INCEST AND INTERPRETATION IN *LOS PAZOS DE ULLOA* AND *LA MADRE NATURALEZA*

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At the conclusion to the «Ulloa» novels by Emilia Pardo Bazán, Gabriel Pardo, the protagonist of *La madre naturaleza*, exclaims: «Naturaleza, te llaman madre... Deberían llamarte madrastra.» The remark invokes a commonplace distinction between an original and natural mother and her (conventionally cruel) surrogate and summarizes the irreconcilable dichotomies that exercise critics of both *Los pazos de Ulloa* (1886) and *La madre naturaleza* (1887): nature/culture, origin/representation, good/evil, sin/grace, education/instinct, etc.[1] These conflicts seem to have found no satisfactory resolution in the one hundred years since the novels' publication. Commonplaces of the sort uttered by Gabriel are not only the result of such conflicts but serve largely to create them. Oppositions like mother/stepmother or nature/culture, if accepted uncritically, obscure the similarities between what appear to be different categories. This essay will reconsider the seemingly dialectical and surely ambiguous relationships in order to examine some of the fundamental textual aspects of *La madre naturaleza* and *Los pazos de Ulloa.* The similarities and differences between general categories like nature and culture as well as between specific terms like «madre» and «madrastra» describe the narrative process itself in many ways. The reexamination of the controversial definitions of such terms and categories also necessarily provides a reevaluation of the characters most affected by those commonplaces and controversies: the two children, Perucho and Manuela.

While relegated for the most part to the background of *Los pazos de Ulloa*, the relationship between Manuela, heiress to Los Pazos, and her illegitimate half-brother, Perucho, emerges in *La madre naturaleza* when they become lovers, ignorant of their common father, Don Pedro Moscoso, the so-called Marqués de Ulloa. The various interpretations of their relationship, both within the narrative by characters such as Manuela's maternal uncle Gabriel or the priest Julián, protagonist of the first novel, and without by scholars of Pardo Bazán hinge to a great extent on the definitions of the terms «mother» and «nature.» For Mariano López, «El mundo elemental de Perucho y Manuela y el de la naturaleza, en función de madre, son en realidad complementarios. Pero esta función de madre y protectora se convierte muy pronto en un símbolo de la relación incestuosa de los dos hermanos. Ya tenemos a la naturaleza en su papel de madrastra que los mantiene ignorantes de su verdadera identidad para de esa manera empujarlos más fácilmente al incesto» (89). For Gabriel, on the other hand, incest is a natural act, the manner in which the earth was populated with people: «dentro de la ley natural, eso no es crimen, ni lo ha sido nunca. Si en los tiempos primitivos

de sola una pareja se formó la raza humana, ¿cómo diantres se pobló el mundo sino con *eso?*» (*LMN* 296). López sees Gabriel's defense of the euphemistic «eso,» however, as an excuse for what he refers to as Gabriel's «sencillamente incestuosa» relationship with his late sister Nucha, his «mamita,» for whom he seeks a substitute in her daughter Manuela (97).

Maurice Hemingway takes a different critical stance, agreeing with Gabriel and observing that «Incest is natural; the birds and the pigs mate without regard to the prohibitions imposed by religion and society. So in the novel, as Manola and Perucho remain unaware of their common parentage, there is no impediment to their having a sexual relationship. Indeed, in their particular situation it is unavoidable» («Grace» 342; see also Brown 106). According to López, though, it is not nature but her cruel surrogate that fosters incest: «es la naturaleza, en función de madrastra, que no de madre, la que fragua el incesto» (92). The polemic rests on the association of apparently opposing literal definitions of the terms incest—natural and unnatural—and nature—mother and stepmother—as well as on differing value judgments—right and wrong. Neither series of associations of words and values can remain fixed, however; no term or interpretation can be privileged over the other absolutely. The paradoxical last words of *La madre naturaleza* suggest, instead, that there is no right or wrong that can be maintained in the text. Those words imply the equal and alternating coexistence of two interpretations of the same term or of two signifieds for the same signifier/two signifiers for the same signified, as it were.

Not only do critics' readings of key terms in the novels differ, but their interpretations of the moral, symbolic, and literary value of Pardo Bazán's texts offer paradoxically different conclusions. Again, for López,

> Lo que Pardo Bazán pretende significar en estos primeros capítulos es ese declinar del hombre que vive al natural, es decir, según la ley de la naturaleza. La gran preocupación de la escritora es terminar con el mito de una naturaleza idílica y llena de bondad, cual la que divinizó Rousseau y difundió el romanticismo. ...En su entender, toda esta mística de la naturaleza no es más que un tópico literario o un idealismo nocivo, materialista en el fondo, que acarrea en su misma entraña el castigo a la ignorancia y necedad del que cree en utopías y en paraísos imposibles. (91)

He supports his remarks with perceptive analyses of Pardo Bazán's narrative style in *La madre naturaleza,* for instance her caricature of such mouthpieces of nature as «el Atador de Boán.» Hemingway also invokes Pardo Bazán's narrative technique to support his different but equally insightful view. According to his interpretation, «Perucho's narrative» in chapter 28 of *Los pazos de Ulloa* creates a contrast

