the storm—coupled with the peculiarities of the inhabitants of Cumbrales—their fears, superstitions, biases, political motivations,

love quests, and so on—are all comprised within “esta danza metafórica y alegórica” (*Sabor* 42) that expresses our precarious humanity, unalienably—and Quixotically—torn between sanity and madness. Having exposed us to so troubling a collective experience, Pereda decides at the end to reel the characters’ follies into the fold: don Juan and don Pedro make peace with each other; Don Valentín is granted a heroic death; Ana and Pablo, María and Calderetas, marry all happily; Nisco returns to the faithful Catalina; El Sevillano and Chiscón are defeated and subdued, the latter even generously pardoned; Rámila receives assistance from Don Pedro; and Tablucas is convinced he has killed the apparition: “Ya ve el lector cómo va acabando esto no del todo mal que digamos, por lo que toca al paradero de cada personaje” (313). Life in the rural community goes back to normal, the seasonal cycle reappears ubiquitously, the idyll is reborn: “Y en esto, avanzaba diciembre; desapareció por completo el Sur” (313), followed by a long description of winter settling upon Cumbreles.¹⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, chaser of chronotopes, extraordinary theorist of the novel, ascribed to the idyll the same spatial circularity linked to the periodic rhythms of nature one encounters in the final page of *El sabor*:

Here there are no events, only ‘doings’ that constantly repeat themselves. Time here has no advancing historical movement; it moves rather in narrow circles: the circle of the day, of the week, of the month, of a person’s entire life. A day is just a day, a year is just a year—a life is just a life. Day in, day out the same round of activities are repeated, the same topics of conversation, the

same words and so forth. In this type of time people eat, drink, sleep, have wives, mistresses (casual affairs), involve themselves in petty intrigues, sit in their shops or offices, play cards, gossip. This is commonplace, philistine cyclical everyday time [...]. Time here is without event and therefore almost seems to stand still. (248)

Bakhtin’s conceptualization of the idyll lays a solid foundation on Don Marcelino’s, Cossío’s, and Montesinos’ characterizations of *El sabor* as “poema idílico,” “égloga realista,” and “novela idilio.” More importantly, it does away with Clarín’s immutable, ahistorical views on the novel. Just because Realism remains at the core of the nineteenth-century canon, one should not infer that other lesser modalities did not have the right to exist on their own. Whether or not they are held in high esteem today, they deserve at least to be studied with the critical objectivity that renders any scholarly enterprise worthy of its name.

In short, it was precisely in *El sabor de la tierruca* where Pereda found his niche as a *costumbrista* novelist in the wake of his admired Fernán Caballero. As I have argued throughout the paper, he was able to give full expression to his aesthetic urges due in part to the mediating stimulation of the pictorial—the poetics of *costumbrismo*, contemporary painting, and Mestres’ illustrations. From then on, the picturesque people and sceneries of his beloved Cantabria would soon be elevated to sole protagonists of his fiction, with *Sotileza* (1885) and *Peñas arriba* (1895) ranking indisputably as two of the greatest novels of nineteenth-century Spain. Similar to Galdós in *La desheredada*, but in a completely different vein, Pereda managed to

perfect his talent only through years of methodical apprenticeship. And where Galdós took up the intricacies of the modern world, Pereda, a lyric plectrum in hand, became the indefatigable chanter of local traditions before they were to vanish from the face of the earth.

Notes

¹ I do not mean to overlook the abundance of tragic or deranged characters in his novels, nor his satirical vein. However, as Montesinos argues, Pereda's views on country life will eventually lead him to the idyll:

El mundo novelesco de Pereda parece implicar la creencia en una realidad poética y moral a un tiempo—poética porque moral—encanto y lección de conducta, en que la pureza de los sentimientos y la rectitud de las acciones condicionan la belleza. Y por eso, la novela de Pereda, realista, insobornablemente realista en las apariencias, se organiza en torno a una concepción idílica de la vida. (*Pereda* 67)

Alborg's recent focus on the unyielding realism of the author (605) cannot account for the idealized relationship of the protagonists to their environment in Pereda's most acclaimed novels, such as *La puchera*, *Sotileza*, and *Peñas arriba*.

