

Letras Hispanas

Volume 15

TITLE: Killing the King: Scapegoating Amid the Environmental Crisis in Galdós' *Doña Perfecta*

AUTHOR: Sarah Sierra

EMAIL: ssierra2@vt.edu

AFFILIATION: Virginia Tech; Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures; 315 Major Williams Hall; 220 Stanger St. Blacksburg, VA 24061

ABSTRACT: In spite of the apparent separation between human populations and nature, ecological analyses demonstrate that cultural behaviors and practices respond to the rhythms of the natural, non-human world. In this essay, I examine how catastrophic weather generates expiatory thinking in which a guilty party is sought to explain devastation in Galdós' 1876 novel *Doña Perfecta*. The highly ideological tone overshadows the role of natural catastrophes, specifically a long-lasting drought, in aggravating the tensions already extant within the community. Pepe Rey's arrival in the backwater town situates him as an ideal surrogate upon which to transfer the internal discord and blame among the inhabitants for the continuing drought. Rey, as king, is portrayed as the scapegoat who can restore the balance of the ecosystem through his death or sacrifice by carrying the evil or imbalance from the community. This analysis seeks to draw attention to the socio-cultural response to the environment and specifically to natural disasters by reading the novel eco-critically.

KEYWORDS: Benito Pérez Galdós, *Doña Perfecta*, Sacrifice, Scapegoat, Ecocriticism, Environmental Crisis

RESUMEN: A pesar de la aparente separación entre los seres humanos y la naturaleza, un análisis ecológico pone de relieve que la cultura responde a los ritmos naturales de la tierra. En este ensayo, postulo que el clima catastrófico genera un tipo de pensamiento que busca un culpable a quien atribuir las condiciones devastadoras en la novela de Galdós, *Doña Perfecta*. El tono altamente tendencioso ensombrece el papel de la crisis natural en forma de una sequía prolongada que agrava la tensión interna entre los habitantes. La llegada de Pepe Rey en el pueblo rural lo sitúa como un sustituto ideal para absorber la discordia interna causada por una crisis social exacerbada por la catástrofe ambiental. Pepe Rey, como su nombre sugiere, sirve el papel del chivo expiatorio del Rey que muere para restaurar la salud y el equilibrio del pueblo. Este análisis eco-crítico intenta llamar atención al papel del medio ambiente en determinar las reacciones socio-culturales en la novela.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Benito Pérez Galdós, *Doña Perfecta*, sacrificio, el chivo expiatorio, ecocrítica, crisis ambiental

DATE RECEIVED: 11/9/2018

DATE PUBLISHED: 8/5/2019

BIOGRAPHY: Sarah Sierra is an Associate Professor of Spanish at Virginia Tech. Her articles have appeared in *Hispanófila*, *Anales Galdosianos*, *Symposium*, and *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, among other journals. She is currently preparing a manuscript on environmental humanities in nineteenth-century Spanish literature.

Killing the King: Scapegoating Amid the Environmental Crisis in Galdós' *Doña Perfecta*

Sarah Sierra, Virginia Tech

... the structure of every organic being is related, in the most essential yet often hidden manner, to that of all other organic beings, with which it comes into competition for food or residence, or from which it has to escape, or on which it preys. —Darwin

Darwin explains that in the organic, non-human world survival and defense mechanisms develop in response to the surrounding environment, including those of the abiotic world (climate, water, soil, wind, etc.). Human culture, though, is often portrayed as nature's opposite, separate or significantly detached from the demands and affordances of the natural world (i.e. non-human). However, ecological analyses have dispelled this belief in the separateness of human culture from nature. Helena Feder suggests that

[w]hile our experience of the world is culturally mediated and constructed, culture is itself a product of nature, and human culture is only one of many types of culture in the material world. (1-2)

Jonathan Bates argues similarly that human culture develops from its interaction with the natural world:

although we make sense of things by way of words, we do not live apart from the world. For culture and environment are held together in a complex and delicate web. (23)¹

Interpretations of the natural world in literary texts often consider it as a scenic backdrop and can suggest a metaphorical rendering of

a specific cultural temperament. Such is the common analysis of Benito Pérez Galdós' 1876 novel *Doña Perfecta* in which the arid and sterile landscape indicates the stubborn sterility of the rural inhabitants' mindset. On the other hand, an ecocritical reading of the novel reveals the natural world as an agential force that influences cultural behaviors of the Orbajosan community. By considering the relationship between environment and culture, a new understanding of the events that lead to the violent dénouement of Pepe's murder lays the foundation for interpreting him as scapegoat to redress the natural catastrophe that was devastating the rural territory.

The novel introduces the progressive-minded engineer, Pepe Rey, into the conservative and traditional town, Orbajosa, where he meets his potential bride and cousin, Rosario. He arrives with a commissioned job sponsored by the government to examine the territory surrounding Orbajosa for development. In spite of Pepe's familial ties to the town through his mother as well as his aunt, doña Perfecta, his political and social ideas are in constant opposition to the rural inhabitants' beliefs and practices. After a series of missteps, Pepe is not only ideologically opposite the townspeople, but also considered an enemy that endangers the entire population. In a culminating confrontation Perfecta orders her henchman, Caballuco, to murder her

nephew, which almost all of the inhabitants cover up as a suicide. The Orbajosans' defensive stance appears as fanatical behavior that underscores the obstacles Spain confronted in becoming a modern nation.² That particular reading, while an accurate portrayal of the emerging *dos Españas*, diminishes the complexity of the many cultural nuances Galdós incorporates into the novel.

Pepe Rey's death is often ascribed to the ideological conflict opposing conservative traditionalist to progressive liberals; however, the prolonged drought afflicting the agricultural community has yet to be considered as eliciting the inhabitants' violent behaviors not only toward Pepe, but also amongst each other. In Spain, harsh natural conditions made consistent productivity untenable, which was often lamented in the press decrying extreme natural conditions.³ Echoes of these harsh environments in rural, agricultural Spain figure prominently in *Doña Perfecta* as the community suffered through diminished crops caused by a prolonged drought.

