An Epidemic of Apathy: *Abulia* and the Language of Pathology in Baroja's Early Fiction

Katharine Murphy

Hispanic Review, Volume 91, Number 3, Summer 2023, pp. 387-410 (Article)

Published by University of Pennsylvania Press
DOI: *https://doi.org/10.1353/hir.2023.a903835*

An Epidemic of Apathy: *Abulia* and the Language of Pathology in Baroja's Early Fiction

Katharine Murphy
University of Exeter

ABSTRACT The literary exposition of *abulia* in Pío Baroja's early novels, especially *La lucha por la vida* trilogy, illuminates the ways in which diagnostic language from psychopathology was adapted, assimilated, and disseminated through the trajectories of fictional characters who suffer from a loss of volition. This article analyzes cultural narratives about *abulia* in Baroja's early fiction, demonstrating that they constitute a resonant pathological metaphor during a period in Spain's history defined by national introspection and regenerationist debates. By tracing metaphorical explanations for social, political, and economic circumstances conveyed through the literary appropriation of medical terminology, this study explores comparisons between *abulia* and the gendered and class-based associations of neurasthenia at the turn of the twentieth century. Although the assumed causes of each condition are different, this process of transposition between medicine and metaphor anticipates the contemporary social, cultural, and ideological shaping of concepts such as stress and burnout.

It is widely recognized that the writings of Azorín, Miguel de Unamuno and Ángel Ganivet explore the notion of *abulia* in Spain at the turn of the twentieth century as a debilitating collective condition, defined variously as a severe depletion of willpower, apathy towards action and devastating collapse of values intensified by "el Desastre" of 1898. The fictional representation of *abulia* in the works of the Spanish novelist and former physician Pío Baroja has received less scholarly attention to date, but merits renewed analysis in

the light of academic interest in the pathological body and mind in late-nineteenth-century fiction. Drawing comparisons with the fashionable diagnosis of neurasthenia as a nervous disorder in *fin-de-siglo* Europe and America, this article seeks to examine literary representations of *abulia* in early-twentieth-century Spain as a process of linguistic appropriation of medical terminology to evoke a wider cultural phenomenon.

The most celebrated novels of the *noventayochistas* in early-twentieth-century Spain, by Unamuno, Azorín, Baroja, and others, are populated by numerous angst-ridden antiheroes, who have often been labelled as *abúlicos*. Their energy depleted and lacking direction, these literary characters embody symbolically the ubiquitous apathy and loss of willpower that was perceived to be afflicting the nation. In turn-of-the-century Spain, the notion of *abulia* (alongside associated terminology) was adapted by Ganivet and Unamuno to describe a collective condition affecting the nation, and acquired significant resonance in the context of regenerationist debates. These discourses were fuelled by "el Desastre" of 1898: war with the United States and loss of the remnants of Spain's New World Empire. However, as Ricardo Senabre and Donald Shaw ("More about Abulia") have both pointed out, the concept of *abulia* did not originate in Spain, but was borrowed and adapted from theories circulating in late-nineteenth-century France, where the idea was popularized by the psychopathologist Théodule Ribot's *Les maladies de la volonté* (1883). Derived from Ancient Greek, and coined in 1818 by the German physician Johann Christian August Heinroth, the term "aboulia" was employed by Ribot to designate a physiological disease of the will. From a modern perspective, *abulia* has been defined as "a motivational deficit that is associated with apathy, loss of will and lack of initiating behaviors." Considering the "flat speech" prosody associated with the disorder, this classification identifies a neuroanatomical basis for apathy (Sidtis 204). In the context of *fin-de-siglo* Spain, *abulia* came to designate a debilitation of the will and life force, an underlying inertia; it was a term borrowed from psychopathology to designate a collective malaise.

In Spain, *abulia* became a shorthand designation for a devastating vision of the nation in decline. Yet intellectual figures such as Ganivet, Unamuno and Baroja did not portray *abulia* primarily as a symptom of ossified social, economic, and political conditions. Instead, the term acquired physiological associations in the context of degenerationism, which had reached its peak in the 1890s across Europe. In France, the physician Bénédict Morel had

warned in his treatise of 1857 about the progressive weakening of the nation through a hereditary generational model that would lead eventually to the sterility of European peoples. In late-nineteenth-century Spain, the term *abulia* crystallized fears about national degeneration through the cultural diagnosis of a widespread apathy. The concept epitomizes, therefore, the adaptation and transformation of the language of pathology within cultural narratives that formed a potent example of the collective mythology of degenerationism.

In a foundational article of 1928, Doris King Arjona inspired interest in the concept of *abulia* as a prevalent disorder of the will suffered by the nation in *fin-de-siglo* Spain, one that became an evocative expression of imperial decline. Approaching the centenary of 1898, literary criticism of the 1990s demonstrated renewed interest in the cultural resonance of *abulia* in turn-of-the-century Spain. Emphasizing the adoption of the term *abulia* from medical discourse, and specifically psychopathology, Gayana Jurkevich explored the physiological dimensions of this disease of the will and noted the influence of French theorist Théodule Ribot. In his scholarly response to this article, Shaw set out to amend and extend this analysis by emphasizing the primarily metaphysical and spiritual post-Romantic condition that reflects a *noventayochista* vision of paralysis and decay ("More about Abulia"). He argues, furthermore, that the concept of *abulia* employed by Ganivet in Spain was more devastating that its French counterpart, and draws attention to France's recovery following military defeat in 1870, a process that was not echoed in Spain. A disorder of the post-Romantic period, *abulia* may be considered a descendant of *mal du siècle*, "spleen," and *ennui*, but one that acquired a greater association with collective national wellbeing in a Spanish context ("More about Abulia" 456–57). Drawing on this research, but underscoring the organicist foundations of *abulia*, the present article employs alternative terminology for the "spiritual" dimensions of this condition in order to emphasize the interconnectedness of mind and body. In recent scholarship, Nicolás Fernández-Medina has explored philosophical theories of vital force in early-twentieth-century Spain, encompassing readings by Unamuno and Baroja on the concept of will. His chapter on the "lived body" during this period in Spain (232–95) includes brief reference to *abulia* and inertia (267–70); however, these concepts are not the primary focus of attention.

