

## RESISTING THE ROMANTIC: MANUEL ZENO GANDÍA AND CARMELA EULATE SANJURJO

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Both Manuel Zeno Gandía and Carmela Eulate Sanjurjo are Puerto Rican writers who “resist the romantic” at the end of the nineteenth century. But what exactly was “the romantic” in the context in which they were writing and what did it mean to resist it? This essay first looks at the importance of the romantic<sup>1</sup> in nineteenth-century Latin America in general and at the resistance to it, then at why the forms this resistance takes in Puerto Rico are necessarily different from those taken in other Latin American countries. Finally, having shown the connotations associated with the romantic in the context in which these two novelists were writing, it compares the different kinds of resistance to be found in Zeno’s *La charca* and Eulate’s *La muñeca*.

### **Politics, Literature and Telling the “Truth:” From the Latin American Romance to *Modernismo* to the Boom**

As Doris Sommer has pointed out, the nineteenth century romances of the majority of Latin American countries were post-revolutionary literature. After the wars of independence, during which these countries freed themselves from domination by the European powers, and after the civil wars which followed, a difficult period of nation-building followed. The literature of this period in these young republics manifests the desire for national unity of the era following such a long period of conflict. These romances are usually set in the

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<sup>1</sup> In this essay “romantic” is used to refer to both Romanticism and the romance as well as in the more colloquial sense of a sentimental relationship between two people. The context in which the word is used in the body of the essay should make it clear which meaning should be inferred in each case.

Americas, not in Europe, and bring together lovers of different races, classes and regions of the country. They emphasize American realities, moving away from the idea of Europe as the source of cultural value. Furthermore, they stress the importance of unity across the differences which threaten to divide the new nations. If these fledgling countries were to survive, they would have to surmount the potential conflicts between these different groups in order to achieve national harmony and viability. This is why these romances often bring together a pair of lovers who must surmount the very differences which threaten to divide the country. The resolution of differences in these novels metaphorically suggests the path these nations must take.<sup>2</sup>

The Latin American romance is different from the European romance. Since earlier romances in Europe tended to be the product of a feudal or monarchic society in which only the elite were in a position to write, or looked back at this period, the tales told deal with the adventures and romances of aristocrats—knights, princesses, kings. In Latin America, it is also true that the elite are those in a position to devote their time to writing, but these are societies which are in the process of rejecting the domination of colonialism and attempting to establish republics. In these romances, the elite mix more with other members of society and we see a more varied national picture.

*Costumbrismo* is an important feature of the Latin American romance since it serves as a vehicle for expressing the positive national self-images of these new republics as they set about nation-building. In *costumbrista* texts, the colorful aspects of life in Latin American countries, including Puerto Rico, are painted in rosy, romantic terms. In Argentina, we see positive images of *gauchos*. In Mexico, we see white-clad *campesinos*. In Puerto Rico, we see smiling *jibaros*. But, these folksy romanticized portrayals of life rarely deal with the real poverty and social problems faced by the kinds of people portrayed in them.

Like the Latin American romance, the movement which followed it and predominated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Latin American *modernismo* had its roots in literary developments occurring in Europe. Since the citizens of the Latin American

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<sup>2</sup> As Sommer writes, "Latin American romances are inevitably stories of star-crossed lovers who represent particular regions, races, parties, or economic interests which should naturally come together. Their passion for conjugal and sexual union spills over to a sentimental readership in a move that hopes to win partisan minds along with hearts" (NN 75).

countries feared England and rejected Spain, France had become emblematic of the European literary sophistication young Latin American writers aspired to, and French literary models, without completely supplanting English and Spanish influences, were important for these writers trying to establish their own voices.

In mid-nineteenth century France, Baudelaire, sometimes thought of as the first modernist, began to create the persona of the dandy and write a poetry which indulged in the sensual. Rimbaud followed him with poetry that sought the “*déreglement des sens*”—the disordering of the senses. In France, these poets were followed by the Parnassians, the Decadents, and the Symbolists, and, later, in the early twentieth century, by the *modernistas* in Spain.

In the England of the 1890s, the writing of Oscar Wilde and the drawings of Aubrey Beardsley show the influence of these developments in France. One finds in the fairy tales of Wilde an ornate aesthetic language similar to the *preciosidad* in Latin American *modernismo* of the same time. It is apparent, for example, in his “The Birthday of the Infanta” (1889):

It was the birthday of the Infanta. She was just twelve years of age, and the sun was shining brightly in the gardens of the palace. Although she was a real princesa and the Infanta of Spain, she had only one birthday a year, just like the children of quite poor people, so it was naturally a matter of great importance to the whole country that she should have a really fine day for the occasion. And a really fine day it certainly was. The tall striped tulips stood up tall on their stalks like long rows of soldiers, and looked defiantly across the grass at the roses, and said: ‘We are as splendid as you are now.’ The purple butterflies fluttered about with gold dust on their wings, visiting each flower in turn; the little lizards crept out of the crevices of the wall, and lay basking in the white glare; and the pomegranates split and cracked with the heat, and showed their bleeding red hearts. Even the pale yellow lemons that hung in such profusion from the mouldering trellis and along the dim arcades, seemed to have caught a richer colour from the wonderful sunlight, and the wonderful magnolia trees opened their great globe-like blossoms of folded ivory, and filled the air with a heavy perfume. (185)