The reliance of agricultural communities on the natural world is clearly self-evident, but the calendar marking numerous rites and ceremonies to protect against extreme conditions brings into sharp relief the cultural behaviors that have adapted to natural rhythms and environmental contingencies. Of particular relevance here is the long history of sacrificial rites associated with agricultural life intended to sustain the fragile equilibrium between human communities and the non-human world. While the modern world has predominantly disavowed human sacrifice as a form of protection against unforgiving natural conditions, substitutions are readily available, most notably in the annual reenactment of the passion of Christ. The annual performance of the God-King's sacrifice for the benefit of all underscores the restorative power of persecutory and redemptive rites. These rites offer a cleansing of the social body and sanctifying of the land by removing the dangerous (sinful) behaviors that contaminate and prevent harmonious

and fruitful productivity. In essence, the sacrificial rites and ceremonies provide a sense of control over uncontrollable conditions.

Sacrificial rites that pervade agricultural practices stem from an ancient belief that from death emerges life. Hubert and Mauss dedicate their extended essay *Sacrifice* to the exploration of the emergence of the sacrificial system focusing predominantly on agrarian culture, which emphasizes the long history of imbuing life into the barren fields through spilt blood. In the earliest of times, agricultural rites tended to address the unreliability of nature by infusing natural elements with a supernatural identity who demanded specific offerings to sustain healthy and bountiful fields (Janick 15). This reciprocal relationship imagined between the people and the supernatural entity empowered earlier societies to feel as though they asserted control over nature's unreliability. As Jules Janick reminds us "most of our religion derived in antiquity among primitive agricultural communities" (14). He analyses the role of horticulture as an integral component of religious beliefs pointing to the sanctification of activities including harvests, plant care, and tree pruning, to name a few. He adds that

[h]orticulture is so basic to human existence that it is no wonder that it has permeated religious beliefs that have developed in agrarian societies. (25)

Yet, in this fusion of religious ceremonies and agricultural rites, the latter represents a historically earlier manifestation, and is therefore less visible on the palimpsestic structure of ritual development. As such, the relationship with the natural world becomes obfuscated by the moral impetus of Christian ceremonies.⁴ A devastating catastrophe caused by natural phenomena is thus translated into a moral crisis that will require greater demonstrations of religiosity. Hubert and Mauss clarify that there is an extraordinary likeness between the sacrificial system and Christianity, but "its

efficacy has been transferred from the physical world to the moral world” (93). They close their study stating: “The Christian imagination has built upon ancient models” (94). Anthropologists note that through time human behaviors and activities became disengaged from nature. In the process, religious practices enshrouded natural phenomena with a moral cloak that led to politicization of catastrophes. Persecutory scapegoating triggered by natural crises has been present in human culture from the earliest of times, but in the modern era nature disappears behind a more virulent ideological conflict marked by moral pronouncements of righteousness and truth.

René Girard explains that persecutory systems continue to hold a fundamental role in modern culture, and requires penetrating deep into the cultural psyche to discern that nature and natural catastrophes still perpetuate the scapegoating process. His extensive work emphasizes that cultural advances are accompanied by an increased detachment from nature, but that natural crises continue to fuel incendiary intra- and inter-group conflict. Customs that had originally developed in consonance with nature closely uniting people to the land suffered a perverse distortion and led to natural catastrophes serving religious and political agendas. As a result, human responses to natural rhythms and events, particularly catastrophic ones, transfer objective and physical explanations to ones rooted in moral contingencies as evinced in this claim by the liberal press during the second half of the nineteenth century in Spain:

Notable coincidencia: En los primeros días de mayo de 1869 y cuando más animadas eran las discusiones sobre el tema de la libertad de cultos, la Providencia fecundó con una abundante lluvia los abrasados campos de la Península, que desde tres años atrás casi estériles. En los días en que mayor animación reviste las discusiones sobre el planteamiento del matrimonio civil, nuestros campos reciben las

benéficas aguas de la primavera tan necesarias para asegurar la abundante cosecha que se prepara. (*El Imparcial* 3)

In these types of declarations, the environmental crisis serves to promote political and religious agendas rather than attend to the physical demands of the natural world. This procedural sleight of hand is evident in *Doña Perfecta*.

The events of the novel occur during a syncretic ritual period in which religious ceremonies and agricultural rites are intimately connected. The palm leaves on the Church altar indicate that Pepe arrives around the period of Holy Week, which suggests that the element of sacrifice already permeates the social environment. It is also a time of increased agrarian activity as the villagers prepare for tilling the soil. These same agricultural activities however incur volatile behaviors as the general collective has suffered several years of diminished productivity in the fields due to the prolonged drought. While the inhabitants' strict religiosity signals the potential for contentious encounters with outsiders, anxiety over environmental crises fomented the community's pervasive combativeness with Pepe. As ideological opposition dominates the climactic and explosive encounters between Pepe and the Orbajosans, apprehension over the environmental crisis is often overlooked, but as this analysis will show, the drought and its consequences on the community infuse these combative moments.

Several critics have considered the environmental conditions and the natural world in the novel, although without exploring the environmental crisis as provoking a behavioral response. Anthony Zahareas refers to agriculture in *Doña Perfecta* explaining its role in the novel as reflective of the conflict between urban and rural life:

It was precisely in areas of dry farming (ajos) such as Orbajosa, where, without massive investments, change and modernization proved so difficult

in the XIX century. Impatient liberals like Pepe did not help improve an already touchy situation. (43)

Randolph Pope notes that the realities of agricultural life and the environmental challenges of nineteenth-century Spain have been relatively forgotten for contemporary readers, yet it occupied a significant space in dialogues over the status of the land in the nineteenth century (287). Harriet Turner sees the environmental crisis as metaphorically portraying the duplicity of Orbajosan behavior:

We note how often the river surrounding the city swells, turgid and roily, to overflow and swamp; yet the productive fields lie bare, parched by continuous droughts. Wetness and dryness point to the two-faced river of language in Orbajosa. (127)⁵

Noël Valis' close reading of doña Perfecta's garden reveals how awareness of the natural world enriches understanding of the novel. In her analysis, she identifies the symbolic relevance of *adelfas* that foreshadow Pepe's death and Rosario's insanity (1036-38).

