Colloquial Castigation of the French, the Russians, the Spaniards and Napoleon in Arturo Pérez-Reverte's La sombra del águila (1993)

Colloquial Castigation of the French, the Russians, the Spaniards and Napoleon in Arturo Pérez-Reverte's La sombra del águila (1993)

John C. Mc Intyre
Independent researcher
University of Strathclyde

Recibido el 1 de marzo de 2010
Aprobado el 26 de abril de 2010

Summary: In 1812, a Spanish battalion is part of Napoleon's army invading Russia. In a major battle, when the Spaniards intend to surrender to the Russians, the French cavalry 'saves' the Spaniards. The Spaniards abandon their original plan and re-engage on the French side. They perform superbly well. In October, Napoleon's *Grande Armée* begins the retreat and crosses the river Beresina in late November 1812. Eleven Spaniards enter Spain in April 1814. The narrator, speaking on behalf of the battalion, describes the French as 'franchutes' and 'gabachos'. French commanders are mocked pitilessly. The Russian ('ruski') artillery and Cossack cavalry fight well, though their commander is a disaster. The French consider the Spaniards to be patriotic, violent – and unfit for modern government. Napoleon is to the Spaniards 'el Petit Cabrón', 'el Petit', 'el Enano', 'el Ilustre' and 'el Monstruo'. Pérez-Reverte develops an impressive variety of pejorative designations for individuals and social groups. He also delivers a great many examples of familiar speech. In other texts and in *La sombra del águila* Pérez-Reverte displays profound knowledge and mastery of colloquial and vulgar speech.

Key Words: Arturo Pérez Reverte. *La sombra del águila.* Uses of the colloquial language. Historical novel.

Resumen: En 1812, un batallón español forma parte del ejército napoleónico en la invasión de Rusia. Cuando en una batalla importante los españoles piensan rendirse a los rusos, la caballería francesa 'salva' a los españoles. Los españoles abandonan el plan original y vuelven a combatir en nombre de los franceses. Su actuación militar es impecable. En octubre, la *Grande Armée* inicia el regreso y cruza el río Beresina hacia finales de noviembre de 1812. En abril de 1814 once españoles entran en España. El narrador, en nombre del batallón español, describe a los franceses como 'franchutes' y 'gabachos', burlándose despiadadamente de los jefes militares franceses. La artillería 'ruski' y la caballería cosaca son buenos soldados, aunque su comandante es un desastre. Según los franceses, los españoles son patrióticos, violentos – e incapaces de comprender un sistema de gobierno moderno. Para los españoles Napoleón es 'el Petit Cabrón', 'el Petit', 'el Enano', 'el Ilustre' y 'el Monstruo'. Pérez-Reverte desarrolla una variedad impresionante de términos peyorativos para los individuos y los grupos sociales. También presenta muchísimos ejemplos del lenguaje familiar. En otros textos y aquí en *La sombra del águila* Pérez-Reverte revela unos conocimientos increíbles y una maestría del lenguaje coloquial y vulgar.

Palabras clave: Arturo Pérez Reverte. *La sombra del águila*. Usos del lenguaje coloquial. Novela histórica.

Arturo PÉREZ-REVERTE published *La sombra del águila* in 1993[6]. The edition used here is the paperback edition of January 2004[7]. This edition has 20 black and white illustrations by José Belmonte, and 131 pages with around 25,000 words of text. Rather than a novel, this is a novella.

The novella deals with an episode involving Spanish soldiers during the Napoleonic Wars. After Napoleon's armies were given access to Spain in late 1807, King Charles IV and his heir Fernando were persuaded by Napoleon and Talleyrand to surrender the Spanish crown. When Napoleon insisted that Spanish army units now form part of his Imperial army, fifteen Spanish regiments (c. 15,000 men) were posted to Denmark. The popular uprising in Madrid on the second of May 1808 was bloodily suppressed by the French, and in June 1808 Napoleon proclaimed his brother Joseph King of Spain. Ordered to swear allegiance to King Joseph ["Pepe Botella"], several Spanish units in Denmark deserted in the late summer of 1808. Some escaping units were intercepted and were imprisoned (1808-1812) in Hamburg, Germany. As Napoleon prepared to invade Russia in 1812, the Spanish soldiers in the prison camp were given a choice: rot here, or join Napoleon's *Grande Armée* in its invasion of Russia. Thinking "De perdidos, al río", over 2,000 surviving Spaniards joined the campaign.

In the novella, by late 1812 Napoleon faces determined Russian resistance at the Sbodonovo ford on the river Vorosik, at the gates of Moscow. The French right is torn to pieces by Russian artillery and Cossack cavalry. From his vantage-point, Napoleon suddenly sees through the smoke 400+ soldiers in French uniforms marching towards the Russian lines. This is the 2nd Battalion of the 326th Regiment of Line Infantry – the Spaniards from the prison camp, now intending to surrender *en bloc* to the Russians. Napoleon orders cavalry support for the Spaniards, and – just as the Spaniards are about to raise the white flag and surrender - they are 'saved' by the French cavalry. The Spaniards hide the white flag, re-join the French attack and contribute greatly to the winning of the battle. The following night the Spanish survivors stand honour guard in the Kremlin. They then have to fight their way, with the rest of the *Grande Armée*, in the long retreat back to France. In the Epilogue, eighteen months later (30 April 1814), the last eleven survivors cross the border from a restored Bourbon France into a Spain once again in the hands of another Bourbon King, Fernando VII.

An anonymous first-person plural narrator claims to represent the whole Spanish battalion: ' ... el 326 batallón de Infantería de Línea – o sea, nosotros- ...' (25). In chapter IV this collective Spanish narrator describes a French officer thus: '... Gerard no era mala gente, sino uno de esos franchutes alegres y amables que había combatido

[6] Arturo PÉREZ-REVERTE, *La sombra del águila*, Ediciones Santillana, Madrid, 1993.
[7] Arturo PÉREZ-REVERTE, *La sombra del águila*, séptima edición, Santillana-Punto de lectura, Madrid, 2004.

en España, mayo de 1808 en el parque de Monteleón...' (58). This use of the familiar and colloquial word 'franchute' [= 'Frenchie'] applied to the likeable Gerard seems almost affectionate. Within seconds, however, the tone darkens: '... Monteleón – una escabechina que nos contaba [Gerard] con detalle, admirado del valor de nuestros paisanos -, y escapado después de Bailén por los pelos, cuando Castaños hizo que el ejército gabacho, con todos sus entorchados y sus águilas invictas, se comiera una derrota como el sombrero de un picador' (58). Whereas the Frenchman Gerard honestly recognises Spanish courage in Madrid 1808, the Spanish soldiers in Russia do not identify with the *Grande Armée* but with 'nuestros paisanos' [JMcI's emphasis]. The Spaniards take pride in General Castaños' victory at Bailén (July 1808) over the allegedly invincible French. Here, the use of 'gabacho' [frog, froggie] in the unit 'el ejército gabacho' goes beyond 'familiar' and 'colloquial' into 'pejorative': this word 'gabacho' is intended to demean, to hurt.

