

image of Christ in the rising sun.

What elements of *La Tentation de saint Antoine* appealed to doña Emilia and why did they influence her art at that point in time?

The mystical overtones of *La Tentation* could not but have been attractive given the Countess's sincere religious inclinations. In a 1912 article on Flaubert she referred to the special influence exerted by the work on "el arte neo-místico de los últimos años del siglo" (*La vida contemporánea* 308). For her the Saint represented the dilemma of the human soul, which, after struggling with doubt, emerges victorious, reaffirming its faith in Christ. Yet, the work's "profundo sentido simbólico" (*La vida contemporánea* 308) caused it to have wider implications. The tortured hermit embodied for doña Emilia the spiritual and psychological stress which afflicts the modern individual and which was the product of what she referred to in the Prologue as "el alta aspiración" (1273).

Another element which must have appealed to the Countess, whose own novels betray a penchant for vivid description and use of color, was the intense pictorial quality of the work, inspired in part, as Flaubert maintained, by the impression made by Breughel's painting of Saint Anthony in Genoa in 1845.<sup>1</sup>

Doña Emilia was also sensitive to the highly poetic prose, and—eclectic that she was—to the indeterminate genre of this novel written in dialogue form, which, as Victor Brombert has pointed out, demonstrates a blend of dramatic, epic and lyric overtones (189). Another innovation of Flaubert, as observed by Harry Levin, was the use of hallucination as a literary device (29), a feature also employed by the Countess in *La Quimera*.

All these characteristics made *La Tentation de saint Antoine* a model for fin-de-siècle painters and poets imbued with the ideals of symbolism, decadentism and *modernismo*—artists like Cézanne, Gustave Moreau, Odilon Redon, and such writers as Swinburne, Huysmans, Rimbaud and Verlaine, D'Annunzio, Valle-Inclán<sup>2</sup> as well as Emilia Pardo Bazán herself.

As Albert Thibaudet affirms, Flaubert portrayed himself in his protagonist as a priest of art, himself a "moine hanté de rêves et de visions" (181). The hermit's hut translates into the artist's studio, into the solitary ivory tower where the artist is assailed by the fear that greatness will elude him. The emphasis on the

solitude and the mental anguish that the artist undergoes clearly links Flaubert's Saint Anthony with the protagonist of the Countess's *La Quimera*, the young painter, Silvio Lago.

Doña Emilia's novel was inspired in part by the death of her protégé, the young Galician painter Joaquín Vaamonde, who died in August of 1900 at her home in Meirás. *La Quimera* began serial publication in *La Lectura* in 1903, but was not published in volume form until 1905 in the author's series of *Obras completas*.

*La Quimera* is divided into six long chapters that follow the trajectory of Silvio Lago from the moment of his return to Galicia after several years spent as a youthful immigrant in Buenos Aires. Silvio's visit to the Baroness of Dumbría and her daughter, the composer Minia, at their country estate at Alborada results in the women's sponsorship of the young artist. In Madrid they launch him on a promising career as portrait painter for the aristocracy, a career which would help ensure the young man sufficient means of livelihood. Yet Silvio, who longs passionately to dedicate himself to his own artistic endeavor and to prove his originality as an artist, is highly dissatisfied. He resolves to go to Paris lured by promises of support from Espina Porcel, a perverse femme fatale who bears resemblances to Saint Anthony's Queen of Sheba.

Silvio's nervous and physical disorders result at times in strange dreams and hallucinatory-like states, which are reminiscent of Saint Anthony's own visions. These, together with his emotional instability and his financial insecurity, hamper the concentration necessary for his artistic development. It is the sight of the Van Eyck's "Mystical Lamb" in Ghent which triggers in the young man the espousal of a spiritual ideal in art. Yet, just as he was on the verge of discovering his original manner, Silvio's health, already weakened by the privations undergone during his years of immigration, worsens. The novel ends as he succumbs to tuberculosis and dies at Alborada.

The overriding ambition to achieve artistic glory which consumes Silvio represents the malaise of the contemporary psyche that the author had defined in the Prologue as "esta dolorosa inquietud en la cual domina exaltado idealismo" (1273). Briefly put, *La Tentation de saint Antoine*, that "allégorie de l'intérieur de l'homme" as Albert Thibaudet termed it, with its special brand of "psychologie sous forme théologique" (180) provided the Count-

ess with a model for the new direction that her novelistic work was taking in the early part of this century. As she herself stated in a 1911 interview:

... hoy no soportamos más las largas descripciones minuciosas de Zola. Nuestras novelas son más psicológicas, más exquisitas, y... más difíciles de hacer... (qtd. in Clemessy I 322-33).