These critics bring us into the realm of environmental criticism by accentuating depleted water resources, difficulties of farming in unfavorable conditions, and nature's active presence as part of a holistic ecosystem that influences cultural practices and beliefs. Their analyses contribute to what Chisholm describes as the art of ecological thinking:

Literary ecology composes landscapes that impact our seeing by seeing how the territories we cohabit are themselves compositions of nature in which we humans participate both beneficially and egregiously, as well as how, with greater attunement to nature's symphonic plan of composition. (585)

What my analysis offers in way of a new approach is consideration of the cultural mechanism that occurs among the Orbajosan community to impart a sense of social

control over unpredictable and destabilizing natural conditions. The Orbajosans behaviorally adapt to the demands of the ecosystem as evidenced through Rosario's warning of the opposing and dangerous winds: "No abras las dos ventanas a un tiempo, porque las Corrientes de aire son muy malas" (94). In accord with Turner's observation above, images of nature as a literary device tend to underscore the duplicity of the inhabitants in this novel. From an environmental perspective Rosario's warning also underscores the role of nature as an agent in the lives of the rural inhabitants.

Orbajosan life reflects cultural proximity to natural rhythms both as a rural and an agricultural community. As mentioned above, the earliest of agricultural communities practiced rites to prevent against poor crops or devastating weather conditions by offering an appeasement or sacrifice to a supernatural protector who then guaranteed a successful harvest. The relationship between a protective spirit and the inhabitants requires both parties to fulfill certain obligations. The earliest manifestations of agricultural rituals demanded acts of cleansing in form of sacrifices intended to rid the land and people of impurities. These rites suggested that the impurities accumulated throughout the year could be filtered out in order to prepare a purified and fertile space for the supernatural protector to inhabit and sanctify for the next agricultural cycle. As Christian ceremonies appropriated agricultural ones, the strict ritual precepts of earlier practices to release contamination became infused with heightened religious morality fulfilled by strict adherence to the imposed behavioral edicts. If the crop is fruitful then the community has fulfilled its obligations by strictly obeying the religious interdictions. If, however, it is not a successful harvest, the cultural imaginary perceives a lapse in the fragile relationship between protector and inhabitants. This lapse can occur in one of two manners: the inhabitants fulfill their duty and, therefore, the supernatural protector has failed. Or as is more commonly attributed to crises, due to a violation among

the inhabitants the supernatural protector refuses or is unable to protect the land resulting in barren fields. In this second consideration, a prolonged natural catastrophe tends to expose any underlying institutional crisis that indicates an internal collapse of the social structure and internecine discord erupts among inhabitants. In these types of crises in which natural catastrophes exacerbate institutional decay a more forceful solution appears in the guise of the scapegoat.

In returning to the novel, as it progresses the narrator moves from Pepe's perspective to penetrate the Orbajosan psyche. This shift reveals that the sheen of harmonious civility Pepe first encounters is a façade concealing more rampant and caustic behaviors. The presentation of Perfecta throughout the novel also exposes the extensive social contamination affecting the entire population. El tío Licurgo describes her to Pepe in highly positive and general terms: "Siempre tan guapa. [...] Parece que no pasan años por la señora doña Perfecta" (72). However, she slowly reveals her true nature, but it is not until the end of the novel that the narrator offers a damning closer look at a woman whose image is physically altered due to her behaviors:

No sabemos cómo hubiera sido doña Perfecta amando. Aborreciendo, tenía la inflamada vehemencia de un ángel tutelar de la discordia entre los hombres. (282-83)

The narrator also notes "[t]ambién la desmejoraba la intensa amarillez de su rostro, indicando una fuerte constitución biliosa" (281). Notably, years later, in *La incógnita*, Manolo Infante refers to the rural population as tinged yellow indicating an endemic state of decay among all Orbajosans. As for Perfecta, she represents the model of normative behavior that is rooted in deception and manipulation. These behaviors signal a transition to privileging individual needs and desires that eclipse collective unity and institutional integrity.

Internal discord assumes various configurations such as jealousy, frustration, and mistreatment.⁶ One of the more conspicuous signs of social disharmony appears through the idea of charity, or more accurately as the lack of charity. As Pepe first enters the town he acknowledges the vast number of impoverished inhabitants:

Desde la entrada del pueblo hasta la puerta de esta casa he visto más de cien mendigos. La mayor parte son hombres sanos y aun robustos. Es un ejército lastimoso, cuya vista oprime el corazón. (98)

Perfecta reproaches him for failing to recognize that the poor provide the opportunity to practice Catholic charity, which forms an essential component to Orbajosan identity. However, Pepe's comment insinuates that it seems to be charity in theory as the needy appear significantly abandoned in their penury. This aspect is most salient with the orphaned Troya sisters, whose living conditions emphasize an absence of charity. As Juan Tafetán attests, and in disagreement with the townspeople's general assessment of the sisters, the young women are not morally degenerate:

Las pobrecitas son honradas. ¡Bah! Si se alimentan del aire. [...] Diga usted: el que no come, ¿puede pecar? Bastante virtuosas son las infelices. (156)

Pepe himself verifies this as he looks around the sisters' home:

Podrá el vicio reinar aquí [...]; pero las fisonomías, los muebles, todo me indica que éstos son los infelices restos de una familia honrada. Si estas pobres muchachas fueran tan malas como dicen, no vivirían tan pobremente ni trabajarían. ¡En Orbajosa hay hombres ricos! (160)

Opportunities to practice charity goes unheeded among the Orbajosans indicating

moral and economic decline among the inhabitants who overtly ignore the desperate need of the young women.