So: How extensive are the uses of 'franchute' and 'gabacho' in the novella?

The seventeen other uses of 'franchute' include: 'cercados por los franchutes y sus mamporreros daneses' (37); '... mientras el emperador de los osterreiches tragaba quina por un tubo, mordiéndose el cetro de humillación con los franchutes de amos del cotarro... ' (74); 'alférez, levanta otra vez la bandera franchute...' (96); 'a un palmo habíamos estado de librarnos de los franchutes' (137); '... el pillaje, que a esas horas estaba siendo practicado con entusiasmo por todo el ejército franchute' (145); 'escuchando los cantos y la juerga de los franchutes...' (147); and 'cayeron prisioneros o fueron fusilados por los franchutes...' (158).

PÉREZ-REVERTE always has 'los franceses' available as a neutral general designation, and he uses it regularly, as in: '... el primer motín de la División del Norte contra las tropas francesas...' (31). This neutral designation and the warmer tone used momentarily to describe Major Gerard – though as the last remaining French officer in the Spanish battalion he is shot in the back to prevent him interfering with the plan to desert – seem to be outweighed by the repetitive use of the mildly contemptuous 'franchute'. A more hateful context using 'franchute' – admittedly with the addition of 'de mierda' - occurs when a French officer in Denmark, worried about Spanish contacts with English ships patrolling the Channel, remonstrates with a prickly Spanish officer who responds by defining the Frenchman as 'franchute de mierda' (34).

The French are also known as 'los franzuskis', as when a Russian artillery-man watches the French cavalry charge: 'están locos estos franzuskis' (81). The formation 'franzuski' is based on 'los ruskis', the latter unit used 26 times in the text. The use of 'estos franzuskis' seems at most slightly contemptuous, though when the Spaniards on the retreat from Moscow once again try to surrender to the Russians, they claim: ' – Aquí todos tovarich [= friends], y los franzuskis a tomar por saco.' (159), where 'los franzuskis' is set in a more hostile frame.

 ISSN: 1988-8430

If 'franchute' and 'franzuski' are mildly but not exceptionally abusive, 'gabacho' meaning 'frog, froggie' is fully pejorative. Its first use in chapter II is clearly meant to offend: '... al comandante Dufour, el gabacho adjunto, que era un perfecto cantamañanas' (31). Fourteen other uses include: '... los gabachos empezaron a desconfiar de nuestros contactos con los británicos' (34); '...y que íbamos a intentar llegar a España como fuera para ajustarles allí las cuentas a los gabachos' (35); '... no estaba dispuesto a pudrirse en un pontón gabacho' (37); 'tuvimos nuestra oportunidad: seguir pudriéndonos allí o combatir con uniforme gabacho' (39); '... cuando Castaños hizo que el ejército gabacho, con todos sus entorchados y sus águilas invictas, se comiera una derrota como el sombrero de un picador' (58: already cited); '... pero otras [veces] tenías encima del cogote la mirada de algún jefazo gabacho...' (62); 'todo cristo luchando allí [= en la Península] para echar a los gabachos, y nosotros con su uniforme' (63); and 'y al 326 se le mantenía siempre entre otras unidades gabachas' (161). A single use of 'gabacho' becomes almost warm in appreciation, when on the retreat from Moscow French hussars rescue the Spaniards from vengeful Cossacks: ' – Hay que joderse, François. En toda esta puta guerra nunca me he alegrado tanto de verle el careto a un gabacho como hoy a ti'. (160) On the other hand, the strength of hostile feeling possible in 'gabacho' is seen particularly in 'Y es que hay que ser gabacho, o sea, gilipollas.' (136). The unit 'gabacho' can be heavily pejorative.

French officers are mocked continually, especially when they speak Spanish. The phonetic difficulty in moving from the French 'r' to the Spanish 'r' is seen in ' - ¡Peggos espagnoles! ¡Tgaidogues!... [= Traidores] Jugaguéis [= Juraréis] fidelidad al Empegadog y al gey de Espagna Gosé Bonapagte o seguéis [= seréis] fusilados!' (32); 'Oh, les espagnols. Que son braves, los tíos. Quién nos lo iba a decir, Dubois. Vivir para ver. Togueadoges [= Toreadores], eso es lo que son. Unos togueadogues.' (42); '... dale con lo de <<peggos espagnoles, necesitáis disciplina>>' (57); ' – Que conste, guenegal [= general] Castanios, que me guindo [= rindo] pog evitag deggamamiento de sangge...' (58); 'y encima pasan vitoreándote, los tíos, hégoes espagnoles, te dicen, camagadas y todo lo demás' (96); '... venga a dar vítores a los valegosos espagnoles...' (97); '... diciéndole piropos a la cantinera, cosas del tipo guapa espagnola, si tú quegueg yo te hagué muy feliz y todo eso.' (133); and in 'Así que el mariscal Lafleur vino personalmente a traernos el vodka - <<bgavos espagnoles, el Empegadog y la Patgia están oggullosos de vosotgos>>. –' (136) The French officers' failure to deliver the Spanish 'r' should be trivial, but by dint of repetition becomes a matter of note and a signal of scorn.

Such tiny details of pronunciation are also turned to comical effect when the Spanish narrator or soldiers – perhaps told at some stage that they speak French 'comme une vache espagnole' – desecrate the French language with phonetic barbarities such as: 'Que éramos españoles y que los alonsanfán [= Allons, enfants... = los franceses] verdes las habían segado' (32); 'mesié' [= monsieur] (32); '... donde todos sus anfansdelapatrí [= enfants de la patrie = los franceses] habían salido por piernas'

(42); 'le-jour-de-gluar [= le jour de gloire] y todo eso' (51); 'Se han cargado al general Nosequiencogne...' (62); '... haciéndole al Ilustre de claque. Alonsanfá, Sire.' (127); 'Así que dígale a la Madre Patria que me agarre de aquí, mi mariscal, silvuplé.' [= s'il vous plaît] (136); and '... estar metidos hasta las cejas en esta puñetera mierda, Sire. Porque la Frans [= la France] nos la trae floja y Vuecencia nos la refanfinfla, Sire.' (150).