*La Quimera* probes the inner states of major characters—of Silvio and of the young widow, Clara, Vizcondesa de Ayamonte. Silvio's rejection of her love prompted Clara to heed the mystical inclinations that she had previously disregarded, leading her to renounce her high society life and enter a Carmelite convent. Silvio practices self-analysis in his diary and in his letters to Minia; Clara in her letters to her godfather Mariano Luz, and in her mystical writing, "Las cuatro meditaciones."

A major aspect of the dialogue between *La Tentation* and *La Quimera* lies in their mutual exploration of inner states and in the correlation between psychological and spatial depiction. The temptations of Saint Anthony are conjured up before him by the devil; they are his hallucinations. The hermit will periodically arouse himself from his visions to gauge the effect on him of the temptation and to reject it. This alternation between passive dream, and active waking states is echoed in *La Quimera* in the contrast between Silvio's dreams of hallucinatory states and the analysis that he makes of them, often in his "Libro de memorias."

The particular use of space in *La Quimera* also echoes the manner in which Saint Anthony's temptations subvert the importance of physical space. Although they take place at different historical times and in various locations, the hermit does not move physically since the temptations occur in his mind. In *La Quimera*, while it is true that the chapter headings allude to the city, town or voyage in which the protagonist finds himself at that point in the novel<sup>3</sup> the location is important only insofar as it marks a stage in the character's spiritual journey. The fact that the novel ends in the same place where it began points to the distance that Silvio has traveled inwardly from that moment a few years earlier when he first visited Alborada intent on achieving artistic fame. He has since experienced both an artistic and a religious conversion.

In addition, there is emphasis in the novel on small spaces which are identified with the individual and which serve to point to their inner space. Akin to Saint Anthony's solitary site in the desert are Silvio's studio where he analyzes his reveries and his emotional ups and downs, and Minia's tower in her *pazo* where she composes.

Besides these parallels between the two works, the most obvious impact of *La Tentation de saint Antoine* on the Countess's novel derives from the dialogue between the Sphinx and the Chimera. Doña Emilia took from it the titles for her unfinished novel *La Esfinge* and for *La Quimera*, using the Flaubertian imagery in the latter novel to explore the nature of the artistic process.

Flaubert's juxtaposition of the two mythological figures is open to interpretation. The Sphinx, the proferrer of riddles is mute and immobile—"C'est que je garde mon secret! Je songe et je calcule" (260); while the Chimera, the fire-breathing monster, part-lion, part-goat and part-dragon, is unstable, capricious and in constant movement—"Je galope dans les corridors du labyrinthe, je plane sur les monts, je rase les flots, je jappe au fond des précipices..." (259). The seemingly impossible rapprochement of the two represents for Jean Seznec "l'impossible conciliation de la fantaisie et de la pensée logique" (75). While for Kitty Mrosovsky the two contrary figures symbolize the necessary interplay "between the rival powers of the imagination, the power of concentration and the power of perpetual motion" (47).

Doña Emilia's incorporation of the Sphinx-Chimera imagery approximates this last analysis. Although stability and method are necessary, they must be accompanied by imagination, daring and the flight of inspiration for the artistic process to take place; yet, reason must always temper fantasy. This interplay is represented in the relation between the two artists, and is made manifest at the end of the first chapter when Minia, at Silvio's behest, reads aloud the Sphinx-Chimera passage from *La Tentation de saint Antoine*.

In this scene, Minia, practical and wise, and who tries to instill in her protégé the moderation necessary for the artist's discipline, is the Sphinx—"Callada como la Esfinge que enmudece justamente porque sabe..." (726). While Silvio, plagued as he is by "la nerviosidad mal dominada, ... el desequilibrio de aquel

temperamento de artista," (725) embodies the Chimera. Even his frenzied movements—"rompió a danzar a la marioneta, ... zapa-teando el piso ... y castañeteando sus dedos largos," (725)—parallel the monster's own capriciousness and instability.