Socio-economic stress begins to spread among the inhabitants breaking down collective unity in favor of individual desires and needs. As a result, signs of discord such as jealousy and greed motivate behaviors. Don Inocencio's niece, María Remedios, emblemizes the collapse of social integrity as she places individual needs above the collective good, even if she disguises her actions in the shroud of Orbajosan religiosity. Her surreptitious campaign against Pepe is rooted in a desire to elevate her son's position through marriage with Rosario that would eclipse the taint of her family's humble origins:

Por más que echemos humos, siempre será usted el hijo del tío Tinieblas, el sacristán de San Bernardo... y yo no seré nunca más que la hija de Idelfonso Tinieblas, su hermano de usted, el que vendía pucheros, y mi hijo será el nieto de los Tinieblas... que tenemos un tenebrario en nuestra cesta, y nunca saldremos de la oscuridad, no poseeremos un pedazo de terruño donde decir: "Esto es mío" (263-64)

In part, María Remedio's behavior represents what Girard calls the institutional crisis that appears as the erasure of social difference. He explains that

[i]nstitutional collapse obliterates or telescopes hierarchical differences, so that everything has the same monotonous and monstrous aspect. (*Sacrifice* 13)

María Remedios aspires to sameness that abolishes the hierarchical order. This homogenizing monstrosity is strikingly exemplified in the published ending of the novel in *Revista de España*, when the intended mother-in-law, doña Perfecta, is substituted for the young bride, Rosario, in marriage to Jacinto.

Social crises can be alleviated by the periodic release of accumulated tension through persecutory acts that unify the collective against a dangerous outsider or force. In this manner, rituals have a pragmatic function in the representation of sacrifice. The inhabitants direct intra-group tension to a filter designed to absorb social strife, or contamination, which infects and deteriorates communal unity. In ritual sacrifices, offerings are the culmination of this process by which the object or victim takes on the collective ills and carries them off through death far beyond the community and earthly boundaries. This type of rite serves to strengthen communal bonds as all members collectively unite to direct their frustrations, concerns, and fears toward the object, as Girard elaborates:

The sacrifice serves to protect the entire community from its *own* violence; it prompts the entire community to choose victims outside of itself. The elements of dissension scattered throughout the community are drawn to the person of the sacrificial victim and eliminated, at least, temporarily by its sacrifice. (8)

It also purifies in the sense that once the ills of the community are transferred to the sacrificial object, or victim, the members consider themselves freed from the contaminating behavior until the tension accumulates once more.⁷

The ritual reenactment of Christ's sacrifice absolves the spiritual ills of the community thus cleansing the people and environment of malignant and contaminating behaviors. The abstract ritual recreated with the effigy of Christ, however, does not attenuate the heightened internal tension among the inhabitants caused by the natural catastrophe. The environmental crisis prevents restoration of communal harmony, but a living scapegoat offers a powerful additional filter to absorb the collective contamination by creating a visible and living target who embodies all of the social ills afflicting the community. When Pepe arrives in Orbajosa he

enters a dangerous persecutory atmosphere during which the expiatory religious rites embedded in the ceremonies of the Passion of Christ coincide with the delicate period during the agricultural calendar in which a cleansing process must also purify the fields before tilling the soil. The desperate condition of the fields provokes more virulent persecutory behavior, provoking the identification of Pepe Rey as scapegoat for the general suffering of the townspeople.

The severe drought is prominently foregrounded in the opening chapters of the novel. However, Pepe interprets the sterile environment as a sign of the inhabitants' stubborn resistance to progress. Furthermore, in spite of his initial praise of the rural lifestyle, his comment only slightly veils his opinion of the people as less developed. His myopic view of the rural countryside fails to recognize the complex cultural dynamic between the people and the land. This is particularly salient in his estimation of what he perceives as ironic names describing the arid zones:

Desde que viajo por estas tierras, me sorprende la horrible ironía de los nombres. Tal sitio que se distingue por su árido aspecto y desolada tristeza del negro paisaje, se llama Valleameno. Tal villorrio de adobes que miserablemente se extiende sobre un llano estéril y que de diversos modos pregona su pobreza, tiene la insolencia de nombrarse Villarrica; y hay un barranco pedregoso y polvoriento, donde ni los cardos encuentran jugo, y que, sin embargo, se llama Valdeflores. (73)

The irony of names as a sign of the backward imagination of rural inhabitants only considers Pepe's perspective as a newly arrived visitor. From an alternative perspective, these names indicate a previously flourishing territory that has since suffered under a continual onslaught of devastating natural conditions. The rural community, on the other hand, is well aware of the harsh environmental conditions of the vast territory. El tío Licurgo's

flourishing fields juxtaposed to or usurped from Pepe's barren lands attest to the continual effort required to produce anything in this landscape.

Pepe's ignorance of Orbajosan customs infamously leads him to violate several taboos among which several are associated with the natural world. His attitude toward the elements of nature is in stark contrast to that of the Orbajosans. On his first day, he neglects the caged canary, which causes particular consternation for Perfecta. He continuously underestimates the deeply embedded Orbajosan customs intertwined with the living environment. In a short episode in Perfecta's garden, Pepe quickly changes topics to trees once he notices don Inocencio and his nephew Jacinto approaching:

—No es conveniente aplicar la primera poda a los árboles jóvenes como éste hasta su completo arraigo. Los árboles recién plantados no tienen vigor para soportar dicha operación. (119)

The priest contentiously questions Pepe's basis for extrapolating on the art of tree pruning in Orbajosa exclaiming:

en agronomía no me citen tratados novísimos. Para mí toda esa ciencia, señor de Rey, está condensada en lo que yo llamo la *Biblia del campo*, en las *Geórgicas* del inmortal latino. Todo es admirable, desde aquella gran sentencia *Nec vero terrae ferre omnes omnia possunt*, es decir, que no todas las tierras sirven para todos los árboles. (122)

This passage is notably suggestive of don Inocencio's opinion that Pepe is an outsider who simply does not belong in Orbajosa, however the ecological implications of the priest's comment should not go unheeded either. Don Inocencio conveys that environmental needs of a specific ecosystem do not respond to universally applied methods, but rather develop through localized nuances of

a particular milieu. Pepe fails to recognize the particular ecological culture of Orbajosa as both specific to the countryside and deeply embedded in the inhabitants' understanding of the natural world and integral to their religiosity. As he insistently denigrates or dismisses these built-in habits, Pepe unknowingly violates social taboos related to the natural world portrayed as evidence of his moral degeneracy leading to his selection as scapegoat.