Jurkevich has shown that both Ganivet and Unamuno adopted Ribot's physiological understanding of the term *abulia* as a lack of energy and inability to exercise volition. Antonio Machado, by contrast, evoked the notion of malaise

in metaphorical terms, through melancholic references to "hastío" and "falta de voluntad" in poems such as "Del pasado efímero" (Jurkevich 181–83). Like the cultural myths of degeneration more generally, the transformation of *abulia* by Ganivet, Unamuno, and others lent useful elasticity to contemporary discourses on Spanish society during this period. In the late nineteenth century, the perception of national decline was widely discussed alongside analysis of "its symptoms and etiologies," and its connection with moral corruption and sexual decadence, criminality and political dissidence (Cleminson and Fuentes Peris 389). Many intellectual figures of the period explained this sense of national debility not in practical regenerationist or reformist terms, however, but instead as collective *abulia*. In the cultural sphere, in 1902 the publication of Baroja's *Camino de perfección* and Azorín's *La voluntad* each demonstrates a salient interest in the will and its erosion in the male subject. In short, the exploration of *abulia* inspired the literary imagination of the intelligentsia in early-twentieth-century Spain, through a transformative linguistic process in which fears about the nation's future were expressed as collective pathological qualities.

The focus of the present article seeks to extend existing scholarship by examining the means by which social and cultural conditions are diagnosed through recourse to metaphors of disease, medical terminology and pseudodiagnosis. This practice is particularly striking during periods of perceived crisis, as evidenced by recurring metaphorical explanations within cultural and literary texts. Analyzing the use of pathological narratives in late-nineteenth-century France, Robert Nye refers to this conceptual assimilation as a medical discourse of national decline. In Spain, my article contends, a similar phenomenon may explain the emphatic recourse to narratives of illness at the turn of the twentieth century, including the lack of *voluntad*, energy, and willpower suffered by the protagonists of the novels of Baroja, Azorín, and Unamuno. In a more directly political and ideological context, this tendency likewise underpinned the regenerationist calls for an iron surgeon to operate on the sick body of the nation (Balfour 25–28). These cultural narratives draw heavily on metaphorical representations of diseases and disorders of bodies and minds. Metaphors are often used to designate our response to disease, as Susan Sontag has famously argued. Conversely, however, metaphors may also be employed by narratives that draw on the language of pathology to refer to prominent concerns about collective social, political, and economic circumstances. In the case of *fin-de-siglo* Spain, these preoc-

cupations were expressed through alarmist discourses about collective apathy and national decay.

In a broader geographical context, Edward Shorter demonstrates that with the rise of psychological explanation in the late nineteenth century, the physical symptoms of hysteria began to be replaced by subtler symptoms such as fatigue. Medical discourses may therefore legitimate the production and identification of specific symptoms through unconscious processes (x). Thus, we can infer that cultural factors may shape the production of similar symptoms among many individuals, leading to accepted behavior across broad groups through normativity or metaphorical contagion. This statement is not intended to deny the lived experience of illness, chronic fatigue, and associated conditions, or negate specialist medical knowledge. Instead, the analysis of literary representation attempts to cast light on a process of figurative interpretation by which political and cultural contexts invest scientific language with meaning. To appropriate Mark Jackson's analysis of *An Age of Stress*, illness is "both a condition and a metaphor" (2).

This article examines the ways in which the representation of *abulia*, inertia and loss of will in selected early novels by Baroja functions as a symbol of wider concerns during a period of perceived crisis and national soul-searching. It focuses on the ways in which the elasticity of the term *abulia* was employed to denote pathological qualities in the Spanish character, arguing that these functioned covertly as a marker for dominant bourgeois values and gendered codes. Although it is not the primary emphasis of the current study, the racial implications of these discourses are strikingly evident alongside those of class and gender. Yet on the surface at least, as Shaw explains, the *noventayochistas* did not concentrate on "an economic-social explanation of *abulia / atonía*. . . . Collective regeneration was thought to be brought about, not by changing economic conditions and thus breaking the prevailing social molds, but by changing the outlook, the mentality, of separate individuals—the readers" ("More about Abulia" 456). This perspective is mirrored by José Ortega y Gasset's description of Baroja's sense of a lack of collective energy: "El sentimiento de la insuficiencia que padecen las ideas y valores de la cultura contemporánea es el resorte que mueve el alma entera de Baroja" (83). In Spanish intellectual circles, *abulia* came to represent more than a temporary state of exhaustion, but instead evoked a physiological depletion of energy that affected mind and body, and was associated with the threat of national decline.

Despite the impressionistic qualities of this "feeling of insufficiency," economic, social and gendered factors were in fact an integral part of Baroja's conceptualization of *abulia* in his early novels (1900–1912), not least because its resolution or overcoming seems to rely in his early fiction on the psychological progress of male, bourgeois individuals. Indeed, as Gerard Flynn concludes in an analysis of the influence of Krausism on the *noventayochistas*, "*lo varonil*, which is the frequent harmonious exercise of intellect and will, is the remedy for *abulia*, the national disease of Spain" (277). The close association of masculinity with the intellect would provide the means to overcome the debilitation of the collective will, a perspective that is very revealing if we take into account dominant codes regarding gender and social status. Even though *lo varonil* represented a quality to which women could also aspire, we might also note the disparaging essentialist judgments about the intellectual woman in early-twentieth-century Spain (on the latter, see Nash 27).