> between the happy, innocent relationship of the two children and the ugly and tragic nature of relationships in the adult world. I want to go further and suggest that a simple shift of «point of view» leads to a symbolic affirmation of primaeval innocence. ...We see how moral and spiritual values—innocence and joy—are conveyed concretely in terms of sensation, in this case, the golden maize and the sunlight. The inhabitants of *Los Pazos* may be plunged in moral darkness but the two children bask in the light of Paradise... the primaeval innocence which the scene in the granary represents suggests that the rest of the novel is enacted in the world of fallen man, of vitiated human nature, unaided by Grace. («Grace» 346)

Hemingway's «primaeval innocence» is surely natural, if as idyllic as the concept of paradise lost.[2] In his schema it is not that nature is corrupt but that man has corrupted nature. Uncorrupted nature is indeed a «paraíso imposible,» as López observes, since in chapter 28 of *Los pazos de Ulloa,* as in chapter 21 of *La madre naturaleza,* Perucho and Manuela's «innocence and joy» is soon interrupted. The momentary interruption of their childish love and delight in each other by Manuela's wet nurse in *Los pazos de Ulloa* contrasts, however, with the tragic and final dissolution of their relationship in *La madre naturaleza.* There, a too brief pleasure, whose culmination only occurs outside the pages of the novel, is followed by their inevitable and absolute separation from each other. The scenes describing the union and separation of Manuela and Perucho serve as emblems of the relationships of identity and difference that constitute the textual process itself.

The Representational Difference

The contrast between the two passages, both filled with «terms of sensation,» reveals the difference between the children and the adolescents. In *Los pazos de Ulloa* the infant Manuela exists in a presymbolic state, as the description of her reaction to Perucho's story in the granary illustrates: «La 'nené' no oyó el final del cuento... La música de las palabras, que no le despertaban idea alguna: el haber vuelto a entrar en calor, la misma satisfacción de estar con su favorito, le trajeron insensiblemente el sueño anterior» (280-81). Even Perucho has only the power of speech in this scene, not writing. But by the second novel, both youths have the knowledge of reading and writing, however rudimentary in Manuela's case (see *LMN* 262); consequently, they belong to the world of representation.

This representational difference between the two scenes might be called somewhat facilely the onset of the knowledge of good and evil. In the second scene, the prelude to their lovemaking, the narrator says of Perucho, as he lies with Manuela: «dos o tres veces retrocedió el montañés—sintiendo en la conciencia una especie de punzada, un misterioso aviso, que al cabo no en balde tenía cuatro o seis años más que su compañera y algo que en rigor podía llamarse conocimiento» (*LMN* 211). More significant than this sexual knowledge, perhaps, is that Perucho taught Manuela to read, no doubt from *El cantar de los cantares,* as Gabriel suggests: «Según los garrapatos que he visto en la edición, Manuela y su..., ¡lo que sea!, aprendieron a leer por ese libro... Tiene algo de simbólico... La más negra no es el texto, sino los comentarios...» (*LMN* 240). Unconscious or conscious, Perucho and Manuela's love is not original, not «naturally» untouched by culture. It is contaminated by the texts of civilization; it is a commentary and a representation of a written text, translated and commented by Fray Luis de León.

Manuela and Perucho's love in *La madre naturaleza* is indeed written, if not in Pardo Bazán's novel, in the texts that it glosses. Their act is necessarily an adding on, even if that addition—the final act—is invisible within the lines of the novel. The invisible space of interpretation defines the representative image itself, since an image is and is not at the same time. As

representation, commentary, or gloss, Manuela and Perucho's love is impalpable. Its «representational nature» reveals a layering of image upon image, commentary upon commentary in an infinite series. Original innocence or natural love cannot be named without participating in the very process of representation that marks its absence. This inescapable representationality is observable in the ways that Gabriel imagines what took place between the two young lovers. His continually shifting interpretations illustrate the perpetual movement of the signifying process. For example, he revises his first interpretation of Perucho and Manuela's readings of the Song of Songs and Fray Luis's commentary, thinking to himself that «si tu sobrina ha leído eso, sería de niña, cuando deletreaba; y a fuerza de ser clásico y castizo y repulido, ni lo entendió entonces, ni lo entendería ahora» (*LMN* 241). However, it does not matter which of Gabriel's interpretations is correct (a question left unanswered in the text); in either case, by reading and writing, Manuela and Perucho participate in the scene of representation. Whether they understand what was written or not, they cannot escape the writing that has preceded them. Nature's corruption by culture—the pervasive presence of writing—is also seen in the passages where nature appears to speak for itself. From the first line of *La madre naturaleza*, in fact, nature displays various characteristics of writing: «Las nubes... como de tinta desleída, fueron juntándose...» Nature's ink may be illegible or unintelligible, diffused or dissolved, and perhaps the Song of Songs has been forgotten or misunderstood by Perucho and Manuela, yet they are, inevitably, already written. [3]