The prolonged drought affecting rural Spain is a persistent concern for the inhabitants underscoring anxiety over the economic and social well-being of Orbajosa. As early as Pepe's first day, Perfecta comments on the deteriorating conditions of the land while still declaring supremacy of Orbajosan agriculture:

Verdad es [...] que los últimos años han sido detestables a causa de la seca; pero aun así las paneras no están vacías, y se han llevado al mercado muchos miles de ristras de ajos. (98)

The defensive comments bespeak that outsiders misunderstand the reason why Orbajosa struggles to maintain mass production of crops. As one Orbajosan declares in response to Pepe's critiques:

¿Por qué no le dijeron la cantidad de arrobas de aceite que produjo Orbajosa el año pasado? ¿No sabe ese estúpido que en años buenos Orbajosa da el pan para toda España y aun para toda Europa? Verdad que ya llevamos no sé cuántos años de mala cosecha. (144)

One of the key moments that brings to the surface tension among the inhabitants in relation to the drought occurs in doña Perfecta's kitchen. In chapter XXI, *Deperta, ferro*, three farmworkers along with Caballuco arrive at Perfecta's house finding the eminent *señora* with

un humor endiablado; a todo ponía faltas, y reprendiales ásperamente,

por la sequía del cielo y la infecundidad de la tierra, fenómenos de que ellos los pobrecitos no tenían culpa. (emphasis mine 220)

In spite of the narrator's affirmation that the farmers were not responsible for the environmental crisis, doña Perfecta does indeed blame them. In fact, during the entire scene Perfecta transfers her fury over the drought affecting the land and agricultural production toward the farmers and specifically toward Caballuco. As is well known, Perfecta attacks Caballuco due to the promise he made to the governor to maintain peace in the region. She blames his promise on a weakness that has left Orbajosa vulnerable to invasion: "¡Pobre Ramos; quieres echártela de bravucón, cuando ya se ha visto que no vales para nada!" (224). Perfecta demonstrates, on a small scale, the scapegoating mechanism in which anger and frustration over uncontrollable natural events is transferred onto a specific and tangible target. However, her anger toward Caballuco divides the community and presents a significantly tense atmosphere for the other inhabitants in the room: "La señora terminó su frase con una risa exagerada, que se hacía más chocante por el profundo silencio de los que la oían" (222). While Caballuco is the primary target of Perfecta's anger, he is not the only one; she attacks other members, specifically among the lower social caste who speak out of order: "—Silencio —dijo doña Perfecta. Siéntate, Frasquito. Tú eres de los de mucho ruido y pocas nueces" (233). In order to release the tension and increasing discord, social unity must be recovered, which is achieved by identifying an external target in Pepe Rey.

As an outline of the external enemy takes shape, internal unity among the inhabitants becomes more palpable. Perfecta forgives prior debts owed to her in order to fortify the unity of the rural inhabitants: "Robustiano no se atreve a venir a Orbajosa, porque me debe un piquillo. Puedes decirle que le perdono los seis duros y medio" (229). Don Inocencio, for

his part, speaks of Orbajosans as a unanimous whole inciting Caballuco to act against Pepe on their behalf: “Yo sé que Orbajosa lo desea; sé que le bendecirán todos los habitantes de esta noble ciudad” (230). The previous explosive scene in Perfecta’s house as well as accumulated anxieties, rivalries, and anger are all filtered toward Pepe. This process simulates scapegoat rituals in which the target absorbs the ills of the community. The sacrifice thus enacts a cleansing of the community as the contaminated being removes sin and discord from within the boundaries to beyond them. The scapegoat becomes the physical manifestation of the intangible natural forces allowing the townspeople to direct their frustrations to an effective and visible target.

In the novel, Pepe, through his ostracism and eventual murder/ sacrifice, is thought to carry away the evil and thus liberate the townspeople of the supernatural ire that had instigated the ecological imbalance. In fact, during Perfecta’s final verbal confrontation with Pepe she specifically mentions catastrophic natural events as part of a divine plan:

Ves lo que tienes delante y nada más; la naturaleza brutal y nada más; rayas, ángulos, pesos y nada más. Ves el efecto y no la causa. El que no cree en Dios no ve causas. Dios es la suprema intención del mundo. El que le desconoce, necesariamente ha de juzgar de todo como juzgas tú, a lo tonto. Por ejemplo, en la tempestad no ve más que destrucción; en el incendio, estragos; en la sequía, miseria; en los terremotos, desolación, y, sin embargo, orgulloso señorito, en todas esas aparentes calamidades hay que buscar la bondad de la intención; sí señor, la intención siempre buena de quien no puede hacer nada malo. (205)

She claims the force behind all events is supernatural which reflects the belief in the fragile balance maintained between the divine overseer and the earthly plain. The subsequent scapegoating and sacrifice of Pepe is justified in this worldview and verifies Perfecta’s religiosity

as she believes to be responding to the divine intention that will inevitably restore balance to the Orbajosan ecosystem.

Through scapegoating Pepe Rey is re-configured from an individual man into an embodiment of culpability, who, through his sacrifice, can free the ecosystem of what is causing the destabilization and catastrophe. His body becomes a powerful receptacle capable of taking on the collective pollution believed to have infected not only the populace, but the entire interconnected web of Orbajosa and its natural environment. As mentioned, it is no coincidence that the events of the novel occur during the weeks leading up to the re-enactment of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, an event not only important to Catholic religiosity, but also as reminiscent of the agricultural cycles of early historical periods. Furthermore, Pepe is uniquely qualified to fulfill the role as a sacrificial scapegoat. According to Girard, the selected individual must not belong to the most integrated sector of society as this would provoke a cycle of vengeance and further deteriorate relations among the members of the community. Instead, the selected victim comes from a marginalized caste, one that exists at the conceptual periphery of the community, which may also coincide with the physical periphery. Eligible castes from which the sacrificial victim may be selected varies from the lowliest of the social body or, from the other extreme, the most elevated position, that of the king. In referring to the king, Girard posits:

Is he not at the very heart of the community? Undoubtedly—but it is precisely his position at the center that serves to isolate him from his fellow men to render him casteless. (*Violence* 12)

Overall, the fundamental aspect is to detain the propagation of violence which is accomplished by selecting a victim who can represent all members of the community and at the same time not be fully integrated in the collective social body.