But, in the same way that different political agendas in Latin America shape the nineteenth-century romance, they also color the *preciosista* vein of Latin American *modernismo*. Compare the similarly ornate language of the Puerto Rican *modernista* poet Luis Llorens Torres used to describe nature his patriotic 1898 essay, “America”:

Las Antillas, niñas dormidas entre las espumas y alentadas por los rayos de un sol tropical, por los pálidos fulgores que en sus voluptuosas primaveras arrojan sus lunas de verano, o por la más

lejana luz de miles de estrellas que aparecen diamantes prendidos en la gasa sin fin de firmamento; aquellas vírgenes islas, adornadas con frondosas arboledas y las más variadas y caprichosas flores, y adormecidas al dulce halago de sus brisas olorosas y suaves.<sup>3</sup> (Colón, 35-6)

One must acknowledge the irony which lies under the surface of Wilde's aestheticism but which is missing in Llorens Torres. In this story, Wilde's irony is directed at the callousness of a beautiful princess who is entertained by an ugly dwarf who dances for her, but is oblivious to his shame at appearing ugly to her. Beauty in Wilde's story is thereby problematized. In Llorens Torres' essay, however, the extravagant prose used to describe the Antilles as beautiful is intended to be taken at face value.<sup>4</sup>

Carlos Fuentes explains the reason for this kind high-flown aestheticized language, typical of the Latin American *modernistas* when he describes the attitude of these writers as follows, "Latin America must be itself by being European, not through imitation, but through cosmopolitan absorption of the values of beauty, since beauty facilitates duty and goodness" (Rodó, 20). But, he confesses his irritation with the ornate style of another *modernista*, José Enrique Rodó, in his response to Rodó's famous 1900 essay *Ariel* for reasons which could also apply to the style of Rodó contemporaries like Llorens Torres. As Fuentes writes about *Ariel*:

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<sup>3</sup> "The Antilles, young girls sleeping in the foamy waves and warmed by the rays of a tropical sun, by the pale brilliance which in voluptuous Spring the moon of Summer sheds, or by the more distant light of thousands of stars which appear to be diamonds sparkling in the endless gauze of the firmament; those virgin islands, adorned with leafy groves and the greatest variety of capricious flowers, drowsing in the sweet flattery of their soft and fragrant breezes." (This and all other translations appearing in this essay are my own.)

<sup>4</sup> This comparison should not be taken to imply that European literature of this period is necessarily "better" than Latin American literature written in the same vein. As Marcel Proust, despite being an admirer of Wilde's and certain others of his contemporaries, wrote, in the early 1890s, in an article called *Against the Young Writers of the Day*: "There has never been such a cheating younger generation as ours... if, as everyone goes on saying, there has never been so much talent, that is because there are certain graces of style which are contagious, and because a journalist with a little aptitude for it can learn his trade in a few years, just as a harlot learns hers" (279-80). About the symbolists, he writes: "Symbolism still has its opportunist adherents, who would as willingly adhere to anything else rather than submit to being neither re-elected nor re-read" (279). About the decadents: "The decadent is usually ignorant, at any rate of all that is not the literature of decadence. He has never thought deeply, and his work, if he has not attained literary sterility, reflects along with the morbid play of his feelings the nullity of his thought" (387).

Its rhetoric has become insufferable. Rodó belonged to the *modernista* movement, which sought a cosmopolitan atmosphere for Latin American poetry, cultivated art for art's sake, and affected an accompanying languor, elegantly settled into the semirecumbant position of turn-of-the-century ennui...Darío could affect the greatest preciousness, but also concentrate on the starkest political statement, as in *Lo fatal*, one of the clearest and most beautiful poems ever written in Latin America, or soar away into political bravura, as in his poems on Theodore Roosevelt, Walt Whitman and the Spanish language. Rodó is not a priest and his range is not Darío's. (Rodó, 1988, 13)<sup>5</sup>

In the hands of the Nicaraguan Rubén Darío, *modernismo* paints beautiful pictures of the American landscape and stirs patriotism. At its best, it is ethereal but, at its worst, as in the case of Rodó according to Fuentes, or Llorens Torres in my view, it is heavy handed and pretentious.

Questions of what constitutes the "truth" are at issue in the kinds of aesthetic judgments made by and about all of these writers. According to Sommer, the nineteenth-century Latin American romance is finally rejected by the writers of the Boom for reasons concerned

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<sup>5</sup> Compare the relatively simple style of *Lo fatal* to the exaggerated, adjective-laden style of the excerpt from *Ariel* which follows it:

Lo fatal

Dichoso el árbol que es apenas sensitivo,  
y más la piedra dura, porque ésta ya no siente,  
pues no hay dolor más grande que el dolor de ser vivo,  
ni mayor pesadumbre que la vida consciente.

Ser, y no saber nada, y ser sin rumbo cierto,  
y el temor de haber sido y un futuro terror...  
Y el espanto seguro de estar mañana muerto  
y sufrir por la vida y por la sombra y por

lo que no conocemos y apenas sospechamos,  
y la carne que tienta con sus frescos racimos  
y la tumba que aguarda con sus fúnebres ramos,  
¡Y no saber adónde vamos,  
ni de dónde venimos...!