Among the French senior officers Marshal Murat is particularly mocked. Murat, an incredibly brave cavalry commander, is very vain, and not very bright: 'El mariscal Murat, emperifollado como para un desfile, se cuadró con un taconazo. Iba de punta en blanco, con uniforme de húsar y entorchados hasta en la bragueta. Se rizaba el pelo con tenacillas y lucía un aro de oro en una oreja. Parecía un gitano guaperas vestido por madame Lulú para hacer de príncipe encantado en una opereta italiana.' (49); '... en Viena, o tal vez fuera un vals, con todas las frauleins mirándole el paquete al apuesto Murat' (74); 'tenemos a Murat, todo bordados y floripondios, con una capacidad mental de menos quince pero valiente como un toro español...' (92); and 'Y Murat, con su dolmán de seda y sus rizos de madame Lulú y su menos seso que un mosquito' (92). PÉREZ-REVERTE's presentation of Murat – 'el Rizos' (132, 134, 137) - before the Emperor after the successful charge is malicious in the extreme. Murat's attempt to quote from the classics – '- Llegué, vi y vencí, Sire' (128), his confusion of 'autómatas/autónomos', 'enrollando/arrollando', 'osmérico/homérico' and Troy/Carthage (132-134) show him to be a cavalry commander of very little brain and limited culture.

The other senior commanders in the General Staff surrounding Napoleon are not spared criticism. They defer always in unison to their Supreme Commander: '... mientras los mariscales, secretarios, ordenanzas y correveidiles se inclinaban respetuosamente a su alrededor', with constant use of 'Sí, Sire. En efecto, Sire. Faltaba más, Sire.' [= No faltaba más] (13). Marshal Lafleur is 'siempre sonriente y untuoso, pegado a él [a Napoleón] como su sombra, quien igual le proporcionaba un mapa que la caja de rapé, que le mamporreaba sin empacho fulanas de lujo en los vivacs...' (14). They fear the Emperor's anger: 'mientras los mariscales se preparaban lo mejor que podían para encajar la bronca que iba a caerles encima de un momento a otro' (17). They re-act collectively to the Emperor's every gesture and word: 'Todos los mariscales se apresuraron a mirar en aquella dirección, e inmediatamente brotó un coro de mondieus, sacrebleus y nomdedieus.' (19). When General Labraguette, who stutters under fire and in brothels (20), defines the Spanish battalion's advance as suicidal, 'los otros mariscales, generales y edecanes asentían graves con la cabeza.' (22). Colonel Alaix 'tenía fama de numerero y fantasma, y nadie lo tragaba en el Estado Mayor.' (23), one example of many of the spiteful jealousies among the General Staff. Marshal Bernadotte is an outrageous flatterer (33). These senior commanders' motives are questioned: '...y todos los pechos galoneados en oro, todos los comparsas que lo rodeaban a la espera de un ducado en Holstein, una pensión vitalicia o un enchufe para su yerno en Fontainebleau, suspiraban a coro compartiendo solícitos su alivio, mais oui,

 ISSN: 1988-8430

Sire, voila les braves y todo eso.' (43). They are viewed as 'la claque', a faceless and witless audience paid to applaud (48). Invited to make positive suggestions to help the Spanish battalion, 'Todos carraspearon adoptando gestos graves, igual que si tuviesen las sugerencias a montones en la punta de la lengua, pero nadie dijo esta boca es mía.' (48). The French General Staff contribute very little to winning the battle.

Overall, how are the collective Russians designated?

PÉREZ-REVERTE on many occasions uses the standard 'los rusos' and 'los cosacos'. He also uses 'ruskis' or 'los ruskis' on twenty-six occasions, the first time in: 'Menos mal que a los artilleros ruskis debía de habérseles ido la mano con el vodka, porque tiraban fatal...' (31). In spite of the mildly comic effect of the –ski ending, there are moments when Russian and Cossack behaviour is awful, as when 'los supervivientes de un batallón italiano que intentó entregarse a los ruskis fueron degollados, desde el comandante al [sic] corneta, sin darles tiempo a ofrecer explicaciones, o sea, ni *ochichornia tovarich* ni espaguettis en vinagre' (159) or when '... y los cosacos *¡Hurra, pobieda!*, clavándonos las lanzas y degollando a mansalva, en una orgía de vodka y sangre.' (169). Some justification for this Russian fury in revenge is seen in: 'A fin de cuentas, como nuestros paisanos allá abajo, los ruskis se limitaban a defender su tierra contra el Enano y los mariscales y toda la pandilla de mangantes de París, los Fouchés y los Talleyrand, con sus medallas y sus combinaciones de salón y toda su mierda bajo los encajes y las medias de seda y las puntillas.' (61). The French invasion of Russia is never given a proper justification. So 'los ruskis' and 'los Iván' in the role of victims do not seem to take on the vicious edge that can permeate 'franchute' and especially 'gabacho' applied to the foreign invader.

Overall, how does the Russian army perform?

The Russian artillery 'había machacado concienzudamente a dos regimientos de infantería de línea a primera hora de la mañana, sólo un rato antes de que la caballería cosaca hiciera filetes, literalmente, a un escuadrón del Tercero de Húsares y a otro de lanceros polacos... El flanco derecho [del ejército francés] era una piltrafa...' (15-16). The Russian artillery are still performing reasonably well as the Spanish battalion approaches the Russian lines under the cover of a ridge.

Behind the Russian artillery, three or four regiments of infantry – four to five thousand men – are resting, under the command of Prince Rudolfkovski, close relation of Tsar Alexander. Half-asleep, with a ferocious headache after heavy sex and much vodka the previous evening, Rudolfkovski sends his servant Igor to find out the cause of the sudden noise at the artillery battery. When Igor, from behind the Russian cannons, sees the advancing French cavalry and Spanish infantry, he beats a highly personal retreat. Taken completely by surprise, the 4,000+ Russians are driven back 'hacia Sbodonovo, maricón el último, metiéndose por las calles del pueblo en dirección al río y al puente de la carretera de Moscú.' (109). The Spaniards, still wanting to

surrender to a Russian unit, start to surrender to Rudolfkovski. The latter tries to shoot Sergeant Ortega, whereupon Ortega kills Rudolfkovski.