Pepe portrays this binary role simultaneously. On the one hand, he is an outsider who could never integrate into the community; on the other hand, he has an intimate connection with the principle family of Orbajosa. Doña Perfecta, in fact, is the voice that most actively depicts Pepe in both of these roles. As the conflict between Pepe and his aunt escalates, she often intercedes when other inhabitants verbally attack him: “No se hable mal en mi presencia de ese desdichado joven” (223). And, after Caballuco threatens to kill Pepe, she responds: “¿Qué hablas ahí de matar, si yo no quiero que maten a nadie, y mucho menos a mi sobrino, persona a quien amo a pesar de sus maldades” (225). Within the same conversation she counterposes declarations of love for her nephew, identifying Pepe as a close family member, with the other extreme as the representative figurehead of the enemies of Orbajosa: “Todo se reduce a que el brigadier y los oficiales son uña y carne de don José, y lo que él quiera lo quieren esos soldados” (225). She also begins to construct him in abstract terms that separates him from his human role: “Mi sobrino, no es mi sobrino, [...]; es la blasfemia, el sacrilegio, el ateísmo, la demagogia” (248). Perfecta elaborates that he is Orbajosa’s punishment:

Mi sobrino, por una serie de fatalidades, que son otras tantas pruebas de los males pasajeros que a veces permite Dios para nuestro castigo, equivale a un ejército, equivale a la autoridad del Gobierno, equivale al alcalde, equivale al juez; mi sobrino no es mi sobrino; es la nación oficial. (248)

But, as *una prueba* of the inhabitants it is a conflict that will be resolved through collective cleansing with his sacrifice. This construction of Pepe that moves him from a man (sobrino) to the embodiment of all that is wrong allows for him to take on the role of sacrificial victim in the minds of the Orbajosans. Hubert and Mauss point out that the sacrificial victim fulfills this role by straddling both the divine and the human:

in a religion as abstract as Christianity, the figure of the Paschal Lamb, the customary victim of an agrarian or pastoral sacrifice, has persisted and still serves even today to designate Christ, that is to say God. (80)

As J.B. Hall indicates in his study on the novel, the similarities between Pepe and Christ (as King) are evident in age, physical attributes, and several other allusions to his person throughout the narrative contributing to his configuration as a sacrificial victim. He is the symbolic King, his name and comparisons to Christ suggest enough similarities that it activates the process of agricultural scapegoating. The townspeople imagine him as an ideal sacrificial victim capable of absorbing the social contamination without incurring a violent cycle of vengeance due to his liminal and abstract identity and enacting a cleansing of the fields while restoring the balance between human and non-human worlds.

In expiatory rituals, the culminating moment is the sacrifice, but to prevent more violence or destructive behavior it must be enclosed within a sacred space isolated from everyday life. In the last scene of the novel (excluding don Cayetano’s closing letters) Pepe secretly enters Perfecta’s garden through the back door that had previously been sealed shut; through this door he moves from the profane space of the street to the sacred space of the garden. In her analysis, Valis determines that the garden evokes an ambiguous and blended space:

Sugeriría más bien que el escritor concibe este escenario desde una perspectiva fluida donde el jardín es paraíso y antiparaíso al mismo tiempo, donde el flujo y el reflujo cósmico de la realidad inestable juegan una dialéctica sutil de fuerzas contradictorias y enigmáticas en el destino individual de Pepe Rey, Rosario y Doña Perfecta. (1033)⁸

The garden as a space in flux and not isolated is unable to contain the contamination of

violence of the “sacrificial act” and, as a result the spiritual cleansing is ineffectual. The garden represents the collapsing boundaries of sacrificial space, signaling the full effects of the institutional collapse. Clifford Geertz articulates that the transition from a spiritually bonded community to one bound by predominantly secular politics fractures the perceived inviolability of sacred rituals (169). This process is evident in *Doña Perfecta* as Orbajosans embrace individual needs over the collective good underscoring the slow invasion of secular politics over religious communion.

Nonetheless, the immediate effects of Rey’s murder/sacrifice appear at the outset to offer the corrective measures necessary to restore harmony to the community, even imbuing a new and almost divine force in the battles against the government as don Cayetano elaborates in his letter dated April 22nd:

La gran partida levantada en Villahorrenda ha sido atacada por las tropas con gran coraje. Ha habido muchas bajas por una y otra parte. Después se dispersaron los bravos guerrilleros; pero van muy envalentonados, y quizá oiga usted maravillas. (290)

However, underneath the apparent restoration of power, courage, and social integrity, the community suffers several crucial losses: Rosario is committed to an asylum after losing her mind, don Inocencio isolates himself from the community eventually embarking for Rome and abandoning the town all together, and Jacinto and María Remedios leave for better economic opportunities in Madrid. Moreover, rumors spread that Pepe was murdered, which further indicates an inability to contain the violence as a sacred sacrifice.

An ecological approach to Galdós’ works captures the conceptual transition from a world enclosed in deep religiosity to a more secular, modern one in which the presence of a divine voice in the scapegoating ritual

disappears giving way to what has become pervasive in contemporary usage of social scapegoats. Brinton Perera speaks of the modern perversion of the scapegoat archetype explaining that

as it is currently practiced, means finding the one or ones who can be identified with evil or wrong-doing, blamed for it, and cast out from the community in order to leave the remaining members with a feeling of guiltlessness, atoned (at-one) with the collective standards of behavior. (9)

Doña Perfecta exemplifies that cultural practices are not as disengaged from the environment as the modern mind may be inclined to argue, but that violent reactions to natural catastrophes do become entangled in ideological dissension. As in the novel, vulnerable territories such as rural or impoverished zones experience the uncontrollable forces of nature more intimately. Cultural practices cannot be separated from these natural contingencies without losing sight of the reliance of the human world on the non-human natural one.