My analysis begins by considering conceptual interpretations of the term *abulia* and their application to the national context by prominent intellectuals during this period. The second part of the article turns to Baroja's representation of *abulia* in his early fiction, focusing especially on the trajectory of Manuel Alcázar, the protagonist of *La lucha por la vida* trilogy (1904), comprised of *La busca*, *Mala hierba* and *Aurora roja*. (An earlier version was published serially under the title *La busca* in *El Globo* in 1903). These three Madrid novels provide a salient example of the protagonist's recuperation of the will in relation to both gender and social class. Finally, the article analyzes the relevance of this case study of Baroja to our wider understanding of the literary representation of disease and disorders. If *abulia* provided a ready narrative for the diagnosis of the national condition at the turn of the twentieth century, this resonant trope provides a key example of the wider literary representation of pathological conditions that reflect a period of perceived crisis of national identity and mood of introspection in Spain.

Defining abulia *in* fin-de-siglo *Spain*

In the late nineteenth century, the powerful emphasis on hereditary causes of disease, in accordance with the theories of degenerationism, led to a renewed focus on the lack or misdirection of willpower as a collective condi-

tion. In Spain, moreover, cultural narratives about *abulia* and the need for regeneration acquired even greater vigor in the wake of the Spanish–American War of 1898. In short, *abulia* as a cultural phenomenon was strikingly resonant in turn-of-the-century Spain during a period associated with a profound questioning of the nation's identity. Although the politicians and political system of the Restoration were held responsible for the loss of Spain's former colonial empire by Lucas Mallada's *Los males de la patria* (1890), as Joseph Harrison explains, the prevailing mood of pessimism and introspection was referenced through the language of pathology. Lord Salisbury described the nation as "moribund"; for Francisco Silvela, it was "sin pulso" and embodied "la descomposición y la muerte" (Harrison 5–6).

It is widely acknowledged that the loss of Spain's former imperial status produced an intellectual, political and cultural examination of the country's past and present that sought to address the pressing problem of national decadence. At the end of *Idearium español* (1897), Ganivet diagnosed Spain's malady as a disease of the will, arguing that collective confusion, inactivity, and irresolution stemmed from a failure to express national ideas and energies: "la enfermedad se designa con el nombre de 'no-querer' o, en términos más científicos, por la palabra griega 'aboulía', que significa eso mismo, 'extinción o debilitación grave de la voluntad'" (Ganivet 131; Flynn 273). In 1893, Ganivet had already used the term *abulia* to designate a weakness of will in a letter to Navarro Ledesma. Unamuno, too, diagnosed the national disease as a state of *abulia* (Senabre 596). This concept was expressed through a range of terminology, more frequently in Unamuno's *En torno al casticismo* (1895) as *marasmo* and *atonía* (Jurkevich 184). In turn, Ganivet found inspiration in nineteenth-century psychiatry for the technical foundation for his analysis of "el mal de España." He remarked that "desde Esquirol y Maudsley hasta Ribot y Pierre Janet hay una larga serie de médicos y psicólogos que han estudiado esta enfermedad," an illness that reveals "el influjo de las perturbaciones mentales sobre las funciones orgánicas" (131–32). Mental and physical symptoms are closely connected. As noted above, Ribot's *Les maladies de la volonté*, translated into Spanish in 1899, was particularly influential in the ways in which Spanish intellectuals conceptualized the problem. Senabre has already underscored the vital influence of this work on Ganivet's conception of *abulia*: notably, weak will, indecision and inaction, and disassociation (598). As Ganivet explained, "Así, pues, la causa de la abulia es, a mi juicio, la debilitación del sentido sintético, de la facultad de asociar las representaciones" (135).

By contrast with Ganivet, who sought individual self-realization through *voluntad*, Unamuno, Baroja and Azorín conceptualized will in the Schopenhauerian sense: that of a driving force underlying the universe, a vital instinct that produced a constant oscillation between desire and suffering that could not be appeased (Arjona 573, 611). This predicament is memorably depicted by the trajectory of Andrés Hurtado in Baroja's *El árbol de la ciencia* (1911), a novel that echoes the Schopenhauerian division between the development of the intellect and its inverse proportion to the life force or will. The overly analytical protagonists of Azorín's *La voluntad*, Baroja's *Camino de perfección* and Unamuno's *Niebla* (1914) suffer from a weakness of volition marked by an excessive intellectualism and tendency to abstraction that prevents their integration into a physical environment.

Informed by his medical training, Baroja was interested in the relationship between physiology, the workings of the mind, and philosophical inquiry. In "La caverna del humorismo" (1919) he debated a speculative connection between the nervous system and *voluntad*, diagnosing Hamlet's predicament (indecision or *hamletismo*) as a paralysis of will (*Obras completas*, vol. 5, 455). Yet in 1917, when he published his autobiographical *Juventud, egolatría*, Baroja had already rejected the ideal of action posed by his earliest novels: "Yo también he preconizado un remedio para el mal de vivir, la acción. Es un remedio viejo como el mundo, tan útil a veces como cualquier otro y tan inútil como todos los demás" (*Obras completas*, vol. 5, 173). In her article on *abulia* in turn-of-the-century Spain, Arjona argued that the will failed to materialize as an effective solution to regeneration: for all three authors, Schopenhauerian pessimism prevailed over Nietzschean vitalism (636). Yet in the case of Baroja, I will contend, philosophical agnosticism (drawing on the competing tensions between pessimism and vitalism) leads predominantly to ambivalent solutions to the problem of will for the protagonists of his early novels.