In another passage of *La madre naturaleza*, Gabriel seems to hear the voices of nature; but at the same time he acknowledges that they are of the listener's own making: «¡Voces!... ¡Voces! ¡Unas voces que están hablando hace miles y miles de años, y a cada cual le dicen su cosa diferente! Deduzco que ellas no dicen maldita la cosa..., y que nosotros las interpretamos a nuestra manera... Las voces están dentro...» (239). The voice of nature is an imagined speech in the listener's mind, but Gabriel soon forgets this knowledge: «Se me figura que la naturaleza se encara conmigo, y me dice: Necio, pon a una pareja linda... como Adán y Eva en los días paradisíacos... entre flores que huelen bien, y alfombras de mullida hierba... ¿Qué barrera, qué valla los divide? Una enteramente ilusoria, ideal; valla que mis leyes... no reconocen... Y yo, única madre y doctora de esa pareja, soy su cómplice... porque la palabra que les susurro y el himno que les canto, son la verdadera palabra y el himno verdadero...» (241-42). The story of Adam and Eve comes from a written, original only as written, source. Yet readers like Gabriel and, even more, Julián take this text for original and natural. Julián, condemning Perucho and Manuela's «natural» love, states categorically: «el advenimiento de Cristo y los méritos de su sangre preciosa fueron cabalmente para... remediar la falta de nuestros primeros padres y sanar a la naturaleza enferma» (*LMN* 316). Since «primeros padres» and «naturaleza» refer to the Old Testament, for Julián, too, original nature is written. Moreover, this natural text is insufficient, «enferma»; it must be corrected, supplemented, by the New Testament. While the value that Gabriel attaches to his definition of nature is positive rather than negative like Julián's, its original truth can

also only be expressed through words and hymns. Such differing interpretations are a part of a textual process where terms like «primaeval innocence» or «mother nature» participate in the system that they may seek to evade. The only way that innocence, nature as prelinguistic and originary, exists is outside of representation. The literal absence of the final act of Perucho and Manuela's lovemaking gestures to that paradoxical origin which, as soon as it is imagined, is written.

To return to the apparent difference between the two novels, in chapter 21 of *La madre naturaleza* the adolescents have both been tainted by culture and writing. Their love cannot be natural, for that term is defined as different from culture and writing. Not even their childish love in chapter 28 of *Los pazos de Ulloa* is natural or original. Perucho supplants the role of a natural mother for Manuela by caring for and protecting her from what he perceives as the danger posed by their abusive father, Don Pedro. When he amuses Manuela in the granary with his «cuento del ogro,» he displays his own representational abilities. He is symbolically projecting himself and his world, making images of things, self-doubling. Through this repetition of himself in his imagination, Perucho is both text and commentary. His interpretation adds to what was before insufficient and in this case unintelligible. He instills events at Los Pazos with a significance that they did not in themselves contain before they were interpreted. Nor is his interpretation original; it has a mediated relationship with his grandfather's murder and with Don Pedro's brutality to Nucha that he just witnessed: «¿De dónde procedía este cuento, variante de la leyenda del ogro? ¿Lo oiría Perucho en alguna velada, junto al lar, mientras hilaban las viejas y pelaban castañas las mozas? ¿Sería creación de su mente, excitada por los terrores de un día tan excepcional?» (*LPU* 279-80). Further, he makes an image of Manuela as the little princess and of himself as the «pagarito» that saves and then marries her. The children's «natural» love is displaced beyond originality and within the symbolic chain. Perucho's narrative inscribes its own theory of textuality, since even the seemingly «primaeval innocence» of Manuela and Perucho in *Los pazos de Ulloa* is a myth. There is no originary moment «before the fall,» nothing outside the text.

These passages from *Los pazos de Ulloa* and *La madre naturaleza* display multiple layers of interpretation and the inevitable rewriting process. Just as Perucho rewrites the fireside stories and the confused impressions of the day into a new story for himself and Manuela, so *La madre naturaleza* rewrites *Los pazos de Ulloa* and all the texts that it interprets—Kempis, the Saints' lives, Sabia's tarot cards, and even the Pardo china. These diverse «texts» suggest an open-ended series of intertextual relationships in which each novelistic element becomes a sort of rewriting of all the others. The reader, like Gabriel, rereads and comments on these intertexts and Perucho and Manuela's readings of them. The reader interprets the unwritten lovemaking of the characters in view of these texts and commentaries too. The singular absence of that act, its existence only in the imagination—the reader's or Gabriel's—also marks its peculiar function among the terms mother and stepmother, nature and culture.

Mother/Nature, Origin/Supplement

The interpretive problems suggested by López and Hemingway, as well as by many others, arise from the different definitions and values attached to the terms nature, mother, stepmother, innocence, good, evil, myth, truth, origin. Critical commentaries also find in the novels different interpretations of and commentaries on Catholicism, naturalism, the Bible, Oedipus, Zola (particularly *La Faute de L'abbé Mouret*, as Brown has shown [99-107]), Dostoevsky, Rousseau, etc. The critics' texts comment on and interpret Pardo Bazán's implicit commentaries on philosophical, literary, and theological texts. Any interpretation of these novels confronts a seemingly endless series of texts whose definitions and values change as one writes about Pardo Bazán's writings of other texts. Jacques Derrida's theory of representation helps us to open up further this infinite textuality among words and interpretations and to see how the terms with which we create our readings are themselves unstable, neither innocent, natural, nor original.