Notes

¹ I will continue for the sake of clarity in this paper to refer to nature or the natural world as the non-human world. While the base of the argument is that human culture is part of this nature, language imposes certain limitations and ambiguities in referring to these different spheres. Bates exemplifies the unstable usage of the term ‘nature’ in its definition in *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*:

The creative and regulative physical power conceived of as operating in the material world and as the immediate cause of all its phenomena (sometimes, especially Nature, personified as a female being); these phenomena collectively; the material world; specifically, plants, animals, and other features of the earth itself,

as opposed to humans or human creations or civilization. (33)

Bates explains:

The definition begins with “nature” as the immediate cause of the entire material world, of all phenomena including humankind, but it ends with an opposition between “nature” and “humans or human creations or civilizations.” (33)

² Many critics have examined different perspectives of the ideological conflict. Lee Fontanella pursues this argument through opposing don Cayetano to Galdós’ narrator as historiographers. Frédéric Conrod and Donald C. Buck examine conflict through spatialization in the text. The former examines ideological conflict through geographical distinctions between Madrid as urban space and Orbajosa as rural and traditional space. Buck sees space as predominantly constructed through masculine privilege. This particular emphasis on the ideological divide between conservatives and liberals figures prominently in analyses of the novel; indeed, critics either denigrate the value of the work for this strong tendentious tone or insist that this thematic controversy supports the author’s discursive techniques and innovations. (Montesinos 178-86) (Gilman, *Galdós* 84) (Varey 87-9) (Santana 284) (Valis 1031-32) (Dendle 51) (Jagoe 56). However, in spite of controversy over the tendentious nature of this novel in the larger scope of Galdós’ writings, critics continue to offer new ways of reading *Doña Perfecta* such as John Sinnigen’s recent analysis that casts the binary liberal/conservative interpretation as anachronistic and instead interrogates the role of sex and politics in terms of the historical context (137).

³ The view of nature as inciting violence in this novel is more visible in light of the environmental issues that were very much a concern throughout the nation during the nineteenth century. One such issue that resonated among those worried about the ecosystem was climatic catastrophes. Recently, environmental critics in Spain have looked at climatological data during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries leading them to question the outcome of historiography’s denigration of agricultural practices and development. In a collection of essays, several of these researchers claim that the greater issue was an underdeveloped *política*

hidráulica. (Garabou 223). Harsh climatic conditions aggravated by severe droughts for extended periods of time constituted the realities of agricultural life in most of Spain; adding to these difficulties were imported techniques from the humid northern countries that were inadequate for the specific natural constraints and affordances of the predominantly dry ecosystems. From this view, Molina argues against the idea of Spain’s underdevelopment in comparison with northern European nations explaining:

Se compara, pues, como si los paquetes tecnológicos fueran ambiental y culturalmente indiferentes y por tanto aplicables a cualquier sistema agrario, cuando por lo general han sido pensados y diseñados para climas templado-húmedos de occidente. (45)

Molina, among others, posits that each nation was comprised of diverse ecosystems and the application of a universal approach to agricultural advancement would ultimately present certain areas as underdeveloped:

Se olvida, en definitiva, que cada sistema agrario tiene unos suelos específicos, como específicos son sus rasgos agroclimáticos, su material genético, sus formas (culturales) de manejo de los recursos, la cantidad y la calidad de las tareas que conforman cada proceso de trabajo (lo que puede dar lugar a diferencias apreciables en la productividad), etc. (45)

Altieri goes further to argue that outsiders unaware of the nuances of a particular ecological system endanger the environment rather than improve upon conditions; in fact, he calls for a more in-depth study of “las taxonomías biológicas folklóricas y las eficiencias de producción de las mezclas simbióticas de cultivos” (333). During the nineteenth century, these concerns resonated throughout the nation as local ecosystems struggled with the centralized government’s intrusions and attempted alterations without taking into account the climatic conditions and constraints as well as the socio-cultural behaviors developed in response to this complex ecosystem. From different regions numerous reports with similarly haunting echoes lamented the loss of massive crops due to prolonged harsh

climatic conditions such as this excerpt from Murcia: “La cosecha de cereales se considera ya perdida en esta provincia donde hace tres meses que no ha llovido” (*Revista Mensual* 91). Or, in Alicante:

Por toda esta comarca ha llovido con bastante abundancia durante una mañana; pero sin que semejante humedad sea de ningún provecho para aquellos campos agotados por una larga sequía. Así es que la cosecha, que en principio se creyó asegurada y que presentaba un aspecto lisonjero, se ha perdido, casi en su totalidad, sin que la última lluvia pueda mejorarla en nada. (*Revista Mensual* 90)

These two examples reflect the interrelationship between the livelihood of large communities and the environment. Furthermore, as Carr points out, severe drought-like conditions were part of the ecological reality of many territories in Spain (20).

⁴ Anthropologists have examined this dynamic of agricultural and religious fusion in ceremonies, but for the purpose of this essay, I will limit references to Christian ceremonies.

⁵ Here we see similarities between Turner’s approach and that how Dianne Chisholm describes the art of ecological thinking based on Deleuze and Guattari:

Through a process of “fabulation” the artist extracts percepts and affects from actual landscape perceptions and affections, and she projects these percepts and affects back onto the landscape so that it radiates with new, impersonal, and nonhuman sensation. (577)

I believe Turner achieves a similar response in her analysis of *Doña Perfecta*.

⁶ Several critics comment on the internal discord of Orbajosa, albeit not in the context of an environmental crisis. Gilman notes that the inhabitants “behave conflictively” predominantly in reference to economic and class distribution in Orbajosa (1976: 17). Wilfredo Ràfols comments on María Remedios:

Although the narrator goes out of his way to specify the extent to which Remedios is driven by an overpowering

maternal instinct [...], she is no less driven by a zealous desire to improve her social and economic standing. (52)

He mentions don Inocencio’s malicious envy that influences his attacks on Pepe (52-53). Jagoe also acknowledges discord originating in María Remedios’ frustrations over class and gender inequities:

the wellspring of the disasters that befall the hero and heroine of *Doña Perfecta* lies, as the narrator reveals at the end of the novel, in the perverted maternal instinct and social aspirations of an apparently minor character, María Remedios. In an emblematic moment of anagnorisis, we learn that questions of class and gender have been the prime movers of a social drama ostensibly centered on religious behavior. (57)

⁷ A year before the publication of *Doña Perfecta*, a two-part article appeared in *Revista de España* entitled “Estudio de las costumbres romanas en el primer siglo” that offers an exhaustive list connecting festivals, rites, and socio-cultural activities connected to the climatological calendar. First, this essay interests for its proximity to the publication of *Doña Perfecta*, but more so in that the author, Augusto Ulloa, makes two key points: First, that many of these customs continue to exist in modern times and second, that the rhythms of human activities were a direct result of the natural environment including such practices as sacrifice due to catastrophic weather conditions and the subsequent purification of the people. Ulloa identifies the origin of a particular festival with ritual sacrifice and collective purification caused by a long-lasting drought associated with April 15:

El rey Numa instituyó estos ritos durante una larga sequía que agostó los campos e hizo perecer el ganado. Se sacrificaban vacas preñadas [...] en el capitolio y en las treinta curias, y después de quemadas las entrañas, la gran Vestal arrojaba al fuego también los terneros nonnatos para purificar sus cenizas al pueblo en la fiesta de Páles. (433)

⁸J.E. Varey also makes this claim of the initial portrayal of the garden as paradise, only to be revealed as its opposite: "El posible Jardín del Edén se convierte en una celda oscura, una tumba" (79).