As noted above, existing scholarship has documented the philosophical significance of *abulia* in "Generation of 1898" thought by means of a detailed focus on Ganivet and Unamuno. Comparatively less attention has been paid to Baroja's understanding and literary representation of the concept. In a survey of the author's changing approach to vitalism, Shaw succinctly identifies *abulia* in some of his most prominent characters, notably the lack of "life directive principle" (or "ideas directivas") in *Camino de perfección*'s Fernando Ossorio (*Generation*, 100). The term is addressed only briefly by more

recent studies of the representation of pathology and medicine in Baroja (Otis; Sosa-Velasco). In a study of the author's at times contradictory approach to medical theories, Benjamin Fraser notes that the medical aspect of his works "is largely impressionistic" and relies primarily on the author's deployment of "disease as metaphor" (38). This small but vibrant field of scholarship inspires further definition and scrutiny of the significance of *abulia* in Baroja and its metaphorical applications.

Like the term degeneration more generally, we could argue that the expression of *abulia* during this period moves from a predominantly organicist category to acquiring a flexible sociological meaning. By extension, the concept of *abulia* is a strong example of the adaptation and dissemination of pathological language within cultural narratives, whether literary, political, or journalistic. A similar tendency occurs with the prevalence of late-nineteenth-century debates about neurasthenia, a term reintroduced and popularized by the American physician George Beard in his article "Neurasthenia, or Nervous Exhaustion" (1869). This condition was provoked, he argued in a later iteration of these theories, by "modern civilization": "steam-power, the periodical press, the telegraph, the sciences, and the mental activity of women" (vi). Interestingly, in Beard's work neurasthenia was associated with flattering qualities—social and intellectual distinction—and became a marker of status rather than the stigma of mental disease (Schaffner 93). The growing prevalence of the term neurasthenia, then, illustrates a process of medicalized interpretations about certain sectors of society in response to social change, modernization and technological progress (Schuster). As Christopher Forth explains, in France it was deployed predominantly in relation to middle-class men to diagnose a nervous disorder, distinguishing it from the hysteria suffered by women and the working classes. This divergence between proletarian and bourgeois forms of neurasthenia thereby drew on class distinctions that functioned simultaneously as markers of gender difference (330). Thus, through conceptual and linguistic assimilation from science and medicine to wider cultural usage, "the shifting status of the neurasthenic male in France was as much a social and political phenomenon as it was a medical issue" (Forth 329–30).

The term neurasthenia fell out of favor following the First Wold War and, although it was later discredited, exemplifies a culturally and historically resonant concept that has been reclaimed as a precursor for contemporary manifestations of exhaustion, stress and burnout by recent academic and

journalistic studies. In an article that appeared in *The Economist* in 2016, Josh Cohen writes that "the *fin-de-siècle* neurasthenic, in whom exhaustion and innervation [*sic*] converge, uncannily anticipates the burnout of today. They have in common an overloaded and overstimulated nervous system." Burnout, then, is not just a contemporary phenomenon; rather, it finds evocative echoes in the *fin-de-siglo* period and has become associated especially with temporal turning points. Like neurasthenia, the term burnout articulates a conceptual adaptation of pathological characteristics, in this case providing a fertile expression of millennial preoccupations that include precarious employment conditions, economic pressures created by neoliberal market policies, and technological overload. The predominantly social factors understood as causes of burnout demonstrate important differences with the organicist lack of willpower signified so powerfully by *abulia*. Nonetheless, the resonance of both neurasthenia and *abulia* relied on the elasticity of definition of each concept, allowing their use as a means to identify, diagnose, and treat the perceived illnesses from which collective groups were suffering. Moreover, the use of these labels in relation to social class and gender is particularly illuminating. In this sense, the process of appropriation between medicine and metaphor anticipates the ideological shaping of elusive concepts such as stress and burnout (Jackson; Schaffner) that continues up to the present day.

Returning to turn-of-the-century Spain, pathological terminology provided a useful explanation for complex and often contradictory analyses of national history in the works of "Generation of 1898" authors. As Jo Labanyi explains, these authors use "strategies designed to legitimize a new sense of nationhood for the purposes of analysing where an old nation has gone wrong" (143). Ganivet diagnosed the nation's illness as both "la patología del espíritu" (or "abulia colectiva") and "la patología política," thereby drawing on organic metaphors (133). Unamuno categorized the Spanish political system as "anemia" and a "virus," demonstrating a contradictory command of medical knowledge (*En torno* 139). Having trained as a doctor, Baroja's knowledge of medicine was more developed, and underpins the language of pathology in his early novels, although his engagement with dominant scientific theories such as determinism was far from consistent.[1] Salient examples

1. On medicine and fictional doctors in Baroja's works, see Félix Cabezas García, and José Guimón Ugartechea. Richard Cardwell addresses this theme in other writers of the period. On Baroja's inconsistent engagements with scientific discourse, see E. H. Templin.

include the representation of Fernando Ossorio's neurosis in *Camino de perfección*, the panoramic exposition of the poverty-stricken masses in his Madrid trilogy *La lucha por la vida*, and finally, the experience of fictional medic Andrés Hurtado in *El árbol de la ciencia*, the last novel of the grouping entitled *La raza*.