(ARD 63-4)

"Ya habían llegado a la amplia sala de estudio, en la que un gusto delicado y severo esmerábase por todas partes en honrar la noble presencia de los libros, fieles compañeros de Próspero. Dominaba en la sala —como numen de su ambiente sereno— un bronce primoroso, que figuraba a ARIEL de *La Tempestad*. Junto a este bronce, se sentaba habitualmente el maestro, y por ello le llamaban con el nombre de mago a quien sirve y favorece en el drama el fantástico personaje que había interpretado el escultor" (Rodó, 1976, 3).

with notions of what constitutes the “truth,” and Fuentes shows how much Latin American writing of the twentieth century is also a reaction against what was perceived as the falsity of the cloying *preciosista* language which could mar *modernista* texts. Raymond L. Williams has argued that the idea that they were expressing the truth was of vital importance for Boom writers like Carlos Fuentes who felt themselves “among the most resonant of the few who could speak for historical truth in such closed societies” (PN, 7), and the conflicting sentiments in Fuentes’ response to Rodó cited above are, indeed, evidence of the complexity and anxiety underlying this Boom writer’s desire to get at the “truth.”<sup>6</sup>

The early twentieth-century Latin American writers who Fuentes admires opposed the artificiality of their Romantic and *modernista* antecedents with a spareness which belies the earlier extravagance, as he shows when he writes about “the tremendous reaction against such a style which set the tone of our modern literature” (Rodó, 20), giving the following examples of this reaction:

The poetics of Neruda consisted in ‘walking around,’ seeing his ghost in windowpanes, making love in sweaty beds, gazing at his shoes, and eating artichokes. Vallejo cast a blind stone of anger at Rodó’s perfectly framed glass. Borges pared down his prose to the bare essentials. (Rodó, 20)

But the highflown language of Latin American *modernistas* like Darío and Rodó, as Fuentes acknowledges, was also often used as a vehicle to express nationalist sentiments, to promote the sovereignty of the young Latin American nations, and to decry their economic or political manipulation by the European powers or the United States, a legacy later Latin American writers would continue to build upon.

These issues are, of course, also relevant to the literature written at this time in Puerto Rico but the situation on the island differed from that of most other Latin American countries since Puerto Rico was still a colony of Spain. Because of this, none of these sentiments could be voiced overtly.

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<sup>6</sup> For the Boom writers, the act of writing the “truth” involves debunking old myths, which include the Romantic constructions of social unities which did not exist. In the context of the nineteenth century, however, one could posit, the truth was open to suggestion, open for construction. If the way to create a desired reality is to first envision it and then make that vision a reality, then the nineteenth century Romantics and the nationalist *modernistas* who followed them were writing the truth as they wanted it to be and hoped to make it happen.

## Rejecting Nineteenth Century Aesthetics in Puerto Rico: Naturalism and the Assertion of the Negative

Literary developments in Puerto Rico, like those in other Latin American countries, must be understood in relation to their specific political context.

As the power of Spain waned in the nineteenth century, Puerto Rico, like other Latin American countries, rebelled against the exigencies of Spanish rule. The nineteenth century sees great ideological debates in which various groups and individuals propose different economic and political futures for Puerto Rico. But, though the creole elite fight for a stronger role in the governing of the island, they do not necessarily call for an end to Spanish rule. After all, if Puerto Rico were to become an independent nation modeled on a U.S.-style democracy, the legitimacy of their positions as *hacendados*, or large landowners of semi-feudal coffee and sugar estates employing manual laborers at extremely low wages, might be questioned. The educated elite, though they might want more autonomy, at the same time, might have seen it to their advantage not to completely sever their ties with Spain.

The late nineteenth century also sees the emergence of political parties in Puerto Rico representing a spectrum of options, from complete independence to autonomy to continued Spanish rule. Some, like the Liberals, urged social reforms in such areas as education and the rights of women, while others wished for the continuation of the status quo which ensured their privileged positions. Largely, though not entirely, this debate occurred among the most privileged members of Puerto Rican society since these were the people who had the opportunity to receive an education and the weight in society to make their voices heard. Manuel Zeno Gandía, a member of this class and a Liberal, is the father of the Naturalist novel in Puerto Rico, and thus a figure whose work marks a definitive rupture with the Romantic and *preciosista* aesthetics of the nineteenth century.

Zeno Gandía's undercutting of the Romantic text via the assertion of unpleasant social truths in his landmark Naturalist novel *La charca* (1894) sets a precedent for challenging "false" Romantic visions which is carried on by later Puerto Rican writers. He is clearly an important precursor for later Puerto Rican writers like Nemesio Canales and Samuel L. Quiñones. Canales, writing in 1918 from a very post-Zeno twentieth century stance, abandons nineteenth century idealism, opposing the political situation in which he finds himself after the United States annexes Puerto Rico as a colony with melancholy and resignation:

Mi lío está hecho. Iremos Barcos y yo dando conferencias hasta la misma Patagonia. Mi pluma y mi lengua, sin mercados aquí donde aún no existe la curiosidad intelectual, encontrarán o no mercados en Sur América, en las grandes ciudades de Méjico y la Argentina. Si lo encuentran, le habré dado a mi planta su verdadera ruta: vivir de mis ideas y para mis ideas.<sup>7</sup> (Colón, 39)

Quiñones, one of the founding fathers of the *Noismo* movement of the twenties, is also an admirer of Zeno's withering Naturalism. He embraces the ugliness Zeno opposes to the overly sweet literary vision of many of his contemporaries and antecedents, writing that, "Zeno Gandía se mantiene siempre atento al panorama de la vida que traslada a sus novelas. Las más feas lacerias morales tientan su escabelo"<sup>8</sup> (*La charca*, 18). The doctrine of negation espoused by Quiñones and the *Noismo* movement, like that of the European Dadaists who also inspired these writers and like the comparable *ninguneísmo* movement in other parts of Latin America,<sup>9</sup> was a rejection of nineteenth century ideas of propriety, order and progress which had clearly not borne fruit in Puerto Rico. Both of these writers wrote countertexts which opposed Latin American Romanticism and, to a lesser degree, *modernismo*.