Two squadrons of Cossack cavalry (200 men), ordered to protect the fleeing Russians, confront the Spaniards in the town's main street. In restricted space the Spaniards form into three lines of riflemen. The first volley kills twenty horses, blocking further charges from the Cossacks. With three volleys every fifteen seconds, the Spaniards fire continuously for five minutes. Some Cossacks finally break through, to be dispatched by Spanish bayonets. The Spaniards drive forward to the bridge, having contributed massively to driving off four Russian regiments of infantry and destroying two squadrons of Cossack cavalry.

The text does not comment directly on Russian military failings, but the reader can see that Rudolfkovski and the other Russian commanders, in the middle of a major battle, failed to post lookouts and be prepared for a surprise enemy incursion. They failed to press home the advantage won earlier by the Russian artillery and the Cossack cavalry. When their troops panicked and fled, Russian officers failed to rally them. And the Russian officers failed to take advantage of their superior numbers. In this phase of the battle only two squadrons of Cossacks performed well.

If Prince Rudolfkovski is suspect in military terms, he also seems suspect for non-military reasons. He is in the habit of whipping his servant Igor, but only 'por faltas muy graves como plancharle mal el cuello de una camisa, no bruñirle la hoja del sable de modo conveniente, o retrasarse en las marchas en vez de correr junto a su estribo derecho con una botella de champaña razonablemente frío a mano.' (106-107) This snapshot of the relationship between the Russian aristocracy and their servants is frightening.

If Rudolfkovski's command under-performed at Sbodonovo, during the French retreat from Moscow, the Russian army harried the French tirelessly. Some three hundred thousand French soldiers were lost to the weather, exhaustion and hunger, wolves, suicide - and to the merciless Russian persecution. Though other Napoleonic units managed to surrender to the Russians, and also managed to survive, this Spanish battalion did not manage to surrender. In the later stages of the retreat, the Cossacks, drunk with vodka and blood-lust, slice the throats of stragglers and anyone seeking to surrender. At the river Beresina, where French sappers struggle heroically to keep bridges open, a hundred Spanish survivors and a few Italians barely make up a company. In the face of ferocious Russian pressure, Captain García drives his men across the last bridge before himself dying alongside his faithful Rifleman Mínguez. In fourteen very briskly written pages PÉREZ-REVERTE catches the horror of the retreat, the incredible pressure from the Russians and the toughness and spiky bravery of the few survivors.

 ISSN: 1988-8430

Though the Spaniards collectively might be thought to be the 'heroes' of the novella, PÉREZ-REVERTE contrives to build in some interesting critical commentary upon them. The author routinely refers to them as 'los españoles', as in the first application: ' – Españoles, Sire... – Repita eso, Alaix. ... – Españoles, Sire. El 326 batallón de Infantería de Línea, ¿recuerda?... Voluntarios. Aquellos tipos que se alistaron en Dinamarca.' (25). The unit 'Aquellos tipos que... ' adds a touch of Gallic scorn.

Most of the critical comment about the Spaniards comes not from the labels used to designate them as a group, but from the anecdotes, sometimes in extensive detail, related about them by the French, based on the French experience of the Spaniards in Spain, in Denmark and now in Russia. In chapter VIII 'Confidencias en Santa Helena', for example, PÉREZ-REVERTE projects forward in time to the moment when Napoleon is dictating his memoirs to his companion-in-exile, Les Cases. This allows Napoleon to look back particularly to the Spanish battalion's performance at Sbodonovo and to the Peninsular campaign. According to Napoleon, Godoy, Prime Minister to Charles IV, 'chuleaba a la madre'. [= a la reina] (121). While imprisoned at Valençay Fernando VII always entered Napoleon's room 'de rodillas'. (121). Fernando has executed hundreds since regaining the Spanish throne in 1814. The Spanish people demanded that they be given back their chains. In this presentation Spanish rulers and ruled seem utterly abject.

The Emperor, thinking Spain would be an easy conquest, now regrets getting into 'semejante berenjenal. Eso ni era guerra ni era nada; una pesadilla es lo que era.' (121-123). Napoleon remembers 'aquellos desgraciados con sus ojos de desesperación, engañados por reyes, generales y ministros durante siglos de hambre y miseria, analfabetos e ingobernables, con su orgullo y su furia homicida como único patrimonio.' (123) His mistake was to give Spaniards 'un enemigo contra el que unirse, una guerra salvaje, un objeto para desahogar su indignación y su rabia.' (123-125). Whereas in Russia he was beaten by the weather, 'quien me venció en España fueron aquellos campesinos bajitos y morenos que nos escupían a la cara mientras los fusilábamos... España es un país con muy mala leche.' (125). Napoleon wonders at 'Una gente como aquella [sic], que hasta las mujeres empujaban cañones y tiraban de navaja para degollar franceses, y fíjese qué gobernantes ha tenido durante toda su desgraciada historia.' (125).

In similar vein, Marshal Murat recalls Madrid on the second of May 1808, with 'los chuloputas y los jaques de los barrios bajos convergiendo hacia la Puerta del Sol con aquellas navajas enormes empalmadas, listos para acuchillar a sus mamelucos y coraceros' (133). That day six French grenadiers were accused of killing the cantinera Manolita Malasaña: 'Cuando, un par de horas después, los compañeros de los granaderos fueron en su busca, los trozos más grandes que pudieron localizar consistían

en doce criadillas ensartadas con un espetón en la puerta de la tasca' (133). Murat knew 'lo que era la furia española' (134). So between them Napoleon and Murat highlight the spinelessness of the Spanish ruling class, the people's unpreparedness for modern forms of government, their primeval patriotism, incredible bravery and unlimited capacity for violence.