² Clarke rightly asserts that Pereda will be remembered as a “paisajista y costumbrista que inmortalizó las gentes y la región montañosas en ‘novelas,’ así entre comillas, porque [...] la novela siempre fue lo de menos en Don José María” (*Paisajista* 218).

³ The urban setting of *Pedro Sánchez* (1883) and *La Montálvez* (1888) sets them apart from the rest, even though both partake of the rejection of city life prevalent in Pereda's other novels.

⁴ The word was coined after the Italian *pittoresco*, “after the manner of painters.” The *Webster's II New Riverside Dictionary* provides a similar meaning: “suggesting or resembling a picture” (529).

⁵ Paradoxically enough, in his manifesto, *Le Roman Expérimental*, Zola avowedly refused to

identify his techniques with photography: “Un reproche bête qu'on nous fait, à nous autres écrivains naturalistes, c'est de vouloir être uniquement des photographes” (65). For the fine distinction between pictorial and photographic effects, I am indebted to Germán Gullón's introduction to his edition of *Sotileza*:

Al leer una novela que tenga un alto índice de realismo ambiental, sentimos la proximidad de lo narrado, igual que al contemplar una fotografía casi cabemos en lo retratado [...]. En *Sotileza* o en *La gaviota* nunca cabemos; si pretendiéramos hollar el dintel de un cuadro, nuestra presencia parecería anacrónica, la de un visitante inoportuno desprovisto del disfraz apropiado para la ocasión. (41)

⁶ Valeriano Bozal stated that:

[L]o pintoresco es para ser contemplado, se ofrece a la contemplación del espectador como ejemplo y prototipo de una realidad curiosa y entretenida. El receptor es un espectador de esa ‘galería de imágenes,’ que le entretienen, le satisfacen más o menos, pero que casi nunca ostentan pretensiones de esencialidad. Ni siquiera las imágenes más entrañablemente románticas logran desprenderse de este *aura de contemplación*. (81, my emphasis)

⁷ González Herrán explains that:

la mayor parte de los articulistas coincidieron en su apreciación de que aquella novela carecía de determinadas condiciones para ser tenida como tal: idea, caracteres, argumento, peculiaridades. (171)

⁸ For an extensive account on issues related to the publication of the novel, see González Herrán, Clarke (*Sabor*), and Gutiérrez Sebastián.

⁹ As defined by María Moliner, the *cachurra* or *brilla* is a “juego de chicos que consiste en hacer entrar una pelota en hoyos hechos en el suelo, dándole con un palo” (Clarke, *Sabor* 201).

¹⁰ Raquel Gutiérrez Sebastián has diligently studied the illustrations in *El sabor de la tierra*. I

would like to express my gratitude to Gutiérrez Sebastián for making a copy of her article available to me.