If *abulia* may be defined during this period as a loss or misdirection of will, the question of whether individual agency would suffice to overcome the condition becomes fundamental. For Baroja, a Nietzschean manifestation of will is presented as a partial and individual (if not collective) solution for the protagonists of *La casa de Aizgorri* (1900) and *El mayorazgo de Labraz* (1903). Elsewhere Baroja ironized the concept of the Nietzschean superman, a position we should bear in mind when interpreting the ambivalent resolutions and endings of many of his early novels. For example, in *Mala hierba* the journalist and intellectual Langairiños, nicknamed el *Superhombre*, adopts a salutary regime to resolve neurasthenic symptoms: "se encontraba neurasténico, y para curar su enfermedad tomaba glicerofosfato de cal en las comidas y hacía gimnasia" (247). In any case, the literary obsession with *abulia* and the plethora of *abúlicos* in the novels of the "Generation of 1898" exemplify the influence of pathological language that was so prevalent during this period. More specifically, however, the foregrounding of Baroja's novels in this article seeks to weigh up the extent to which the loss of will as metaphor demonstrates the influence of an inevitably bourgeois and gendered perspective. With this aim, the next section will explore literary depictions of male *abúlicos* in Baroja's early fiction, beginning with the ways in which *Camino de perfección* anticipates and foreshadows the evolving representation of a pathological misdirection of willpower in his Madrid trilogy *La lucha por la vida*.

Abulia *in Baroja's Early Fiction*

Following the Nietzschean resurgence of energy of the female protagonist at the end of his first novel, *La casa de Aizgorri*, Baroja's portrait of the artist in *Camino de perfección* explores the male *abúlico*'s loss of volition. Claiming that "tengo la inercia en los tuétanos" (*Camino* 17), Fernando Ossorio embodies apathy and fragmentation. His statement points overtly to inertia as a pathological symptom, one that blurs mental and bodily states through the

use of figurative language. Similarly, the narrator explains his sense of cerebral disintegration in physiological terms: "Sentía que su cerebro se deshacía, se liquidaba" (43–44). The portrait of Fernando represents a stark lack of volition associated with *abulia*, lack of direction and even disassociation: "como no tenía deseos, ni voluntad, ni fuerza para nada, se dejó llevar por la corriente" (35). In the representation of the decadent artist, *Camino de perfección* draws on the sensationalist theories of Max Nordau, who described the degenerate as egotistical and impulsive, pessimistic, mystical, and one who suffers from "abhorrence of activity and powerlessness to will (*aboulia*)" (18–22). Later in the novel, Fernando decides to spend time in Yécora, with the hope that "allí su voluntad desmayada se rebelase y buscara una vida enérgica" (223). The tension between loss of will and the recuperation of vitalism is foregrounded through the protagonist's journey to southeast Spain. Yet the novel's conclusion presents an ambivalent solution to the entrenched causes of his neurosis, in which mysticism and aestheticism, two central tenets of Nordau's diagnosis of the degenerate artist, cannot fully be overcome.

Furthermore, although described through physiological symptoms, the protagonist's experience of *abulia* implicitly references the importance of sociocultural factors for understanding his predicament. Deeming Fernando "un aristócrata; está acostumbrado a una vida de lujos, de vicios" (320), Dolores's father identifies the protagonist's family lineage as both a source of economic privilege and moral decadence. In fact, Fernando interprets the convulsions he experiences during the episode in which he envisions a mummified Christ as a psychic projection provoked by kissing Aunt Laura in church as evidence of hysteria: "Mil luces le bailaban en los ojos; ráfagas brillantes, espadas de oro. Sentía como avisos de convulsiones que le espantaban" (52). Here, the narrative implies, Fernando suffers agitated brain activity prompted by his perception of a sacrilegious act, and his fear of an epileptic seizure. Fernando's vision, it is implied, is a product of the psychological legacy of his Catholic education, one that produces physiological symptoms. The social constrictions along with the burden of guilt and sin, "la idea aplastante del pecado" (229), instilled by his schooling can be traced as rational explanations for the excessive emotion performed by the repressed male subject.

Through pathological language, the protagonist diagnoses his self-proclaimed identity as "un histérico, un degenerado" (9). In this sense, we find parallels with the ambivalent status of neurasthenia as a disorder of the

nervous system, and evidence of deviant masculinity. Fernando describes himself as a hysteric, blurring the distinctions between categories of class and gender evident in dominant stereotypes that associated hysteria with women and the proletariat. By contrast, neurasthenia in *fin-de-siècle* France evinced simultaneously a fashionable bourgeois aspiration for intellectualism, the artistic qualities of an elevated sensibility, and relative wealth, alongside a nervous emotionalism associated more dangerously with femininity. These contradictory discourses about masculine nervousness, which signified effeminacy and therefore concerns about national decline, fit awkwardly with the class and gender status of such medical terminology, as Mark Micale explains (379–80). Fernando's self-confessed hysteria (through its integration of the gendered and class-based associations of neurasthenia) thereby combines both desirable and potentially threatening qualities. In a similar way, we might argue that the literary representation of *abulia* at the turn of the century denoted a collective weakening of energy, while simultaneously privileging bourgeois values and gendered norms. In this context, *abulia* represents qualities that are the preserve of the privileged classes, who may reflect on such feelings of malaise.

As Luisa Elena Delgado et al. have explained, social phenomena may be interpreted as both performative and communicable, whereby emotions, beliefs and attitudes are subject to a "process of contagion" (9). Drawing on this recent scholarship, I propose that in his early novels Baroja employs parascientific discourse to explain emotional responses, thereby underscoring a performative interpretation of affective life that recasts the social position of the subject. On one hand, a collective depletion of energy conveyed a symbol of fears about the nation's future and echoed dominant theories about European decline; on the other, the *ennui* of the decadent upper-class individual was a sign of social standing and relative wealth. Ricardo Campos Marín et al. examine the shared language of pathology in class battles waged through anarchist, socialist and bourgeois discourses of the 1880s and 1890s. Anarchist and socialist texts pointed both to the degeneration of the working classes and the pathological symptoms of the ruling classes, in adroit arguments employed to critique capitalism as the source of illness and justify social revolution (218–29). In other words, the symptoms of degeneration, including loss of will, were open to manipulation for competing ideological arguments in relation to the nation's future, in this case by translating biological explanation to the domain of social injustice.