In the 1950s, René Márquez would also probe the darker side of Puerto Rican realities, the terrain first opened up by Zeno. Márquez's most famous work, the play *La carreta*, evokes emotional responses by examining the painful uprooting of Puerto Rican peasants who are forced to abandon their land and migrate to the United States. In his story *Dos vueltas de llave y un arcángel* (*Two Turns of the Key and an Archangel*), Márquez also gives us the kind of graphic depiction of the sexual abuse of a poor girl, which Zeno had included in *La charca*. In this story, a young, mentally incapacitated country girl is abandoned by her poor parents on the streets of San Juan where she is

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<sup>7</sup> "My bags are packed. Barcos and I will go off on our lecture tour even if it takes us as far as Patagonia. My pen and my tongue, having found no market here where there is still no intellectual curiosity, will or will not find a market in South America, in the big cities of Mexico and Argentina. If they find it, I will have set my foot on the right path: living by and for my ideas."

<sup>8</sup> "Zeno Gandía is always attentive to the panorama of life which his novels convey. The ugliest moral lacerations tempt his scalpel."

<sup>9</sup> George Yúdice describes the members of this movement in the following words, "*ninguneístas* who berate their culture for being a pale reflection of metropolitan society," and criticizes "these self-negating breast-beatings, so typical of elite Latin American intellectuals" (8). Unlike him, I see this negativity, at least in Puerto Rico, as having a positive function. The problems of a society which cannot be acknowledged are problems which cannot be solved.



found by a man who locks her in a room and sells her sexual favors to a series of men.

In the sixties, this assertion of the negative took the form of breaking the taboos of literary language. Members of the Generation of the Sixties used strong “unliterary” language, obscenity, and racial epithets to show the ugliness under the polite surface of Puerto Rican society. One of the members of this generation, Carmelo Rodríguez Torres, who began writing in the early 1960s, gives the reason for this in his 1982 novel, *La casa y la llama fiera*. In this novel, the main character Aldo, a novelist, explains how he sees the role of the novelist in Puerto Rican society:

¿Y si no es exactamente en la novela, dónde puedo decir lo que quiero? El ensayo es muy pesado y además en este pueblo nadie lee ensayos. Si pudiera inventar un género donde pudiera meter otros géneros y pudiera decir las cosas tan libremente como mi vecino cuando está borracho. Eso es, el escritor es un alma borracha, sin inhibiciones, lo dice todo; lo intentaré, así podré librarme.<sup>10</sup> (88)

Around the same time, the Anglo-Puerto Rican critic Gerald Guinness commented on what he thought was the excessive negativity of Puerto Rican literature of the time. Calling for the kind of positive images nineteenth-century writers like Pushkin, Stendhal and Mark Twain held out to their audiences, he argued that:

Contemporary Puerto Rican writers have singularly failed to provide comparable models for their readers. When they want the commodity young (and not so young) Puerto Ricans have to look for it in second-rate “telenovelas” or in the films of North American provenance aimed at a very different audience. (43)

The political reasons why this is so are, however, explained in Guinness’s own essay when he concludes:

Here is a case where a colonial nexus deforms by a sort of inverse attraction. Writers become tied to what they reject. They are drawn to images of the exotic and the deformed commensurate with what José Luis Gonzalez has called ‘the abnormal reality’ of Puerto Rican life. As a result, they ignore the exemplary and the normative. Of course this energy of rejection is what largely accounts for the intense vitality of recent Puerto Rican fiction—but then it also accounts for much of its sourness and negativity. (55-6)

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<sup>10</sup> “If not in the novel, where can I say what I want to? The essay is too heavyhanded and, besides, in this country, no one reads essays. If only I could invent a genre in which I could put all the other genres and could say things as freely as my neighbor when he is drunk. That’s it, the writer is a drunken soul, without inhibitions, who says everything; I’ll try it. In this way, I will find freedom.”

The work of all of these writers indicate how important Zeno is as a figure of rupture who breaks with the past and prefigures important trends in the aesthetics of twentieth century Puerto Rican literature. They also show how the Naturalism of his most influential novel *La charca* is, thus, of great importance for Puerto Rican literature on the levels of both language and of politics. For many critics, including Quiñones and the contemporary Puerto Rican critic Juan Flores, it is the first Puerto Rican text that can properly be called a novel,<sup>11</sup> since it is the first to expose the darker side of poverty in Puerto Rico in a harsh manner which sets it apart from earlier works still colored by a romanticized view of island life.<sup>12</sup>

### **La charca**

The Naturalism of *La charca* is clear. It is the story of the difficult lives of poor *jibaros* living in the mountains of Puerto Rico at the end of the last century. In this novel, Zeno describes in graphic detail the cruel treatment of “lazy” workers by a tough *mayordomo*, sexual abuse and licentiousness, the diseases which incapacitate and decimate the undernourished population, the death and destruction which the pathological avarice of an old woman brings about, and the way in which the rum which the men drink leads to violence and tragedy. One of the most arresting descriptions in the novel which shows the power of Zeno’s Naturalist approach is of the death of a young girl who suffers an epileptic fit on the edge of a cliff:

Retorcióse una vez más, perdió el equilibrio y precipitóse... La vertiente, llena de árboles y malezas, abrió camino al cuerpo, doblándose los tallos verdes, entreabriéndose las marañas, quebrándose las

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<sup>11</sup> Flores voiced this opinion in the presentation he made at the Puerto Rican Literature Written in the U.S.: Redefining Boundaries Conference at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez Campus, April 29, 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Quiñones, who in his writing rejected the false optimism and romanticism in the writing of many of his contemporaries, rejects texts before Zeno for the same reason, judging that they are not realistic enough to be called novels. See his famous introduction to *La charca*, 9-36. His polemical assertion may of course be questioned, as it is by Ángel Aguirre who identifies the following as novels having realist characteristics, all of them being published before *La charca*: *Inocencia* (1884) by Francisco del Valle Atilas; *La pecadora* by Salvador Brau (1890); *El secreto de la domadora* (1884) and *El fondo del aljibe* (1886) by Federico Degetau; *La primera cría* (1892) and *Cosas* (1893) by Matías González García; and the novels of Miguel Meléndez Muñoz (Eulate, 19-20). For an overview of Puerto Rican literature and culture and a description of the Noismo movement see “A Special Voice: The Cultural Expression” in Morales. Noismo is discussed on page 333.

hierbas secas, desplazándose los hacinamientos de pajuncias que formaban lecho en el declive.

Caía con la pesadumbre de lo que no ha de levantarse más, Rodaba volteando sobre sí misma, chocaba contra los obstáculos, rebotaba de piedra a piedra, deteníase un punto en el tronco de algún árbol hasta que la pesantez la empujaba de nuevo; arrastraba en la caída montones de piedras rodadizas que le seguían como si aquellas piedras, más piadosas que los hombres, quisieran, en fúnebre cortejo, acompañarle hasta el fondo.

Despeñábase dejando rastro sangriento, un surco rojo. Era la vida volviendo a su origen, los alientos prestados reintegrándose a la tierra, la materia devolviendo sus despojos a la gran cuna común.

Así, malherida, con los huesos rotos, desfigurada, llena de sangre, muerta en el despeñadero antes que en el paroxismo, Silvina cayó con masa informe sobre la piedra lisa y plana en que lavaba Leandra.

Irguióse ésta aterrorizada. Miró un instante, y este instante bastó para que de la inmensa desventura se diera cuenta. Lanzó un grito. ¡Era su hija!<sup>13</sup> (266-7)

Shortly after the publication of this novel, Zeno states how, in his view, Naturalism is a literary step which must be taken in order to oppose what he sees as the falsity of Romanticism with a cruder, more honest documentation of “reality”:

Dejemos a los románticos *inventando* argumentos como los escenógrafos pintan decoraciones; dejémoslos deteniendo el natural avance de las letras, de la ciencia, del arte, con sus ridiculeces rebuscadas y sus *seudo sentimientos* ilusorios y su *idealismo* que no creen... Siempre me atrajo esa admirable facultad que permite al artista *hacer realidad*. En mis gustos, avanzo todavía un poco más: creo el

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<sup>13</sup> “She twisted once more, lost her balance and fell. The slope, full of trees and tangled weeds made way for the body, the green stems bending, the undergrowth opening, the dry stalks breaking, the matted straw taking the weight of the fall. She fell with the heaviness of that which would never have to lift itself again. She rolled, tumbling head over heels, colliding with obstacles, bouncing off one stone and on to another, pausing for a moment against the trunk of a tree until her weight again pushed her onwards; she shook loose in her fall torrents of rolling stones which followed in her wake as if they, being more pious than men, wished to accompany her, in a solemn funeral procession, to the bottom. She plummeted, leaving a bloody trail, a red furrow. She was life returning to its origin, borrowed breath reintegrating itself into the earth, matter returning its remains to the great common cradle of life. In this way, fatally wounded, with her bones broken, disfigured, covered in blood, having died on the precipice even before the paroxysm, Silvina fell, an inert mass, onto the smooth, flat stone where Leandra was washing. Leandra stiffened in terror, looked for an instant, and that moment was enough for her to realize her immense misfortune. She screamed. It was her daughter!”

naturalismo lo único formal, útil y positivamente artístico.<sup>14</sup> (Eulate, 118-9)

In *La charca*, Zeno Gandía, a doctor who cared for poor patients in Puerto Rico, counters the false optimism and folkloric quality of the earlier *costumbrista* novels with meticulous descriptions of the real horrors of poverty. Yet, barely one year after *La charca* was published, he praises Eulate's novel about a beautiful, spoiled aristocrat in Spain for its "realism." What is it that attracts the author of *La charca* to *La muñeca*? Given the seminal importance of Zeno's Naturalist approach in *La charca* with all its political implications, what would lead him to praise a novel which, in its *preciosista* style, would most probably have infuriated Carlos Fuentes as much as *Ariel* did?