In *Of Grammatology* Derrida examines the texts of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, particularly the posthumously published *Essay on the Origin of Languages*. Rousseau has particular import in view of López's reading of Pardo Bazán's reading of «Rousseau's idyllic concept of nature» (91). Derrida suggests that Rousseau's use of the term «nature» was neither so divine as López believes and surely not innocent. Derrida's commentary enables a rereading of possible relationships between the texts of Pardo Bazán and Rousseau. [4]

Rousseau's works are included among the few volumes in the archive of Los Pazos (*LPU* 35, *LMN* 156) and are the only ones mentioned in both novels. *La madre naturaleza* makes reference to two and possibly three of his works, *La nueva Heloisa*, *El contrato social*, and *Las confesiones*. (This last reference could also be to St. Augustine, another text that seems to incite controversy among critics of these novels, e.g. Hemingway [«Grace» 343].) As with the Song of Songs, these references to Rousseau suggest provocative interpretations. Derrida illustrates how in Rousseau two fundamental and seemingly opposing terms—nature and culture—are intertwined and in the process reveal the inescapability of writing. He introduces his reexamination of Rousseau by observing that «we must... think Rousseau's experience and his theory of writing together... On the side of experience, a recourse to literature as reappropriation of presence, that is to say, ...of Nature; on the side of theory, an indictment against the negativity of the letter, in which must be read the degeneracy of culture and the disruption of the community» (144). These considerations are pertinent to *Los pazos de Ulloa* and *La madre naturaleza*, since the novels depict the relationship between nature and culture. At the same time they inscribe their own theory of writing. The key to such fundamental aspects of the novels lies in the relationship between Manuela and Perucho, which seems to exist in the limit between nature and culture.

For Rousseau, presence is natural and maternal. Moreover, writes Derrida, it «*ought to be* self-sufficient. ...Like Nature's love, 'there is no substitute for a mother's love,' says *Emile*. It is in no way *supplemented*, that is to say it does not have to be supplemented, it suffices and is self-sufficient; but

that also means that it is irreplaceable; what one would substitute for it would not equal it, would only be a mediocre makeshift» (145). This passage provides an approximation to Pardo Bazán's novels in numerous ways. Most notably, Manuela's mother, Nucha, was from the beginning insufficient—incapable of nursing her—and soon abandoned her in death. The wet nurse first supplements Nucha's insufficiency, and then Perucho does. He becomes a mother of sorts as he recounts in his impassioned narration to Gabriel all the ways that he has nurtured Manuela. Even in *Los pazos de Ulloa* Perucho holds Manuela «con tanta suavidad, precaución y ternura como pudiera su propia madre» (278). This stepmother, himself a child of nature, comes to take the place of the natural mother: in Derrida's terms, he is a supplement.

Gabriel, although unsuccessfully, also tries to be everything he believes Manuela lacks. More significantly, Gabriel seeks to substitute Manuela for his own Mamita, his sister Nucha, also a stepmother or supplement to the natural mother who died after Gabriel's birth. These unnatural, though not necessarily cruel, mothers—Perucho, Gabriel, and Manuela—demonstrate the positive value of supplementarity. «The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *fullest measure* of presence. It cumulates and accumulates presence. It is thus that art, *technè*, image, representation, convention, etc., come as supplements to nature and are rich with this entire cumulating function. This kind of supplementarity determines in a certain way all the conceptual oppositions within which Rousseau inscribes the notion of Nature to the extent that it *should* be self-sufficient (Derrida 144-45). In the seemingly perfect relationship between Perucho and Manuela, who signify everything to each other, the stepmother Perucho appears to have surpassed nature itself. Even the language of *La madre naturaleza* becomes a sort of hymn to nature, a gloss or a commentary that enriches and makes more beautiful its subject.

There is another side to Mother Nature and to the supplement, as the events of the novels reveal and critics' comments indicate. Writes Derrida: «But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace... [I]f it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence... [S]omething can be filled up *of itself*, ...only by allowing itself to be filled through sign and proxy. The sign is always the supplement of the thing itself» (145). The function of the terms nature and mother, the relationship between Perucho and Manuela—apparently authentic children of nature—and the textual process of these novels can all be reconsidered in light of the «other» side of the supplement.

The question of Perucho and Manuela's guilt or innocence always seems to require that nature and culture be defined according to those values too, as the different interpretations of López and Hemingway or Gabriel and Julián indicate. Rousseau defines these terms according to the values of good and evil too, as Derrida writes: «According to Rousseau, the negativity of evil will always have the form of supplementarity. Evil is exterior to nature, to what is by nature innocent and good. It supervenes upon nature. But always by way of compensation for... what *ought* to lack nothing at all in itself» (145). If nature lacks something, it invites «evil» supplementation. Julián's reference to the Old Testament «naturaleza enferma» suggests not

only that nature is insufficient but that its supplement, «la gracia» (*LMN* 316), is an ambiguous value that may be deemed good or evil.