Works Cited

- Altieri, Miguel A. "¿Por qué estudiar la agricultura tradicional?" *La tierra: mitos, ritos y realidades*, edited by José A. González Alcantud y Manuel González de Molina, Anthropos, 1992, pp. 332-50.
- Bate, Jonathan. *The Song of the Earth*. Picador, 2000.
- Brinton Perera, Sylvia. *The Scapegoat Complex: Toward a Mythology of Shadow and Guilt*. Inner City Books, 1986.
- Buck, Donald C. "Geographical Places, Architectural Spaces, and Gender in *Doña Perfecta*." *Romance Language Annual*, vol. 6, 1994, pp. 417-21.
- Carr, Raymond. *Spain: 1808-1975*. Clarendon Press, 1982.
- Chisholm, Dianne. "The Art of Ecological Thinking: Literary Ecology." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2011, pp. 569-93.
- Conrod, Frédéric. "Babel Contra el Panóptico: Una Confrontación con Madrid en *Doña Perfecta* de Galdós." *Colorado Review of Hispanic Studies*, vol. 2, 2004, pp. 61-81.
- Darwin, Charles. *The Origin of Species*. Random House, 2008.
- Dendle, Brian. "Orbajosa Revisted, or, the Complexities of Interpretation." *Anales Galdosianos*, 1992-93, pp. 51-67.
- Feder, Helena. *Ecocriticism and the Idea of Culture: Biology and the Bildungsroman*. Ashgate, 2014.
- Fontanella, Lee. "Doña Perfecta as Historiographic Lesson." *Anales Galdosianos*, 1976, pp. 59-68.
- Garrabou, Ramon. "Crecimiento Agrario, Atraso y Marco Institucional." *El pozo de todos los males: Sobre el atraso en la agricultura española contemporánea*, directed by Josep Fontana, Crítica, 2001, pp. 215-43.
- Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Basic Books, 1973.
- Gilman, Stephen. "Novel and Society: *Doña Perfecta*." *Anales Galdosianos*, 1976, pp. 16-25.
- . *Galdós and the Art of the European Novel, 1867-1887*. Princeton UP, 1981.
- Girard, René. *Violence and the Sacred*. Translated by Patrick Gregory, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1972.
- . *The Scapegoat*. Translated by Yvonne Freccero, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1989.
- Hall, J. B. "Galdós's Use of the Christ-Symbol in *Doña Perfecta*" *Anales Galdosianos*, 1973, pp. 95-98.
- Hubert, Henri and Marcel Mauss. *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Functions*. Translated by W.D. Halls, U of Chicago P, 1964.
- Jago, Catherine. *Ambiguous Angels: Gender in the Novels of Galdós*. U of California P, 1994.
- Janick, Jules. "The Intersection of Religion and Horticulture." *The Basics of Human Civilization: Food, Agriculture, and Humanity, Vol. 1: Present Scenario*, Compiled by Prem Nath Agricultural Science Association, 2013, pp. 12-25.
- Jones, C.A. "Galdós's Second Thoughts on 'Doña Perfecta'." *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 54, no. 4, 1959, pp. 570-73.
- Molina, Manuel González de. "Condicionamientos ambientales del crecimiento agrario español (siglos XIX y XX)." *El pozo de todos los males: Sobre el atraso en la agricultura española contemporánea*, directed by Josep Fontana, Crítica, 2001, pp. 43-94.
- Montesinos, José F. *Galdós*. Castalia, 1968.
- "Noticias." *El imparcial*, vol. 1049, no. 29, 1870, pp. 1-4.
- "Noticias." *Revista mensual de agricultura*, edited by Don Augusto de Burgos, Tomo VI, 1853, pp. 90-91.
- Pérez Galdós, Benito. "Doña Perfecta." *Revista de España*, no. 50, 1876, 224-60.
- . *Doña Perfecta*. Edited by Rodolfo Cardona, 7th Edition, Cátedra, 1997.
- Pope, Randolph. "Cambio, progreso y transformación: Releyendo *Doña Perfecta* de Galdós." *Anales de la literatura española contemporánea*, vol. 38, no. 1-2, 2013, pp. 277-92.
- Ràfols, Wilfredo. "The House of *Doña Perfecta*." *Anales Galdosianos*, 1999, pp. 41-60.
- Santana, Mario. "The Conflict of Narratives in Pérez Galdós' *Doña Perfecta*." *MLN*, vol. 113, 1998, pp. 283-304.
- Sinnigen, John H. "Doña Perfecta: Política, sexo y literatura en dos restauraciones borbónicas." *Confluencia: Revista Hispánica de Cultura y Literatura*, vol. 30, no. 3, 2015, pp. 136-48.
- Turner, Harriet S. "The Shape of Deception in *Doña Perfecta*." *Kentucky Romance Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 2, 1984, pp. 125-34.
- Ulloa, Augusto. "Estudio de las costumbres romanas en el primer siglo del imperio." *Revista de España*, XLII, 1875, pp. 432-63.

- Valis, Noël M. "El significado del jardín en *Doña Perfecta*, de Galdós." *Actas del Séptimo Congreso de la Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas*, edited by Giuseppe Bellini, Venezia, 1982, pp. 1031-38.
- Varey, J.E. *Pérez Galdós: Doña Perfecta*. Grant & Cutler, 1971.
- Zahareas, Anthony. "Galdós' *Doña Perfecta*: Fiction, history and ideology." *Anales Galdosianos*, 1976, pp. 29-51.