### **How Zeno and Eulate Come Together: Naturalism and Preciosismo Are Reconciled**

Although Zeno seems to argue that Eulate's writing is not *preciosista* when, in discussing *La muñeca*, he refers to "su estilo fácil, desprovisto del abrumador adjetivismo que suele ser corriente a líricos y prosistas"<sup>15</sup> (Eulate, 120), preciousity is, clearly, a prominent feature of her writing as one can tell from the many extensive and elaborate descriptions in *La muñeca*, like this lingering one which describes the beauty of the protagonist:

Su hermosura, notable desde niña, se desarrolló en la juventud, realzada por el lujo y elegancia con que la vestían. Era alta y esbelta, delgada con curvas casi infantiles, el cabello castaña, la frente alta y estrecha, los ojos azules, y el rostro deliciosamente oval. Su cabeza redonda y en extremo pequeña, descansaba sobre un cuello largo de líneas purísimas y hombros que tenían la blancura de alabastro. Era pálida, con esta palidez mate de las mujeres meridionales y su cutis tenía transparencias que dejaban adivinar a sus venas. Sus labios finos y casi sin sangre, su nariz pequeña y griega que una línea purísima unía al frente, el arco imperceptible de sus cejas, contribuían a formar un conjunto seductor.<sup>16</sup> (37-8)

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<sup>14</sup> "Let us leave the Romantics inventing arguments like designers paint their sets; let us leave them restraining the natural progress of letters of science and art with their ridiculous quests and deluded *pseudosentiments* and their *idealism* in which they do not believe... I have always been attracted to that admirable faculty which permits the artist to *create reality*. In my own personal taste, I go even a little further: I believe that Naturalism is the only serious, useful and positively artistic option."

<sup>15</sup> "her easy style, stripped of the overwhelming quantity of adjectives now fashionable among lyric poets and writers of prose"

<sup>16</sup> Her beauty, notable since her girlhood, developed in her youth, enhanced by the luxury and elegance of her dress. She was tall and slender with almost childlike

Though the title of Zeno Gandía's first novel, *Rosa de Mármol* (1889), suggests a similar *preciosista* approach, by the time he wrote *La charca* (1894), his vision had been purged of the ornate descriptions of beautiful flowers, precious stones and minerals and female attributes so typical of the *modernistas*. But Zeno had more in common with Eulate than may at first be apparent. To understand this, one must understand who Zeno Gandía was as well as visualize the society which both he and Eulate Sanjurjo belonged to.

Both writers belonged to the upper echelons of Puerto Rican society as anyone who would have had the time to devote to writing novels would have had to at the end of the nineteenth century. Zeno Gandía was the son of wealthy landowners in Arecibo; Eulate Sanjurjo was the daughter of a Spanish admiral. Both were educated at elite institutions. After finishing his education in Spain, Zeno Gandía returned to Puerto Rico as a doctor where he practiced for a number of years before devoting all of his time to writing and politics. Though a member of a privileged class, he was a Liberal who fought for a more egalitarian society and championed the poor. Eulate Sanjurjo was also politically active. A feminist, she wrote biographies of women like Mary Stuart, Queen Isabel of Spain and Marie Antoinette, as well as essays on women in the arts and in history. The list of her works is extensive. Class, political positioning and literary vocation all would have served to align Zeno and Eulate with each other.

In addition, what reads as a melodramatic novel written in hyperbolic prose today, clearly did not seem so to Zeno in 1895 when he described *La muñeca* as full of "innumerable real life details" (Eulate, 118). The doll-like protagonist of Eulate's novel seemed real enough to Zeno for him to find the novel "worthwhile reading for all of those dolls who might live among us" ("merecida y sabia lección a las 'muñecas que puedan andar por ahí'") (Eulate, 121). Though the tendency is to associate Naturalism with the hard realities of the poor, Zeno also recognized it in this very different novel about a beautiful cold woman who marries a wealthy man who loves her passionately and then destroys him: Rosario cares for nothing but displaying her beauty to its best advantage and acquiring material

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curves, chesnut-colored hair, a high narrow forehead, blue eyes and a deliciously oval face. Her round and extremely small head rested on a long neck of the purest lines and shoulders as white as alabaster. Her skin was pale, with that matte quality characteristic of women from the south and transparent enough to reveal the veins beneath. Her fine, almost bloodless lips, her small Greek nose connected in the purest line to her forehead, the imperceptible arch of her eyebrows, all contributed to forming a seductive ensemble."

possessions with which to adorn herself and her house. Her husband Julián, at first, tries to gain her affections with gifts. Later, crushed by her indifference, he throws himself into political causes with a desperate fervor which eventually leads to his illness and then death. After the death of her husband, Rosario, after observing all the correct proprieties, continues unperturbed with her life, continuing to use her beauty to coolly collect male admirers and the material possessions they bring her.