Gabriel and Manuela's need for supplementation can be seen not as the exception but the norm. Derrida writes: «Childhood is the first manifestation of the deficiency which, in Nature, calls for substitution. Without childhood no supplement would ever appear in Nature. The supplement is here both humanity's good fortune and the origin of its perversion» (146-47). In Pardo Bazán's novels the constant flux of terms and values like good and evil, nature and culture, sufficient and deficient is the place of innocence/corruption for Perucho and Manuela. They seem to be unto themselves self-sufficient; theirs is a significant and original, essential and innocent love. They, too, supplement and are supplemented. The supplement—culture, evil, writing—is already within nature—mother, presence, love—even, and perhaps most catastrophically, within childhood and before the fall. The place of the relationship between Manuela and Perucho is where incest comes into existence by its very prohibition. Derrida privileges the term incest in Rousseau's work because of its absence. The absence of this prohibited term marks its importance in *La madre naturaleza* as well.

Incest and Catastrophe

Rousseau's situation is analogous to Manuela's (and also to Gabriel's). Derrida associates this natural or maternal deficiency with the process of writing as infinite deferral, the play of *differance.* Rousseau's story and his storytelling are one and the same: «the absolute present, Nature, that which words like 'real mother' name, have never existed; ...what opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence» (Derrida 159). The presence of an originary and self-sufficient mother, nature, or being is as illusory, as endlessly deferred, as an ultimate truth in or a real referent beyond the text. Such an insufficiency is intrinsic to the writing and the topic of *La madre naturaleza,* and, by extension, the text it rereads, *Los pazos de Ulloa.* The stepmother, in the Ulloa novels or for Rousseau, is necessary from the beginning; both Rousseau's «supplement» and Gabriel's «madrastra» inscribe the process of writing. At the origin of Rousseau's theory, in *The Essay on the Origin of Languages,* and of Pardo Bazán's practice, in *La madre naturaleza,* is the word incest. [5]

In «That 'Simple Movement of the Finger.' Writing and the Prohibition of Incest,» Derrida writes that for Rousseau «the origin of civil man, the origin of languages, ...the origin, in a word, of the supplementary structure, and... the origin of writing» are «catastrophic» (255). The catastrophe is the awakening of nature to its own image-making or supplementarity. The onset of imagination, representation, marks the deferral of nature from itself. Herein resides the irresolvable paradox between the natural and the cultural, the origin and writing. One sees the paradox in the natural bond between mother and child: their presence to each other must be imagined to exist. But as it is imagined it becomes deferred. Moreover, the awakening of the imagination within nature is purely accidental, argues Derrida: «If societies are born in

catastrophe, it means that they are born by accident. Rousseau naturalizes the Biblical accident: he makes a natural accident of the Fall. But by the same token, he transforms the throw of dice, the luck or checkmating of a player God, into a culpable Fall. Between the accidents of nature and social evil, there is a simplicity that, moreover, manifests Divine Providence. Society is created only to repair the accidents of nature... Floods, earthquakes ... no doubt terrified savages but then made them come together» (260). Julián's orthodox version of the Fall is not so different from Rousseau's: «lo que la naturaleza yerra, lo enmienda la gracia» (*LMN* 316). Hemingway writes that «Pardo Bazán, despite her caution, emphasizes the importance of the doctrine of Original Sin: that man has fallen from the state of innocence in which he was created» («Grace» 343). The error, accident, or Fall, the catastrophe, was necessarily within Nature, from the beginning, as its supplement.

Acknowledged or not, imagination has come between Perucho and Manuela. Their love is natural only insofar as it already contains its catastrophe. This catastrophe is their very identity as brother and sister; it requires their inevitable difference and deferral from each other. Gabriel's discovery of Nucha's long-hidden letter in his father's bureau becomes the accident that gives the children knowledge of themselves, allows them to symbolize good and evil, to see their own image. The «natural accident» of their birth, revealed by the cultural accident of the letter, is the catastrophe that separates Manuela from her brother Perucho.

Perucho and Manuela's catastrophe impels them toward civilization. The passage from one state to another parallels the description Derrida gives of Rousseau's theory of the origin of society as a «Festival»: «There is certainly an experience of time, but a time of pure presence, giving rise neither to calculation, nor reflection nor yet comparison: 'happy age when nothing marked the hours.' ...Time also without differance: it leaves no interval, authorizes no detour between desire and pleasure: 'Pleasure and desire mingled and were felt together'» (262). Such an experience of time out of time is observable in *La madre naturaleza* as Perucho lies with Manuela, his arm encircling her as in the Song of Songs,[6] without «interval,» as it were: «Tan feliz se encontraba que olvidaba el transcurso del tiempo..., sumido en una de esas distracciones profundas propias de los momentos culminantes de la existencia, que rompen la tiranía del pasado, anulan la memoria, suprimen la preocupación del porvenir y dejan sólo el momento presente con su solemnidad, su intensidad, su peso decisivo en la balanza de nuestro destino» (210). They lie under the «natural pabellón» of the old oak (208), alone and far from civilization, as in Rousseau's description of the festival as the meeting of youths «under old oaks, conquerors of the years» where «an ardent youth will gradually loose its ferocity. Little by little they become less shy with each other» (Derrida 262; see Rousseau 45).[7] Perucho and Manuela lose their shyness and seem to experience desire and pleasure at once: «Pedro la dejaba a su disposición, cerrando los ojos y sintiendo un bienestar infinito e indecible. La cortedad penosa experimentada el día del refugio en la cantera, con la conversación explícita de amor...; y el montañés ni pedía, ni soñaba dicha mayor que la de estar allí solos, próximos, seguros