Some positive things are said of the Spaniards collectively. Both Russians and Spaniards were defending their own land against a foreign invader: 'A fin de cuentas, como nuestros paisanos allá abajo, los ruskis se limitaban a defender su tierra contra el Enano y los mariscales...' (61). When executing the Russian wounded after a battle, the Spanish narrator claims: 'Te cepillabas un regimiento ruso y después, al rematar a los heridos a la bayoneta, veías las caras de campesinos que te recordaban a tus paisanos de Aragón o de La Mancha' (61). Spanish inclinations to identify with the Russians and therefore to slide the bayonet past rather than into the wounded Russian were spotted by French officers, who insisted the wounded be killed, especially in retaliation for the death of a French officer. After Sbodonovo, the Spanish battalion was not 'en condiciones de violar a nadie' (145). Planning still to surrender to the Russians, they did not want to be accused of raping Russian women. Whatever their motives on that occasion, the Spaniards looted in Moscow, but they did not rape. So, inclined to some measure of compassion for wounded Russians and not inclined to rape, Spanish soldiers in Moscow seem to occupy higher moral ground than the generality of the French army.

Two Spanish soldiers – Captain García and Rifleman Mínguez - display great qualities as soldiers and as human beings.

Captain García is first seen as '... buen tipo, un chusquero valiente, pequeñajo y duro como la madre que lo parió, de Soria, con aquellas patillas enormes, de boca de hacha, que casi le tapaban la cara' (29). He is totally identified with his 400 Spanish soldiers in their determination to use the confusion of the battle to surrender to the Russians. They know that other Spanish units trying to desert have been very severely punished. The battalion's two French officers are shot in the back to prevent any interference (57), leaving Captain García in command.

Just as they make to surrender, the French cavalry (1,200 men) arrive and ruin the Spanish plan (96). Captain García reacts quickly and cleverly: '... nos dirige una mirada de tranquila desesperación y después se encoge de hombros y le grita a Muñoz... alférez, levanta otra vez la bandera franchute, levanta el águila de los cojones...' (96-97). The Spaniards, still wanting to surrender to the Russians, are angry at the spoiling of the plan: García vents his anger on the first line of Russian artillerymen. While Murat's cavalrymen re-organise, the Spaniards pursue the fleeing Russians, who turn and shoot some of the Spaniards. Encountering Prince Rudolfkovski, the Spaniards try to surrender to him. Not understanding their plea, the Prince fires at Sergeant Ortega:

 ISSN: 1988-8430

Ortega kills the Prince. The Spanish momentum takes them into Sbodonovo village, where, still keen to surrender, they are confronted by 200 Cossacks protecting the Russian retreat and about to charge. Lacking space for their infantry square, Captain García arranges three lines of riflemen: 'ya nos rendiremos otro día' (112). Captain García and Lieutenant Arregui direct a withering sequenced fire – three volleys every fifteen seconds - into the Cossacks. García orders a bayonet charge to finish off the Cossacks. The Spanish charge finally stops at the bridge on the other side of the village (118).

Having come within a whisker of surrender to the Russians, the Spaniards – now less than 300 in number - have had to disguise their original intentions from the French by re-engaging in the battle – which they have done so well that they have helped to chase off four Russian infantry regiments and have destroyed two squadrons of Cossack cavalry. Napoleon sends congratulations and a hundred bottles of vodka to the Spanish battalion. Captain García keeps Spanish ambitions under control: '... al mal tiempo buena cara, hijos míos, de momento parece que somos héroes, así que paciencia y barajar. Ya desertaremos más adelante' (136). A large part of this military success and the successful masking of the Spaniards' intentions to desert is due to the professionalism, leadership and protective care of Captain García.

One survivor is Rifleman Mínguez, 'un gaditano de San Fernando con más pluma que el sombrero de Murat' (137-138). Mínguez, a veteran skilled at mending clothes and cooking, '... era muy maricón, pero en combate se volvía bravo como una fiera. Amaba en secreto al capitán García, aunque el suyo era un secreto a voces...' (138). In the battle he ferociously protected Captain García: 'Mínguez se había cargado él solo a una docena de cosacos' (138). After the battle, as he sews the captain's jacket at the camp-fire, '... le sonreía respetuosamente al capitán, que se dejaba querer, bonachón, porque el fusilero Mínguez era buena persona y nunca se pasaba de la raya' (139). Mínguez, like his captain, is a very accomplished soldier.

The next day French commanders, fussing over the physical appearance of the Spaniards before they are presented to Napoleon in Moscow, proclaim that the Spaniards need discipline, 'mucha disciplina' (141). The French commanders resent the loss of relatives in battles in Spain to 'estos salvajes' (141). As García orders the battalion to attention, he mutters: '... poned cara de soldados, hijos míos, que no se os note mucho de qué vais. Más vale ser héroes a la fuerza que fusilados por sorteo, uno de cada dos, como aquellos compañeros a los que les echaron el guante en Vitebsk' (143). García is very aware of the dangerous situation that Spanish soldiers minded to desert are in, and is doing all he can to protect his men. Napoleon has to take Labraguette's Legion of Honour to decorate Captain García, promising to get Labraguette a new one '... cuando volvamos a París... Si volvemos' (144). García cannot be sure if the Emperor spoke these words seriously or not.

The Spaniards are allowed to do a little looting, and are set that night as honour guard in the Kremlin citadel. Happy to loot, the Spaniards are unwilling to rape: '... tampoco era conveniente dejar mal cartel entre los ruskis' (145). Captain García breaks a Spanish soldier's jaw to prevent a possible rape. Clearly, the Spaniards do not wish to upset the Russians: they still plan to desert. From the Kremlin they can see French soldiers going round the city with torches and they hear 'de vez en cuando... el grito de una mujer' (148).

At midnight, Napoleon, with no escort, suddenly appears on the Kremlin walls. He and García listen to the guitar-playing and singing of Pedro el cordobés. García momentarily is tempted to shoot the unprotected Emperor. Knowing that he in turn would be shot, García gives up on the idea. Asked by Napoleon why the Spaniards had advanced as they did, García holds back on all the possible answers he might give and answers only: ' – No había otro sitio adonde ir, Sire' (151). While Napoleon half-smiles at García, 'entre irónico y comprensivo' (151), García's eyes do not blink: they are both 'soldados profesionales y se estaban entendiendo sin palabras' (151). The Emperor leaves, and García sees that Moscow is burning. Later, the Captain will report to his men: ' – Ese tío sabía que en Sbodonovo nos quisimos largar. Se dio cuenta pero le importa un carajo... Su instinto le dice que la *Grande Armée* tiene los días contados, y ni él mismo está seguro de salir bien de ésta' (151). García's ability to sniff out a military secret is as good as the Emperor's.