The portrait of *abulia* by Baroja and other writers provides a reflection on perceived national debility through psychopathological language. However, it had the potential to offer simultaneously a marker of social or cultural status, as the following analysis of the author's Madrid trilogy now seeks to demonstrate. Interestingly, the lack of *voluntad* attached to the one-time delinquent and working-class Manuel Alcázar in *La lucha por la vida* is eventually resolved through emphasis on his moral superiority and the necessary development of a strong work ethic. This moral position thereby confers on him a more elevated status than the numerous poverty-stricken workers, delinquents, prostitutes, vagrants and anarchists with whom he fraternizes. Notably, the three novels track Manuel's progress from petty criminality and lowly physical work as a baker and printing operator to a newly acquired bourgeois status as the owner of his own printing business. By the final novel of the trilogy, in *Aurora roja* his friend and one-time fellow vagrant Jesús cynically resents his newfound position, labelling him "todo un señor burgués" (94). Among the anarchist circles in which Manuel and his brother Juan become involved, sociological discussion in which "hablaban de la abulia, de la degeneración burguesa, de la amoralidad o del agiotismo" (211) points to the central significance of class awareness and social hierarchies in relation to these pathological labels.

The question of whether the individual or group undertook physical or intellectual labor, and whether in a domestic or a public sphere, is therefore relevant to the cultural interpretation of perceived maladies of the will and the nervous system during this period. In Baroja's portrait of the idle and delinquent masses in his *La lucha por la vida* trilogy, there are references to the lack of volition among the poverty-stricken and criminal underclass, alongside the author's critique of social injustice. Indeed, the depletion of *voluntad* appears to affect all echelons of Spanish society, from lowly vagrants to the ruined aristocracy. However, despite the initial impression that the category does not find its foundations in any identifiable social class, the detailed exposition of *abulia* in Baroja's early novels is drawn out most convincingly in relation to male bourgeois individuals. Most notably, it is the partial and often ambiguous resolution of *abulia* by these individualized subjects that form the most notable literary explorations of psychopathology and lack of will in these texts. While the masses of the Madrid suburbs in *La lucha por la vida* remain enmired in poverty and degradation, the energetic overcoming of *abulia* relies most frequently on the actions of the privileged

male subject who therefore occupies a prominent role in the literary representation of the national condition.

It is worth noting in this context that anthropological studies of criminality in Spain include references to a widespread lack of *voluntad* among the lower strata of society. Following Cesare Lombroso's analysis of the female criminal, Constancio Bernaldo de Quirós and José M. Llanas Aguilaniedo's well-known volume on criminality, *La mala vida en Madrid* (1901), referred with little sense of irony to "la apatía más completa" as a primary character flaw among the causes of female prostitution (59). In a similar way, the authors of this volume described the disreputable types who frequented the works of the criminal anthropologist Rafael Salillas as "los inválidos de la voluntad" (1998, xxviii). Baroja's analysis of the figure of the "golfo," a term that identified the petty delinquent and vagrant (while simultaneously conveying a certain bohemian freedom) presents some insights into the author's use of pathological language to designate immorality and vice. In his article "Patología del golfo" (1900) Baroja expanded on his early definition of the term (published as "Golfos" in *La Voz de Guipúzcoa* in 1897) through the use of a biological metaphor for this figure who functions as a "microbio de la vida social; echa sus ideas y sus actos disolventes en el organismo de la sociedad; si ésta tiene salud, fuerza y resistencia, el microbio no prospera; donde la vitalidad está perdida, el microbio se descompone y sus toxinas penetran hasta el corazón del cuerpo social" (*Obras completas*, vol. 5, 59). The "golfo" is described as a source of social contagion.

Here the "golfo" is defined in the context of society's loss of vitality; however the figure is simultaneously framed in terms of moral inferiority, thereby reinforcing the superior values of the privileged classes, as Rafael Huertas notes, "No cabe duda de que el trastorno de las funciones afectivas constituye uno de los ejes fundamentales en la configuración médica del niño 'golfo': como inadaptado social, ajeno a las normas y valores de la clase dominante, supone la 'negación de toda moral'" (430). In other words, although the category of the marginalized "golfo" at first appears to be beyond class boundaries, in fact it helped to protect bourgeois values and privileges by emphasizing the pathological qualities of vast social groups, rather than the pernicious effects of socioeconomic inequalities. This is an interesting point, given the strong elements of social critique we find in *La lucha por la vida*, in which the indigent masses are portrayed alternately as victims of social injustice and as perpetrators of their own decadence. Sleeping at the

ironically named Asilo de las Delicias, one of Madrid's charitable institutions for the poor represented in *Mala hierba*, Manuel and Jesús witness a fight during the night between two young men who, having sought food and shelter, are subsequently removed from the dubious protection of the refuge. Here the indigent rogues of the Madrid suburbs perpetuate their own marginalization. One should note, too, that Baroja's conception of "el golfo" included all social classes, including those born into poverty, the middle classes and the aristocracy (*Obras completas*, vol. 5, 57–58; see also Maristany, 103–10).