el uno del otro, a razonable distancia de todo lo que fuese gente, habitación, obstáculo, mundo en suma; allí, en el desierto de la isla del Castro, donde Perucho quisiera quedarse hasta la consumación de los siglos, con Manuela nada más» (210). Manuela feels a «placer inexplicable» (209), and for Perucho, «no hervía con ímpetu su sangre moza; sólo parecía correr con mayor regularidad por las venas» (210). The moment of their union, too, suggests unmediated pleasure and desire: «al fin, sin saber cómo, sin estudio, sin premeditación, tan impensadamente como se encuentran las mariposas... los rostros se unieron y los labios se juntaron con débil suspiro...» (211). The union of Perucho and Manuela is pure pleasure out of time, the moment between nature and civilization, self-proximity and deferral, neither one nor the other but both continuously.

The continuity of time, presence, Manuela, and Perucho is ruptured at the end of their celebration of lovè—their festival—at the end of that very day, when Gabriel identifies Perucho to himself. When Perucho, and then Manuela, sees his image, he feels unnatural: «the supplement is the image and the representation of Nature»; nature, that is, deferred from itself. «What dislocates presence introduces differance and delay, spacing between desire and pleasure. Articulated language, knowledge and work, the anxious research of learning, are nothing but the spacing between two pleasures» (Derrida 149, 280). After they are named, Perucho and Manuela are separated from each other by interpretation and culture, and their pleasure has become desire. As representations now, Perucho and Manuela stand at the same distance from themselves as critics—in their «anxious research»—must stand from Pardo Bazán's novels.

Derrida writes that after the festival there follows «The age of the supplement, or articulation, of signs, of representatives. That is the age of the prohibition of incest. Before the festival, there was no incest because there was no prohibition of incest and no society. After the festival there is no more incest because it is forbidden» (263). The culmination of Manuela and Pedro's natural, unmediated pleasure must take place outside the pages of the text, outside of writing, because it is forbidden. If it is natural, it cannot be written.

Just as the representation of the incestual act itself is avoided by Pardo Bazán, so Rousseau mentions it only in a footnote to the unpublished *Essay*. Derrida observes: «we shall be very little surprised by the omission of incest in the evocation of the festival: describing the nonprohibition, Rousseau does not mention the mother at all, only the sister. And in a note called forth by the word 'sister' Rousseau explains with some embarrassment that the prohibition of incest had to follow the festival, and to be born of the act of birth of human society...: 'The first men would have had to marry their sisters... [T]his practice would easily perpetuate itself as long as families remained isolated...» (264; Rousseau 45-46). Perucho and Manuela's isolation of course permits their «marriage.» And Perucho is not only brother but mother to his sister. These familial relationships are unperceived by the children but not by their readers like Gabriel. In reading the *Cantar de los cantares*, he, like us, cannot help making incestual associations between the children and the texts: «'¿Quién te me dará como hermano

que mamase los pechos de mi madre? Hallaríate fuera, besaríate, y ya nadie me despreciaría'» (*LMN* 240; Solomon 8:1). The reinscription of the *Cantar de los Cantares* in *La madre naturaleza* illustrates that Pardo Bazán's omission of the description of the act of incest itself marks its importance, exactly as in Rousseau.[8] Incest is an invisible and inevitable supplementarity that describes the signifying process. Like the relations between nature and culture, the incestual union of Perucho and Manuela becomes an identity within difference. Derrida sees Rousseau's footnote about the prohibition of incest in the *Essay* as a fundamental supplement—an absent presence—to the coherence of Rousseau's work: «The function of the prohibition of incest is neither named nor expounded in *The Social Contract* but its place is marked as a blank there. ...It is the universal order of culture» (264-65). This blank is like the one in Pardo Bazán's text. It is the lack within nature that cannot be mentioned without transgressing the prohibition itself. Nature identifies its supplement, culture; «Madre» is «madrastra.» Blanks in the texts of Rousseau and Pardo Bazán identify the difference between nature and culture, «madre» and «madrastra,» as their invisible and unspeakable identity.

Incest and Writing

Reading López's interpretation of Pardo Bazán's reading of Rousseau together with Derrida's analysis of Rousseau makes obvious the inevitably incestual relationships between text and interpretation. The function of incest—its prohibition or transgression—describes the signifying process in general. According to Derrida, «Society, language, history, articulation, in a word supplementarity, are born at the same time as the prohibition of incest. The last is the hinge [*brisure*] between nature and culture. ...It is the element of culture itself, the undeclared origin of passion, of society, of language; the first supplementarity which permits the substitution in general of a signifier for the signified, of signifiers for other signifiers, which subsequently makes for a discourse on the difference between words and things» (265-66). Incest is the supplement between Perucho and Manuela, between their love and the naming of that love, between cumulation and lack, pleasure and desire, meaning and interpretation.