It is ironic that French commanders should feel that the Spanish troops – 'estos salvajes' (141) - needed discipline. While French soldiers rape, Captain García personally prevents an act of rape by a Spaniard. Also, the city is apparently set on fire by the French: '... escuchando los cantos y la juerga de los franchutes que iban con antorchas de un lado para otro por la ciudad desierta' (147-148), and '... Se asomó a la muralla, inquieto, y entonces vio el resplandor rojo que crecía en la zona este de la ciudad. Moscú estaba en llamas' (153). The Spaniards are seemingly not responsible for either the acts of rape or for the burning of the city.

Early on in the retreat from Moscow, the French commanders, almost as if they had suspicions of the Spaniards, kept the Spanish battalion within the main body of the army. After capturing some Russian prisoners, the Spaniards thought to use very bad weather and the prisoners to hand themselves over to regular Russian army units. Confronted instead by charging Cossacks in thick woodland, they are rescued by French hussars and returned to the main body of the retreating French army.

As the weather worsens, Captain García every morning does all he possibly can to get and keep his men moving: 'aunque sea a patadas en el culo tengo que devolveros a España' (161). Many do die, and García 'vencido, sorbiéndose lágrimas de impotencia y rabia que se le helaban en la cara, ordenaba coged los fusiles y vámonos

 ISSN: 1988-8430

de aquí' (161). While enraged at his inability to protect his men better, García is careful not to leave the Spanish rifles for the pursuing Russians.

One day, Napoleon approaches the Spaniards. Not recognising García from the Kremlin, Napoleon asks the captain to identify the village. García's answer is impertinent: 'Ni lo sé ni me importa' (164). Even more impertinent is García's action in pulling the Legion of Honour from his pocket and throwing it into the snow at the Emperor's feet. Napoleon stops a senior officer from killing García, and rides on.

At the river Beresina, in a three-day battle, French sappers manage to make pontoon bridges for the French army to cross. By 28 November 1812 around one hundred Spaniards and a few Italians make up barely a company. An Italian colonel and major are killed, leaving Captain García in command. Some soldiers still want to surrender to the Russians though all reports say that Cossacks are killing all stragglers and anyone trying to surrender. García decides to attempt a bridge crossing before the French blow up the bridges: 'Tal y como están las cosas, a España sólo se va por ahí' (167). When Sergeant Ortega protests, García picks up a rifle, 'se fue hacia Ortega y le saltó los dientes de un culatazo. – Insisto – dijo, volviendo a señalar hacia el otro lado del río. - A España se va por allí. Después se cargó a hombros a Ortega, que estaba sin conocimiento, y nos pusimos de nuevo en marcha' (167-168). Captain García makes the decision, imposes it on the reluctant amongst his men, picks up the soldier whom he has just rendered unconscious and leads his men towards the only possible route to safety – that offered by the bridge. García's decisiveness, his physical ability to impose his leadership in a very fraught situation and his ongoing care for his misguided and unconscious rifleman demand the greatest respect.

The Spaniards fight a horrendous rearguard action to get onto the last bridge just as French sappers set fuses. Chaos ensues. With Russian shrapnel and Cossack lances everywhere, Captain García fights heroically as he urges his men across. Rifleman Mínguez drags at a badly wounded García. Ordered to run by their Captain, the last Spaniards bolt for the other side. As García collapses, Mínguez stands over the Captain and confronts the advancing Russians. With García clutching one of his legs, Mínguez kills yet another Russian before he is overwhelmed. The bridge explodes.

These two Spaniards are very fine professional soldiers. Whatever the reasons for his devotion to Captain García, Rifleman Mínguez's loyalty to a comrade, his bravery and his savagery in battle are quite exemplary. The Captain's ability to shield his men from French suspicions and possible reprisals is excellent, as is his ability to stare through Napoleon's unvoiced questions, as are his qualities of leadership and sheer military skill and nerve in the confrontation with the Cossack cavalry. Captain García is a soldier and a military leader to his fingertips. As PÉREZ-REVERTE closes down the main narrative, the text slides from factual report of the explosion, from '... y los demás le caen todos encima, y en esto que el puente salta por el aire bajo sus pies...' - into a different tone: '... y Mínguez se larga, con su capitán, derecho a ese cielo donde van,

con dos cojones, los maricones de San Fernando que también son pobres soldaditos valientes.' (170) Although the final unit contains rude items like 'cojones' and 'maricones', the tone has become almost benedictional: good soldiers do go to Heaven.

So PÉREZ-REVERTE is perfectly able to accentuate the positive. He has praised the action of the Russian artillery and the Cossack cavalry on the morning of the battle. He has lauded the bravery of Marshal Ney and that of Marshal Murat. The ranks of the 200 Cossacks in Sbodonovo main street and of the French sappers at the Beresina river must have contained characters like Captain García and Rifleman Mínguez, but we do not hear the heroic detail of these Russian or French actions. We do hear such heroic detail in the case of the Spaniards.

The final main target of PÉREZ-REVERTE's hostile commentary is Napoleon himself. The opening lines show the Emperor in a classic pose, observing a battle from a vantage-point. He is described by his veterans as le Petit Caporal, el Pequeño Cabo – the Little Corporal. Instantly, the Spanish narrator, speaking on behalf of the battalion, shatters this tone of reverence and awe: 'Nosotros lo llamábamos de otra manera. El Maldito Enano, por ejemplo. O Le Petit Cabrón' (14). As early, then, as the second page of the novella the collective Spanish narrator in defining Napoleon as 'The Damned Dwarf' and as 'The Little Swine/Bastard/Cuckold' shows a willingness to use the most gross elements of the Spanish language to describe Napoleon. And, in spite of the fact that capital letters are relatively little used in Spanish, the use of capital letters in the French 'Le Petit Caporal' is carried over into Spanish in the first uses of 'El Maldito Enano' and 'Le Petit Cabrón' – and into all the subsequent uses of 'el Petit Cabrón', 'el Petit', 'el Enano' and 'el Ilustre'. The choice of words to describe Napoleon and the use of the inflationary capital letters in those mocking designations is a systematic attempt to puncture the myth of the Napoleonic person and his Grand Imperial ambitions.