The use of the feminine term "golfa" had primarily sexual connotations and was commonly used to designate prostitutes. Pathological representation is amply employed in the portrait of the poverty-stricken women who are enmired in moral and physical degradation in *La busca* (Murphy 87–92). Turning to the upper-class female protagonists of Baroja's early novels, the lack of volition suffered by Águeda de Aizgorri is based overwhelmingly on her fears of inheriting the degenerate characteristics of her family, and is finally overcome by her unambiguous psychological recovery through the assertion of free will. As she mourns the death of her father, "ante lo inexplicable y ante la muerte, su espíritu se recoge y se siente con energía y, victoriosa de sus terrores, entra con lentitud en la alcoba de su padre" (*La casa* 37). More commonly, however, female characters in Baroja's early novels tend to provide a counterpoint and source of resolution for the psychological trajectory of the male protagonist through the woman's embodiment of energy or *voluntad*. In *Camino de perfección,* Dolores provides a healthy contrast to Fernando's neurosis and an opportunity for his partial regeneration through the birth of their son. In *La lucha por la vida* trilogy, Salvadora's name is clearly symbolic of her role in providing redemption for Manuel through her industrious work ethic. Lulú, the central female character of *El árbol de la ciencia*, is an obvious exception to this paradigm, representing female intellectualism at the expense of biological health, as symbolized by the death of both mother and infant during childbirth at the end of the novel. She is defined as "una mujer cerebral, sin fuerza orgánica y sin sensualidad, para quien todas las impresiones son puramente intelectuales" (*El árbol* 269). In all the cases above, a symbolic emphasis on the essentialist role of women in relation to marriage and maternity is key to whether the recuperation of the protagonist's willpower is successful.

For the male bourgeois individual, *abulia* is something that may be overcome to some extent by means of action and determination, or through partnership with a strong-willed woman. For Baroja, the predicament of his protagonists (Ossorio's neurosis, Alcázar's lack of *voluntad*, Hurtado's retreat from the world) may be read as both physiological and psychosocial, a position that is not fully resolved by the novels' conclusions. To place these observations in the wider context of the cultural mythology of *fin-de-siglo* degenerationism, if *abulia* could be overcome through the regeneration of the neurotic and depleted protagonist, then a Nietzschean resurgence of the energy of the individual becomes symbolic of the nation's potential salvation. The question of national identity during this period is intensely entwined with pathological metaphors, among which fictional representations of *abulia* and the attempted recovery of volition were expressed in especially resonant terms by Baroja and his contemporaries in relation to the male psyche. Although detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this article, the failure of the female protagonist María Aracil to achieve emancipation at the end of *La ciudad de la niebla* (1909) arguably reflects the prevailing influence of social norms more convincingly than the inherited legacy of racial depletion.

In *La busca*, the first novel of *La lucha por la vida* series, the protagonist Manuel Alcázar arrives in Madrid to join his mother, Petra, who works as a maid in a boarding house. Rejecting the harsh conditions of work in a bakery in searing temperatures and with rudimentary sleeping arrangements, Manuel falls in with vagrants, prostitutes, and criminals who roam the streets of the *barrios bajos*. In *La busca*, we find a resonant and often cited reference to the significance of will, offered in the guise of Roberto Hasting's advice: "Si quieres hacer algo en la vida, no creas en la palabra imposible. Nada hay imposible para una voluntad enérgica" (95). In *Mala hierba*, the second of the series, Manuel poses as the illegitimate son of the Baronesa de Aynant, and subsequently finds honest (although intermittent) work as a printing operator. In this novel, the lack of *voluntad* that is Manuel's primary characteristic gains momentum as Roberto provides a clear diagnosis of his friend's predicament: "Hoy no eres más que un vago, y debes hacerte obrero. [. . .] Quiero decirte que tengas voluntad" (158–59). In contrast to Manuel, Roberto (who is of mixed Spanish and English descent) is defined by an indomitable energy and capacity for hard work, echoing Baroja's anthropological theories regarding the strength of northern European peoples (*Obras*

completas, vol. 5, 514–17). In *Mala hierba*, *abulia* is a malady suffered by the semidestitute Manuel Alcázar. Indeed, the novel briefly references the low-lifes that frequent the Círculo de la Amistad in relation to the prevalent symptom of a lack of willpower: "Eran todos sin sentido moral, a quienes, a unos la miseria y la mala vida, a otros la inclinación a lo irregular, había desgastado y empañado la conciencia y roto el resorte de la voluntad" (336–37).

A pervasive lack of volition is not restricted to those born into poverty; rather it extends to the impoverished aristocracy caricatured in the trilogy through don Alonso, "el Hombre Boa," a member of the vagrant group with whom Manuel sleeps rough. In *Mala hierba* the trope of national decadence is sustained through the description of the Baronesa's social circles: "es una consecuencia natural y necesaria de nuestra raza. Estamos degenerados. Somos una raza de última clase" (216). By contrast, what distinguishes Manuel from the lowly masses is a newfound energy that embodies the potential for individual transformation through personal struggle, a trajectory that has Nietzschean echoes: "Hallábase Manuel con decisión para intentar seriamente un cambio de vida; se sentía capaz de tomar una determinación enérgica y dispuesto a seguirla hasta el fin" (146). His aspirations, however, are frustrated by the overwhelming paralysis of will that characterizes him for a large part of the trilogy, and which prevents any sustained adherence to regular paid work. As the narrator observes, "sentía una inercia imposible de vencer" (281).

The final novel of the trilogy, *Aurora roja*, witnesses Manuel's bourgeois redemption as the co-owner of his own printing establishment through a regenerative journey encouraged by the energetic Salvadora. He is portrayed, at least overtly, as a reformed *abúlico*, who has overcome apathy and the descent into petty criminality. However, the moral ambivalence of this position is emphasized by Jesús's description of Manuel's new identity as "un burgués infecto" (113). From this perspective, the protagonist's acceptance of private funds from Roberto represents surrender to a position of capitalist ownership, rather than salaried work, and marriage to Salvadora, once a destitute orphan who became a ward of Jesús. Thus, the economic source of Manuel's social ascent permits a passive role in which he escapes further hardship, by instead perpetuating the exploitation of other workers through the appointment of a manager for his printing business, and reliance on the industrious energy of a working-class woman. By contrast, his brother Juan misdirects idealism toward the confused and ineffectual actions of a disparate anarchist

grouping, with little opportunity to succeed. The contradictions of this conclusion underscore the author's own ambivalence through an ironic ending that demands an ideological interpretation by the reader.