Yet here doña Emilia also links Flaubert's chimera, which inspires fantastic longings and unrealizable aspirations in human beings—"Je découvre aux hommes des perspectives éblouissantes ... Je leur verse à l'âme les éternelles démesures ... Je pousse aux périlleux voyages et aux grandes entreprises" (260)—with "el *alta aspiración*," that "dolorosa inquietud" referred to in the Prologue. Thus, Silvio equates the chimera image with his own overpowering desire for artistic glory—"¡Triunfar o morir! Mi Quimera es esa, y excepto mi Quimera ... ¿qué me importa el mundo?" (726). Throughout the novel he is portrayed as being in the monster's grip.

The Countess also employed the chimera as countless artists did before her—as a symbol for the breath of inspiration. Some twenty years earlier when referring to the ways in which the Romantics represented the idea of artistic inspiration, doña Emilia alluded to the manner in which "al sentir el roce de sus alas, Alfredo de Musset encendía las bujías y abría de par en par el balcón *para que entrase la musa*" (*La cuestión palpitante* 621). This image's lasting impression on her fuses with that of Flaubert's "chimère aux yeux verts" in the depiction of Minia awaiting the advent of the chimera at the close of the novel:

Un soplo de fuego la envolvió; unas pupilas de aguamarina alumbraron la estancia con su reflejo ... Y—ya segura de que el monstruo acababa de penetrar por los huecos del balcón consagrado a las Musas—Minia descubrió el armonio ... (896).<sup>4</sup>

The appearance of the chimera is a necessary prelude to Minia's composition of "una sinfonía" which, now inspired by the death of Silvio, is "tal vez más sentida que las demás"; that is, than those "Sinfonías campestres" for which she is famous.

Thus, the end of the novel brings us back to the very beginning, to the "Sinfonía: la muerte de la Quimera—Tragicomedia para marionetas en dos actos" which the author placed at the beginning of her novel and which serves as symbolic prologue to it.<sup>5</sup> The "Sinfonía," which can conceivably be the libretto or literary transcription of Minia's musical piece, is a reworking of the Greek myth of

the chimera, in which Bellerophon, prince of Corinth, slays the monster through the aid of his protectress Minerva, the goddess of reason.<sup>6</sup> In the Countess's version, Bellerophon—who is fascinated by the creature despite his orders to kill it—prefigures Silvio, and Minerva, Minia. Indeed, the name Minia is an amalgam of Minerva and Emilia.

The special twist that the author gave to her version—that the Chimera's death, rather than a cause for rejoicing, signifies the end of dreams, love and the impulse towards heroism—would probably have endeared it to Flaubert himself. In 1872 the French novelist wrote:

La vie n'est tolérable qu'avec une marotte, un travail quelconque. Dès qu'on abandonne sa Chimère, on meurt de tristesse. Il faut ... souhaiter qu'elle nous emporte (*Correspondance* V 95).

In this passage from a letter to Mlle. Leroyer de Chantepie can be heard an uncanny echo of Flaubert's own Sphinx and its plea to the Chimera: "O Fantaisie, emporte-moi sur tes ailes pour désennuyer ma tristesse!" (261).

In a similar vein doña Emilia wrote in an article on Marinetti and the Futurists in September of 1912:

En arte, la razón no procrea. Ha de sobreponérsele siempre el vuelo de la fantasía y el movimiento interior del sentir.

Yet in the face of the Futurists's total rejection of reason, she also pointed to the importance of

el freno que la razón no cesa de poner a la inspiración y a la imaginación desatadas, moderando su impulso unas veces fortificándolo, otras atenuándolo (*La vida contemporánea* 298).

In *La Quimera* Minia, although described as "idólatra del 'self-control,'" rants against the stifling effects of reason—"vieja chocha, que no sabe sino cuatro casos 'de sucedidos' y cuatro máximas roídas de orín. ... Lo mejor que hace el hombre suele ser contra la razón" (722). Thus the necessary interplay between reason and imagination reaches its maximum representation in *La Quimera*, not in the friendship between the artists, but through the opposing yet complementary elements within Minia herself. In this way, the aristocratic composer, a fictional alter ego of the Countess, emerges as the veritable portrait of the artist. *La Quimera*, one of the author's richest and most masterful novels, is her testament to artists and their aspira-