Since the supplement names incest, it must be hidden, writes Derrida: «So dangerous is this supplementarity that one can only show it indirectly, by means of the examples of certain effects derived from it. One can neither show it, nor name it as such, but only indicate it, by a silent movement of the finger» (266). The novelistic characters refuse, until too late, to voice the relationship between Perucho and Manuela; by the time they do, the mother is already a stepmother and nature already culture. The finger that points to Manuela and Perucho as brother and sister defers them from their fundamental identity—their being for each other. Their necessary difference and separation is their origin, even while their lovemaking is not original. In representation there is no original nature, mother, sister, or self: «Within the play of supplementarity, one will always be able to relate the substitutes

to their signified, this last will be yet another signifier» (Derrida 266). The absence/presence of incest in *La madre naturaleza,* the identity/difference of Perucho and Manuela, their multifaceted supplementarity, defines their texts as a series of signifiers without original referent or ultimate truth.

Perucho and Manuela's absolute love, their total presence to each other, cannot exist within the order of culture. Once named by culture, they are forever separated by that name, which illustrates the paradox of incest and of the relationship between nature and culture: «The festival *itself* would be incest *itself* if some such thing—*itself*—could *take place*; if, by taking place, incest were not to confirm the prohibition: before the prohibition, it is not incest; forbidden, it cannot become incest except through the recognition of the prohibition. We are always short of or beyond the limit of the festival, of the origin of society... This *birth of society* is therefore not a passage, it is a point, a pure, fictivè and unstable, ungraspable limit» (Derrida 267). In Pardo Bazán's novels, the series of readings and interpretations of other texts reveals the infinite supplementary process of which incest is the fictive origin, the *différance* between nature and culture, mother and stepmother, sister and lover, desire and pleasure, Perucho and Manuela, words and things. Writing about the novels can only take place within the prohibitively fictive and inevitably separating signifying process itself.

Displacing Desire/Revealing Secrets

Los pazos de Ulloa and *La madre naturaleza* display throughout, not just in intimate scenes, their own theory of textuality and the necessarily mediated and supplemented process of language. The protagonists of the novels, for example, Julián and Gabriel, represent everything that Perucho and Manuela do not. Derrida writes that «the desire of presence is, on the contrary, born from the abyss (the indefinite multiplication) of representation, from the representation of representation» (163). Gabriel's Dulcineaic visions of Manuela or Julián's sublimation of Nucha in *Los pazos de Ulloa* and cult of her in *La madre naturaleza* are examples of this abyss between desire and presence, but there are others.

Many of the characters are narrators of more or less reliability, becoming text and commentary at once, and thus reveal the interdependence and interchangeability of these functions, as in Perucho's narrative in *Los pazos de Ulloa.* Some texts «outside» of the Pardo Bazán novels mediate the actions and desires of the characters as well as critics' interpretations. These texts may be as conventional as the Saints' lives and Kempis in *Los pazos de Ulloa* or the Song of Songs and Oedipus in *La madre naturaleza.* But such prior texts cannot maintain their isolation and privilege from the Pardo Bazán novels; while these other texts help to create readings of the novels, they also become objects of reexamination. The titled texts have the same function as the dreams and nightmares of the characters or Sabia's tarot cards that appear in both works (*LPU* 183-85; *LMN* 19, 183) or Perucho's narration in *Los pazos de Ulloa.* Like Oedipus, these dreams and cards de-form and re-form readings, insistently deferring the relationships between the words of a text

and its interpretations. In *La madre naturaleza,* the references to Nucha's long-hidden letter, to the Atador de Boán's tattered handbook, and to the character himself as «un texto de la región,» with skin like the parchment of his book (16), or to the Pardo china that recalls Gabriel and Pedro's common ancestry (130-31) continually call attention to the irreducible textuality that weaves the words of the narrative. The texts cumulate, one upon the other, like supplements. And as commentaries both inside and outside, critics' interpretations are included in and allowed for by the narrative associations and silences. Critical commentaries, like any of the «intertexts» of these novels, are all equally representations, without hierarchy in a series of illusions. The textuality of *Los pazos de Ulloa* and *La madre naturaleza* prohibits an originary truth or an ultimate meaning—the undifferentiated relation of identity between word and thing, presence and pleasure—just as the original and natural love of Perucho and Manuela is forbidden in the text. As these novels differentiate and space Perucho from Manuela because of their identity, as they layer reader upon reader, text upon text, interpretation upon interpretation, critics are confronted with their own shortcomings and limitations as readers and interpreters of these texts and the world.

Like all of the novelistic characters, and most tragically Perucho and Manuela, no one can escape the confines of representation. No one can achieve presence, be one with mother, sister, or nature, reach an original and natural signified. The relation between nature and culture, instinct and morality, is not between good and evil but only between terms of a conventional language that forgets its own symbolic condition, just as Nucha's letter was so long unread or Perucho and Manuela's kinship ignored. Perucho and Manuela's love is prohibited in the text because it cannot be represented. The immediate truth, true presence, is imperceptible in a culture and a language of illusion.