Such heavy mocking of Napoleon is odd in that Napoleon at one moment did offer Europe a possiblity of profound reform and release from ancient structures into more modern societies. PÉREZ-REVERTE does recognise the broad European composition of Napoleon's army in Russia, in: '... como esos españoles de allá abajo, en mi ejército de veinte naciones' (77) and in: 'Un tercio de los soldados de la *Grande Armée* no éramos franceses, sino españoles, alemanes, italianos, holandeses, polacos, enrolados de grado o por fuerza en la empresa imperial' (157). Yet any noble conception of this continental army as a legitimate instrument to bring French-style liberty, equality and fraternity to the antiquated and autocratic monarchies of old Europe is barely visible in the text. Napoleon's encounters with European monarchs and heirs are usually presented in anecdotal and comical detail rather than in terms of serious political ideas.

The presentation of Napoleon is, in fact, very physical and direct. Napoleon's lack of stature is highlighted in eighteen uses of 'el Petit' and no less than fifty-three

 ISSN: 1988-8430

uses of 'el Enano'. Chapter IX alone has eleven uses of 'el Enano': 'el Enano nos había hecho enviar un centenar de botellas de vodka...' (136); '... el Enano tomó posesión del asunto' (140); 'el Enano que aparece pasando revista...' (141); 'Y a todo esto el Enano que se para ante García...' (143); 'El Enano despachó a Labraguette...' (143); 'Pero el Enano miraba a los ojos del capitán García...' (144); '... el Enano hablaba en broma...' (144); '... apareció el Enano en persona...' (148); '... el Enano hizo una pausa...' (150); 'Entonces el Enano se volvió despacio...' (151); and '... lo cierto es que al Enano debió de gustarle...' (152).

It must be admitted that in fact the harsh designation 'El Maldito Enano' on the second page of chapter one is the only example of this unit in the whole novella. It also must be recognised that Napoleon often shows a cutting intelligence and a verbal brutality that are usually quite justified. Impatient, for example, at Colonel Alaix's slow delivery of vital news, Napoleon warns him: 'Le recuerdo que al duque de Enghien lo hice fusilar por menos de eso. Y que con esa mierda de flanco derecho deben de quedar cantidad de vacantes de sargento de cocinas…' (23). Flattered by Marshal Bernadotte, Napoleon responds: ' – Deje de darme coba y mueva el culo, Bernadotte' (33). Irritated by Marshal Lafleur's preoccupation with menus and recipes when men are dying, Napoleon erupts: ' – Cierre el pico, Lafleur. – Ejem, naturalmente, Sire. - Es usted un bocazas, Lafleur... Imbécil. Tolili. Cagamandurrias. – Ese soy yo, Sire. Me retratáis. Clavadito' (88-89). In exile in Santa Helena, Napoleon recalls that 'Wellington no era más que un sargento chusquero con mucha potra. Que si Fouché un trepa y un pelota, Talleyrand una rata de cloaca y Metternich un perfecto gilipollas' (120). He enjoys the memory of 'las piernas de Désirée, por ejemplo,... aquello era gloria bendita, mujer de bandera...' (120). He boasts: 'Mi mayor venganza tras la guerra de España fue devolverlo [= Fernado VII] a sus paisanos' (120). Asked by Captain García to keep him alive, Napoleon admits: 'Eso no está en mi mano, capitán' (152). Napoleon is given some of the sharpest lines in the novel.

However commanding a presence Napoleon might be to his General Staff and to most of the army, the Spanish narrator sixteen times over describes the Emperor woundingly as 'el Petit Cabrón'. And just as the official portraits of Napoleon between 1799 and 1812 move from poses in fairly standard uniform to a 'Grand Imperial' pictorial style, so in this novel set mainly in 1812, PÉREZ-REVERTE exercises a parallel 'Grand Imperial' verbal designation for Napoleon – that of 'el Ilustre'. This term is used forty-three times in the text, on many occasions with mischievous intent, as at the moment when the supposedly all-conquering Emperor orders the retreat: 'Incapaz de sostenerse en la ciudad [= Moscú], con el invierno encima, el Ilustre convocó a sus mariscales y generales para tocar retirada, o sea, caballeros, a casita que llueve' (155).

If we add up the main pejorative units used against the French and Napoleon - franchute (18), gabacho (15), el Maldito Enano (1), el Petit Cabrón (16), el Petit (18), Le Petit Caporal (1), el Pequeño Cabo (1), el Enano (53), el Maldito Enano (1) and el

Ilustre (43) – the total of 167 pejorative terms gives an average of almost 1.27 pejorative or abusive forms on every page of the novel. Chapter IX with sixteen pages deploys 36 of these pejorative terms. And the term of supposed respect – 'Sire', with 89 usages – with over-use and insincerity becomes quite sickening. Such a systematic use of pejorative language applied particularly to the French and to Napoleon cannot be accidental. Nor can it be accidental that the second-last paragraph includes the unit: 'Tras la caída del Monstruo, confinado ahora en la isla de Elba...' The final hostile image delivered of Napoleon in the novella is that of 'The Monster' – that which is abnormal, unnatural, awesomely destructive - and deserving of destruction.

So PÉREZ-REVERTE in this novella applies pejorative designations across a broad spectrum of targets. Are these targets in fact the main thrust of this text? Might the pejorative designations be part of a wider purpose? Is there evidence that PÉREZ-REVERTE perhaps rejoices in colloquial, spicy and rude Spanish generally?

A listing of the hundreds of familiar expressions, colloquialisms and vulgarisms used in the novella would over-load this article[8]. In Chapter I alone (11 pages, c. 2,100 words) PÉREZ-REVERTE makes occasion to use 'parir'; 'fulanas de lujo'; 'colear'; 'joder'; 'casa de putas'; 'semental'; 'macró'; 'culo'; 'tragarlo'; 'meterle un paquete'; and 'gilipollas'. This is as authentic a core-sample of Hispanic colloquialisms and vulgarisms as one could expect to find in such a small space. A sampling from Chapters II to X yields: 'carajo'; 'palmarla'; 'follón'; 'qué coño'; 'cagar en tus muertos'; 'maricón el último'; ' – No jodas.'; 'domingueros de mierda'; 'amariconarse'; 'cenutrio y hortera'; 'un auténtico pelmazo'; 'irse al carajo'; 'tirarse a' (una mujer); 'cargarse a'; 'pasarse por la piedra'; 'todo cristo'; 'nos cascaban'; 'cabreado'; 'la puñetera granja'; 'el paquete'; 'giñando leches'; 'los hijoputas'; 'una que te cagas'; 'cagar gloria'; 'Cagüentodo'; 'le patea los huevos'; 'nos puteó bien'; 'beneficiarse a' (una mujer); 'poner los pies en polvorosa'; 'Hostia'; 'cabrearse'; 'tener guasa'; 'endiñarse por lo bajini'; 'los tiene bien puestos'; 'me llevaron al huerto'; 'un país con muy mala leche'; 'cargando a la izquierda'; 'cabrón'; 'navegar a vela y vapor'; 'mamporrear'; 'meterla de matute'; 'cortes de mangas'; 'darse el piro'; 'con más pluma que...'; 'de lo más guarro'; 'acojonada'; 'descojonarse de risa'; 'convertirse en una merienda de negros'; 'a tomar por saco'; 'una puñetera mierda'; 'Fue la leche'; and 'de una puta vez'. PÉREZ-REVERTE calls on the full resources of colloquial Spanish.