¹¹ As for the events, the illustrator chose the following: Pablo arrives at his home only to find out Ana is there to open the door (ch. 3); don Juan and don Pedro are passionately arguing (ch. 5); Catalina confronts Nisco (ch. 8); Pablo picks up Ana's sewing kit from the floor and gives it back to her (ch. 9); don Valentín visits Juanguirle (ch. 10); Nisco and Catalina face each other again (ch. 10); Ana and María converse on the balcony (ch. 12); Rámila admonishes Nisco (ch. 15); El Sevillano and Chiscón walk home at night (ch. 16); a shepherd blows the horn (ch. 22); a house has been dilapidated by the *ábrego* (ch. 22); a circle of gossiping women are standing by the church door (ch. 23); Chiscón enters Cumbrales, one female in each arm (ch. 23); four men break into Rámila's house for the sake of seeking revenge (ch. 24); the same men leave (ch. 24); Juanguirle heals Pablo's wound (ch. 25); the doctor arrives to look after Pablo (ch. 26); Pablo is lying down in bed (ch. 26); don Valentín walks on the streets of Cumbrales in search of the Carlists (ch. 27); Juanguirle visits Rámila to inquire about her health (ch. 29); Tablucas fires a shot at the ghostly dog (ch. 29); finally, the cattle returns from the mountains (ch. 30). On the other hand, the picturesque characters that caught Mestres's attention were: don Juan (ch. 5); don Valentín (ch. 6; on page 110—my emphasis—thinking undoubtedly of the illustration, Pereda wrote: "Comenzando a describirle por la cúspide, pues no había un punto en todo él de desperdicio *para el dibujante*"); Juanguirle, sharpening his scythe (ch. 7); a symbolic, monster-like Rámila (ch. 8); a realist Rámila (ch. 8); El Sevillano, Chiscón and Tablucas, sitting at a table at the *taberna* (ch. 11); don Rodrigo Calderetas, riding his horse (ch. 20); lastly, Don Valentín, wielding his saber (ch. 28).

¹² Ana's alert eye poses a striking contrast to Pablo's absent-mindedness:

Cuanto a Pablo, no hay para qué decir lo que se aburría y mareaba entre el barullo, sin curarse más de lo que pasaba ante sus ojos, que de las coplas de Caláinos. (211)

¹³ An exception would be the two portraits of Rámila in chapter 8, one realist, one fantastic. Mestres was trying to recreate the difference between what Rámila looked like, and her witch-like attributes as spurred by the superstition of the people.

¹⁴ We ought to do justice to Menéndez Pelayo for defining *El sabor* in a similar manner:

La obra es un poema idílico [...] hay trozos en su libro, como el de la lucha de los dos pueblos rivales, o el de la entrada del ganado en las mieses, que parece que están reclamando el antiguo y largo metro épico, solemne y familiar a la vez. (*Pereda* 216)

¹⁵ The paragraph reads like this:

Y en esto, avanzaba diciembre; desapareció por completo el Sur; y aunque la alfombra de verdura, con todos los imaginables tonos de este color, cubría la vega, la sierra y los montes, porque estas galas no las pierde jamás el incomparable paisaje montañés, los desnudos árboles lloraban gota a gota por las mañanas el rocío o la lluvia de la noche; relucía el barro de las callejas, porque el sol que alumbraba en los descansos de los aguaceros no calentaba bastante para secarle; andaba errabunda y quejumbrosa de bardal en bardal, arisca y azorada, la negra miruella, que en mayo alegra las enramadas con armoniosos cantos; picoteaba ya el *nevero* en las corraladas, y acercábase el colorín al calorcillo de los hogares; derramábanse por las mieses nubes de tordipollos y otras aves de costa, arrojadas por los fríos y los temporales de sus playas del Norte; blanqueaban los altos picos lejanos cargados de nieve; *cortaban* las brisas; reinaba la soledad en los campos y la quietud en las barriadas; iba la *pación* de capa caída; y mientras al anochecer se arrimaban las gentes al calor de la *zaramada*, ardiendo sobre la borona que se *cocía* en el llar, y se estrellaba contra las paredes del vendaval la fría

cellisca, la aguantaba el ganado, de vuelta de las encharcadas y raídas mieses, rumiando a la puerta del corral, con el lomo encorvado, erizado el pelo, la cabeza gacha, el cuello retorcido y el rabo entre las patas; señales, éstas y aquéllas, de que se estaba en el corazón del invierno, nunca tan triste ni tan crudo como la fama le pinta, ni tan malo como muchos de ultra-puertos, que la gozan de buenos sin merecerla. Pero otras injusticias mayores comete todavía esa señora con la Montaña. (313-14)

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