Fictional characters provide the political diagnosis of the nation's ills, a technique of narrative distancing employed frequently in Baroja's early novels. According to Roberto's views expressed in *Aurora roja*, Spaniards become anarchists out of a fundamental apathy, leading to his regenerationist declaration that Spain needed "un gobierno dictatorial, fuerte" (145). He recommends an authoritarian political solution in the guise of "el despotismo ilustrado, progresivo" (145). A frequent strategy of his early fiction, the author's ideological position is obscured by political debate between two or more opposing viewpoints. For Manuel, by contrast, the regenerationist notion of a benign or progressive dictator to lead Spain out of apathy and *abulia* would be ideologically unacceptable: "¡Obedecer a un tirano! Eso es horrible" (145). For Roberto, the national environment is the primary determinant of character, and thereby propels "la fatalidad de la raza" (143). During this period, the term "raza" was frequently employed to denote the nation, underscoring the contextual significance of Baroja's anthropological theories. Like Iturrioz in *El árbol de la ciencia*, Roberto Hasting defends a vigorous eugenicist perspective, one that is problematized by Baroja's own contradictory stance.[2] The present article has focused primarily on subtexts of class and gender in the novels' presentation of organicist metaphors; however, the profound racial implications of degenerationist discourses in Baroja's trilogy demand further scholarly scrutiny in the context of implied hierarchies of difference.[3]

As we have seen, the trope of *abulia* provides a discursive platform for the depiction of Manuel Alcázar, the protagonist of *La lucha por la vida* trilogy who finally overcomes the descent into poverty, criminality, and vice of the indigent masses. The pathological metaphors of these three Madrid novels function overtly as vehicles for the author's exposition of social inequality

2. In "Nation, Narration, Naturalization," Labanyi discusses the political eclecticism and abstentionism of the 1898 writers as cause and consequence of their view of "history as disease" (146–47).

3. In her study *Organic Memory*, Laura Otis analyzes Baroja's theories of heredity and race in selected novels and essays (75–92). Álvaro Girón Sierra explores engagements by Spanish anarchists with anthropology and theories of racial difference (231–43). On race and degenerationism in a transnational context, see J. Edward Chamberlin and Sander Gilman.

and the conditions of disease and degradation in which the working-class masses live in moral and physical squalor. In his early novels, Baroja engages powerfully with theories of hereditary determinism and organicist decline, leading to ambivalent conclusions. From a privileged narrative perspective, social, gendered, and racial hierarchies are depicted through the language of pathology. This is significant because, as Raymond Carr explains, Spain's poor economic performance in the late nineteenth century "was attributed by Spaniards less to a historical development that had created a great gap between rich and poor, or to structural causes in general, . . . than to some inherent racial vice" (28). Spain's economic failures, together with the antiquated political system of electoral management (*caciquismo* and the *turno pacífico*), were explained in terms of national pathology. The concept of the sick and degenerate body that characterized the Spanish nation underpinned the regenerationist discourse of the neuroscientist Ramón Santiago y Cajal through the striking metaphor of the tumor. Anticipating Generation of 1898 authors, for Cajal the loss of *voluntad* was a key political and psychological problem that Spain needed to address in order to regenerate (Sosa-Velasco 25–36).

Baroja's early novels employ various metaphors of sickness to describe Spanish society. In sum, they present an array of *abúlicos*, predominantly (but not exclusively) male characters who either suffer, or believe they suffer, from paralysis of the will. These figures lack direction in life, are devoid of energy, and experience a sense of malaise that places them at odds with their environment and society. Some make a partial recovery, usually through the formation of a stable relationship and refuge from the hostility of the outside world. In his early works, Baroja's medical knowledge merges with his interest in other scientific disciplines, most notably anthropology, to become what Beatriz Rivera-Barnes has described as a "parascientific epistemology." Baroja explores dominant theories of degeneration that were driven by positivist science, and the powerful combination of heredity and environment famously articulated by Hippolyte Taine. Despite the fatalistic qualities expressed by the Baronesa and other characters in the analysis above, however, his fictional representation of physiological inevitability is tempered by the ambivalent resolutions of his early novels. The protagonists of his early novels debate the competing legacy of hereditary and environmental factors, but some (including Águeda de Aizgorri and Fernando Ossorio) manage to

overcome their predicament, at least partially, through individual psychological development.

Theorizing the role of metaphor in science and literature, James Bono argues that scientific metaphors traffic emotive and affective associations, and may thus be employed as "rhetorical ploys aimed at enforcing the objectivity and authority of a given scientific discourse." The privileging of science as the provider of objective insight has been challenged by acknowledgment of racial and gender analogies in the biological sciences, ones that appeal to existing social, political, cultural and religious structures and reinforce the bourgeois status quo (68–71). In the context of early-twentieth-century Spain, the diagnosis of the nation in relation to a collective state of depletion or *abulia* drew on organicist explanations for a metaphorical epidemic of apathy and inertia, thereby underscoring the contagious effects of conditions conceptualized by ideological factors. In other words, cultural and literary commentaries of this period drew powerfully on medical sciences for the diagnosis of problems that were rooted in political, social, and economic circumstances, rather than physiological origins.

Fictional representations of *abulia*, therefore, offer an illuminating context for the study of a wider phenomenon that persists to the current day: the transposition of medical terminology to other linguistic realms. In the case of *abulia*, as for neurasthenia, this process may result in the cultural legitimization of symptoms, whether by journalists, politicians, or authors of fiction, in relation to a specified community. The present analysis of Baroja's early fiction seeks to contribute to the ongoing development of scholarship on literary narratives of pathological bodies and minds, and the medical terminology employed to critique society during periods of crisis, change, and ideological uncertainty.

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