One may not expect this kind of story to appeal to someone concerned with the kinds of problems dealt with in *La charca*. But, perhaps for somewhat personal reasons, the realism of the novel, for Zeno, may have lain in the premise of a cold woman, concerned only with her own appearance and possessions, who makes her generous Liberal husband suffer and finally die of unrequited love for her. The character of the husband, so similar to Zeno Gandía himself, would perhaps have helped him to experience this situation as realistic. Julián, like Zeno Gandía, is a wealthy but humane member of the upper class. A lawyer, his generous nature drives him to help others and eventually leads him into a political career as one of the Liberal leaders. Julián is a sympathetic character committed to worthy causes who deserves a better wife than the vain Rosario, who saps his energy rather than supports him. This situation must have seemed entirely plausible and deplorable to Zeno Gandía, a man who himself loved women and was quite susceptible to their charms as his rapturous exclamations after a night of dancing during his youth show. “¡Hermosa noche!” he cries,

—día 9 de febrero. Fui al baile de máscaras de la sociedad del Teatro de Eslava... ¡Oh, mujeres, mujeres!... ¡qué vals delicioso...! ¡Pepita, Adela, Luisa, Beatriz, Julia... hermosísimasavecillas de la nieve!<sup>17</sup> (Gardón, 20)

Zeno Gandía would also have shared with Eulate Sanjurjo not only a similar literary and social conditioning but also the Liberal desire for social reforms. In Zeno, this is manifested particularly in his interest in the rights of the poor. In Eulate, it is evident in her feminism, albeit an abstract romantic feminism written in a highflown language and concerned with long-dead queens rather than the real people of her own time and place. During the period when *La charca* and *La muñeca* were published, Zeno's commitment to social reform

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<sup>17</sup> “Beautiful night!” he cries, “the ninth of February. I went to the masked ball at the Slavic Theater... Oh women, women!... What a delicious waltz!... Pepita, Adela, Luisa, Beatriz, Julia... beautiful little snowbirds!”

in Puerto Rico was strong. His novels of this period are political in the sense that they counter the *costumbrista* presentation of Puerto Rican realities with a much darker and carefully documented vision. But he does not use them to deal with issues of nation or status since his convictions and the political situation of the island had not yet pushed him to seriously question his loyalty to the crown.<sup>18</sup> In a similar fashion, Eulate Sanjurjo, the Puerto Rican daughter of Spaniards, embraces feminist issues but does not in any way confront the issue of national identity. Though Loreina Santos Silva's biographical sketch indicates her fondness for the life she had known in Puerto Rico,<sup>19</sup> this fondness on a personal level does not lead her to take any political stance regarding the island in her literary works.<sup>20</sup> *La muñeca* is Eulate's only novel written in Puerto Rico before the Spanish American War made it necessary for her to return to the land of her parents and it takes place entirely in Spain. Though the political perspective these two writers share is a Liberal one, they are similar in that, at this time, neither of them subscribes to the nationalism one might find in some of their Latin American contemporaries—like Rubén Darío in Nicaragua, José Martí in Cuba and José Enrique Rodó in Uruguay, to name a few—who are grappling with the issues of their already sovereign countries.

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<sup>18</sup> Zeno's politics are more overt and clearcut than Eulate's in this respect. Over the course of his life, he moves from a Liberal stance tolerant of Spanish rule in the 1860s to his position as a pro-independence leader during the teens of this century. The biographical information contained in Margarita Gardón's book on Zeno shows this evolution. She first writes about the young Zeno, "Parece ser que durante la época de los compontes, a pesar de haber tomado una parte decisiva en las campañas político-liberales, a Zeno no le molesta el gobierno español" (29). ("It seems that during the time of the compontes [Spanish forces which brutally repressed Puerto Ricans fighting for independence or simply for greater freedom], despite his having taken part in liberal political campaigns, Zeno had no objection to the Spanish government.") In 1899, as she writes, Zeno goes to Washington with Eugenio María de Hostos and Julio Henna to negotiate Puerto Rican status. While Hostos is a "separatista absoluto" (an absolute separatist), and Henna is "un anexionista entusiasta" (an enthusiastic annexionist), Zeno is described as "entre ambos ideales" (in between both ideals). In 1902, he leaves the pro-United States Republican Party. In 1904, he helps to found the Union Party. By the end of his life, he is well-known for his pro-independence stance.

<sup>19</sup> "En sus residencias en España se vivía y se comía al estilo puertorriqueño y ella nunca abandonó la esperanza de regresar a su país natal" (Eulate, 125). ("In her residences in Spain, she lived and ate as Puerto Ricans did and never abandoned the hope that she would be able to return to the country of her birth.")

<sup>20</sup> This stance is, of course, understandable since it would have made it necessary to break with her family. In addition, in colonial Puerto Rico, overt opposition to Spanish rule would have been punished with a prison term.

Like the Boom writers and like Zeno, Eulate Sanjurjo, in *La muñeca*, rejects the Romantic aesthetic. Like Zeno, her novel employs the kind of aesthetics of negation which Gerald Guinness deplores in the nineteen eighties when he criticizes how Puerto Rican writers are too “tied to what they reject,” but which Zeno, rejecting the kind of nineteenth-century writers Guinness admires, celebrates when he writes, “¡Vamos a la vida que es lo que nos importa! Lo que nos rodea es muy bello aunque sea feo”<sup>21</sup> (Eulate, 118). Yet, despite the similarities they share, Eulate Sanjurjo starts from a different premise than does Zeno, and goes in a direction which, politically, must be seen as quite different than Zeno’s, that of the upper-class feminist daughter of Spaniards.

### ***La feminista peninsular and el criollo naturalista:* How Zeno and Eulate Move Apart**

As a privileged young woman, Eulate would have had opportunities not open to less privileged women, but also expectations that would not have been required of them. She had an excellent education and the opportunity to travel widely which allowed her to distinguish herself as a scholar and an artist. She spoke eight languages and was a prolific writer, publishing novels, poetry, essays and translations. This is the portrait of an intelligent, cosmopolitan upper-class woman and her feminism is the feminism of such a woman. She does not address the problems of poor women, most probably because her position in society sets her apart from such women. As a doctor, Zeno regularly visited the rural poor of Puerto Rico and came to understand their problems. Eulate, as the daughter of a Spanish admiral living in San Juan would have moved in the kind of polite, if also intellectual, circles of the capital which would not have afforded her the same experiences. Perhaps as a result, her feminism tends to celebrate the lives of privileged women of the past from a cosmopolitan perspective rather than addressing immediate concrete experience.