Nature implies an inevitable supplementary structure; it is the mother that requires and signifies a stepmother, even if this supplement is hidden. *La madre naturaleza* rereads the silences of *Los pazos de Ulloa* just as Gabriel discovers Nucha's letter, «escrita con tinta ya descolorida y letra no muy suelta,» in the secret compartment of his father's desk: «Cayó la cubierta, y los dedos impacientes de Gabriel empezaron a escudriñar los famosos *secretos* de la cómoda, cual si en ellos se encerrase algún escondido tesoro» (*LMN* 88). This forgotten knowledge—Nucha's letter about Manuela—impels Gabriel to Los Pazos where he will reveal the unspoken secret of Manuela and Perucho, let down their cover with a «silent movement of the finger.» Their hidden treasure is destroyed once it is named. While forgotten, Perucho and Manuela's supplementary relationship to each other was invisible, though always latent. A secret, like Perucho and Manuela's love, ceases to be once it is represented.

Perucho and Manuela's difference is inscribed within their identity, the stepmother within the mother, just as *Los pazos de Ulloa,* replete with its secrets, is within *La madre naturaleza.* This continual textual reinscription is both present and absent, like the «tinta desleída» at the beginning of *La madre naturaleza.* All these secret supplements describe incest itself, whose significance—for Perucho and Manuela, nature and culture, morality and

instinct, and for all of the textual processes of these novels and their interpretations—is defined by its absence.

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NOTES

[1] Among the many excellent discussions of such conflicts, a few representative studies are those by Boland, Brown, Clémessy, Feal Deibe, Hemingway (*Emilia Pardo Bazán*), Pattison, Varela Jácome, Villanueva.

[2] Villanueva also contradicts Hemingway's concept of «primaeval innocence» in his interpretation of point of view in *Los pazos de Ulloa* (see esp. 131-36).

[3] The *Diccionario manual de la lengua española* defines «desleír» literally as «disolver y desunir las partes de algunos cuerpos por medio de un líquido» and figuratively as «Tratándose de ideas, pensamientos, conceptos, etc., expresarlos con sobreabundancia de palabras, de modo que resulten desmayados y fríos.» This vèrb has a «natural» and a «cultural» signified; both suggest the various functions of writing as «dissemination.»

[4] Consult also Paul de Man's reading of Derrida. His comments are particularly enlightening with regard to the processes of commentary upon commentary. For him, it is not Rousseau's text that produces a misreading of its own terms but rather his first interpreters: «There is no need to deconstruct Rousseau; the established tradition of Rousseau interpretation, however, stands in need of deconstruction» (139). Derrida appears to have used these traditional misinterpretations (which de Man believes Rousseau foresaw and allowed for) to his own ends: «instead of having Rousseau deconstruct his critics, we have Derrida deconstructing a pseudo-Rousseau by means of insights that could have been gained from the 'real' Rousseau. The pattern is too interesting not to be deliberate» (139-40). These remarks have obvious pertinence to the rich tradition of Pardo Bazán criticism. As de Man concludes: «the existence of a particularly rich aberrant tradition in the case of writers that can be legitimately called the most enlightened, is therefore no accident, but a constitutive part of all literature, the basis, in fact, of literary history. And since interpretation is nothing but the possibility of error, by claiming that a certain degree of blindness is part of the specificity of all literature, we also reaffirm the absolute dependence of the interpretation on the text and of the text on the interpretation» (141).

[5] The terms theory and practice, like literature and interpretation, are completely interchangeable, as I am arguing. The *Essay* is also Rousseau's practice, and *La madre naturaleza* contains the theory it practices. In like fashion this interpretation only practices the theory of representation and incest that is already implicit in *La madre naturaleza.*

[6] This detail of Perucho's encircling arm is recalled by Gabriel (*LMN* 240); it is one of the many specific parallels to the Song of Songs (Solomon 8: 3-4). See Kirby's study.

[7] See also Brown's excellent discussion of the symbolic tree (102-03) and Osborne (67), who writes of the «árbol simbólico» in chapter 21 of *La madre naturaleza* and of other specific parallels to Genesis.

[8] Although Gabriel finally does say specifically to Perucho, «¿Usted sabe o no sabe que es hermano de Manuela?» (*LMN* 268), he usually circumvents any specific reference to their relationship. He refers to Perucho as Manuela's «¡lo que sea!» (240) and, first confronting him in chapter 27, is able only to utter: «¿Usted sabe de quién es hijo?» (261). When he tells him of Don Pedro's near acknowledgement of Perucho as his son, he says: «Y hoy si se descuida, delante de todos los majadores, le llama a usted... lo que usted es» (269). Juncal and Gabriel discuss the relationship between the children many times, but even their early apprehensions in chapter 11, as well as their final certainty, remain unspoken: «Calló Juncal. Lo que ambos cavilaban no era para dicho en alto» (110); and in chapter 30, Gabriel tells Juncal all without telling him anything: «—Y en especial... —¡Basta, basta! En especial, silencio...» (288). Julián, unable to name Perucho and Manuela's relationship in *Los pazos de Ulloa,* is the only character who utters the word incest—«pasión incestuosa»—in *La madre naturaleza* (302). He is also the only character who sees no moral dilemma or ambiguity in the children's relationship and believes himself to be in the possession of «truth» in this novel. For Julián the term «incest» and his interpretation of it form a univocal sign and an absolute value. His condemnation of the act finds its corollary in the ease with which he utters the term, whereas Juncal and Gabriel refuse to put a name to their interpretations. For Perucho and Manuela, before Gabriel interprets for them, incest is a word without a meaning since they read without interpreting.

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