So: The use of pejorative designations applied particularly to the French and to Napoleon may be part of a wider commitment in this novella to thoroughly familiar, colloquial and vulgar forms of language. It is worth recalling that PÉREZ-REVERTE, in the six novels of the capitán Alatriste series published so far (1996-2010), makes an amazing success of re-invigorating the everyday Spanish language of the 1620s. And in his acceptance speech to the Real Academia de la Lengua Española in June 2003, he

[8] Full lists of pejorative designations and colloquialisms available from the author of this article.

 ISSN: 1988-8430

delivered a very accomplished exercise in linguistic analysis entitled 'El habla de un bravo del siglo XVII': 'El bravo, el valentón, se levanta tarde. La noche, que él llama sorna, es su territorio; y a veces, para su gusto y oficio, algunas clareas (algunos días) tienen demasiada luz. Ya empieza a bajar el sol sobre los tejados de la ancha, la ciudad (que en este caso es Madrid), cuando nuestro hombre se echa fuera de la piltra, carraspeando para aclararse la gorja. Se le nota en la cara, que él llama sobrescrito, en lo desordenado de los bigotes y en los ojos inyectados en sangre, que anoche y hasta de madrugada dio a la bufia y besó el jarro más de lo prudente, que el sueño ha sido escaso, y que la borrachera, la zorra, aún está a medio desollar..."[9]. In PÉREZ-REVERTE Spain may have found not only an exciting novelist but a veritable master of language.

Some minor criticisms may be allowed. For some readers a number of the colloquialisms deployed may seem very – too – contemporary: '... y qué he hecho yo para merecer esto [= title of Almodóvar film, 1985]; 'Domingueros' [= Sunday drivers = amateurs] (47-48); 'hortera' [= naff, uncool] (54); 'un auténtico pelmazo' [a real ******* bore] (54); 'curriculum' [= c.v., résumé] (64); 'paquete' [= 'genital bulge'] (74); 'gilipollas' [guy, prat, jerk, stupid fellow] (96); 'una puñetera mierda' [a damned load of shit] (165). The vast majority of the colloquialisms are well-established and much, much used in ordinary everyday Spanish speech. Perhaps occasionally a high-frequency usage of today takes on an extra edge of humour when used in the context of 1812.

Are there any other narrational or presentational flaws that should be highlighted?

Those determined to find fault might worry that Captain García splits the battalion into two on page 112 whereas on page 113 he has the riflemen arranged in three sections (112-113). The same critic would perhaps argue that the query about possible bisexuality in the Emperor expressed in 1812 as '... no creo yo que el Ilustre navegue a vela y vapor' (129) virtually antedates the first working steamboat. At one particular point the move from the first person plural voice of the narrator into second person singular 'tú' might cause a frisson (61-64). More generally, the narrative point of view switching freely and without warning or signal from the first-person plural point of view of the Spanish soldiers in their corner of the battlefield to an omniscient external view of the French General Staff to the actions, reactions, words and thoughts of the Emperor will to some readers seem untidy rather than fluent. The 'leístas' will note the widespread use of 'lo' for direct object 'him': '... lo llamaban los veteranos de su Vieja Guardia... Nosotros lo llamábamos de otra manera...' (14); '... los miran acercarse inmóviles...' (101) and '... los dejaron pasar con indiferencia...' (171). The occasional repetition of a stock phrase – 'maricón el último'; 'tenerlos bien puestos'; 'pasarlos por la piedra'; 'la madre que lo parió' - might be thought a stylistic flaw. Lack

[9] Text available on Internet requesting 'El habla de un bravo del siglo xvii' or at www.perezreverte.com/upload/ficheros/noticias/201002/discurso_rae.pdf .

of the capital letter in 'el ilustre' (52; 77; 126) is an oversight. The stress-mark omitted occasionally on demonstrative pronouns (ese 45; ese 105; esos 111; de esta 112) may irritate the traditionalists. The unit '... ya estáis oyendo que se impacienta el Emperador, esa carga es para hoy o para mañana' makes more sense as '... esa carga es para hoy, no para mañana' (79). And a Spanish patriot might enjoy the critique of the French yet wince at the similar brutal treatment handed out to Godoy, Carlos IV, Fernando VII and even to ordinary Spaniards.

These are pardonable details in a short, short novel which engages with a real episode in history and delivers a fascinating story in a rumbustious narrative charged with both thoughtfulness and rough good humour. The narrative tone – en todo momento vivo, picante, escabroso y festivo – carries strong echoes of two of Spanish literature's great sharp-hitting prose texts - the *Lazarillo* and Quevedo's *El Buscón*. Seeking both serious comment upon history and great good fun for the reader, PÉREZ-REVERTE deploys a very broad range of idiomatic expression that is very open and free-wheeling, refreshingly frank, rude and jocular. *La sombre del águila* joyfully celebrates the expressive possibilities of colloquial Spanish as understood and used not just by *la soldadesca* but by *el pueblo llano de siempre*.

Bibliography.

Pérez-Reverte, Arturo. *La sombra del águila*, Ediciones Santillana, Madrid, 1993.

Pérez-Reverte, Arturo. *La sombra del águila*, séptima edición, Santillana-Punto de lectura, Madrid, 2004.

Pérez-Reverte, Arturo. Text available on Internet requesting 'El habla de un bravo del siglo XVII' or at

www.perezreverte.com/upload/ficheros/noticias/201002/discurso_rae.pdf

 ISSN: 1988-8430