Victoria Ocampo, the Argentinean intellectual and upper-class feminist of the following generation (b. 1890) who founded the prestigious literary journal *Sur*, writes about both the advantages and disadvantages of being a woman of this class in the early twentieth century in her autobiography. In it, she acknowledges both the

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<sup>21</sup> “Let us turn towards life because that is what is important to us! What surrounds us is very beautiful even if it is ugly.”



tremendous advantages given her by her education and the opportunities she has to travel in Europe. But she also recounts her sadness at having to conform to the behavior of a well brought up young lady of her class. These expectations force her to marry an “appropriate” husband rather than the man she truly loves and to abandon the idea of pursuing a career as an actress, the career for which she feels she has the most talent. One would tend to think that Carmela Eulate, an upper class Hispanic woman of the previous generation (b. 1871) would, like Ocampo, have enjoyed the advantages of her position in society but must, to an even greater degree than the younger woman, have felt the pressure to conform to its expectations.

The area in which Eulate takes a strong political stand is feminism. If we read *La muñeca* as a feminist text, we can see how it functions as a counternarrative to the Latin American romances of the nineteenth century for reasons very different from those of the Boom writers or of Manuel Zeno Gandía. To the romantic union which is the typical culmination of the romance, Eulate opposes the romantic rupture caused by a cold and egotistical protagonist, the antithesis of the Romantic heroine. Though Zeno reads the novel as a criticism of such cold and materialist women, the text also allows another, more feminist reading. By opposing the romance which culminates in the happy marriage of the two lovers, Eulate, who herself never married, problematizes the idea of marriage as a happy institution, giving us a wife who misbehaves and thinks of herself before her husband. According to Loreina Santos’ biography, Eulate herself did not seem to value marriage highly, seeing it as something she had no time for if she was to have the literary career she preferred. Eulate’s novel can, therefore, easily be read as opposing the nineteenth century romance on feminist grounds as promoting a false image of love and marriage which would effectively seduce women into relationships which would limit them to playing primarily the role of wife and mother and stunt other ambitions they might have (Eulate, 126). Where Zeno’s novel opposes romanticized images of the *jibaro* with the starker realities of their lives, Eulate opposes romanticized images of women and marriage with a text which subverts the standard fairy tales.

But, if Eulate demonstrates her feminism in this text, she also demonstrates how her political allegiance is with Spain rather than with Puerto Rico since *La muñeca* is a counternarrative which, via its implicit opposition to the texts associated with Latin American nation-building, reinforces colonial values. Though Eulate takes no overt stand in the area of national identity in this novel about a marriage,

her silence is eloquent. In an era of fierce debates about Puerto Rican status, she sets her novel in Spain, the colonizing country, far away from the land she lives in where these debates are raging and which she does not engage in. Spain, *la madre patria*, or motherland, is the land that triggers Eulate's imagination, the country to which she assigns value. Although the issue is never addressed directly, the fact that the novel is set in Spain must indicate her interests and her allegiance. Where Zeno had addressed immediate problems in the land where he lived, Eulate addresses feminist issues in the faraway land of her parents peopled with rich, lavishly attired people who do not seem part of the same universe, let alone country, as Zeno's characters.

In saying this, it is only fair to point out the different influences and experiences which would have come into play in the lives of Zeno, a male *criollo hacendado* (i.e. an American-born property-owner who was thus a taxpayer and voter) from Arecibo, and Eulate, an upper-class peninsular (i.e. a Spaniard living in Latin America during colonial times), a woman with no Puerto Rican roots living in the capital city. It is unlikely that Eulate's social position could have led her to identify with Puerto Rico and understand the specificity of life on the island to the degree that someone like Zeno would have. As a male *criollo hacendado* who became a doctor, Zeno's experience of Puerto Rico would have been far more wide-ranging than Eulate's, and his novel does indeed show his familiarity with, not only poor people, but merchants, the *mayordomos* who managed the workers on the haciendas, the clergy and the *hacendados* themselves. The specificity of his descriptions of these people, their living conditions and their physical attributes indicate his medical training and his experience as a doctor in the country. No such variety exists in *La muñeca*, probably because Eulate's exposure to people and places would, of necessity, have been much more restricted. Her access to people not of her own class and social milieu would have been far more limited and her knowledge of the island more vague. It is perhaps, therefore, not surprising that her writing, set in drawing rooms and studies, seems to derive more from her own more cloistered life, from her imagination, or from research than from the kind of detailed observation that Zeno had the opportunity to pursue in the mountains and fields of the countryside.

In the mid 1890s when both novels were published and when Zeno wrote his article praising *La muñeca*, the agendas of these two Liberal writers both resisting the Romantic for different reasons, had converged so that Zeno could celebrate Eulate's novel as the work of

a kindred spirit. But their paths would soon diverge. A few years later, after the annexation of Puerto Rico by the United States in 1898, Eulate had returned to Spain, the country where her true allegiance lay, and Zeno had started on the path that would lead him towards his final pro-independence stance.

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