

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Spanish Language and Literature

Modern Languages and Literatures, Department
of

January 2004

Benito Pérez Galdós

Harriet Stevens Turner

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, hturner1@unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/modlangspanish>



Part of the [Modern Languages Commons](#)

Turner, Harriet Stevens, "Benito Pérez Galdós" (2004). *Spanish Language and Literature*. 11.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/modlangspanish/11>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Modern Languages and Literatures, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spanish Language and Literature by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Benito Pérez Galdós

HARRIET S. TURNER

The term “Realism,” whether applied to painting, philosophy, literature, or even to what today is called “the *real* reality TV,” always implies a fundamental duality. There is, on the one hand, the perception of a world of things that simply exists – “inanimate, spatially extended, and subject to quantifiable forces” – and, on the other, there is the mind – “the seat of thought, understanding, sensation, and imagination.”¹ The mind–body dualism of Descartes (1596–1650) and the inventions and discoveries of Galileo (1564–1642) had shaped for Western civilization the scientific worldview. This view delineated three basic intellectual positions *vis-à-vis* the relationship between mind and world: skepticism, or the idea that what the mind pictures or imagines cannot be a reliable guide to knowledge; idealism, or the conviction that a sensorial and subjective understanding, including certain belief systems, is the only one there is; and Realism, or the perspective that “heroically bridges the gap.”²

During the nineteenth century, in Spain as in the rest of Europe, the task of bridging this gap, ever widening under the impact of political and social changes as well as scientific discoveries, technological inventions, and industrial advances, became the heroic project of Benito Pérez Galdós (1843–1920), Spain’s preeminent Realist novelist. He sought to depict the impact of current political, social, and economic factors that jaggedly shaped everyday life: the resurgence of national consciousness and the imperatives of democracy in forming a nation; the rising presence and power of the bourgeoisie, of industrial growth, and the emergence of an exploited laboring class; the rise of banking, the stock market, the invention of institutional systems of credit and debit, and the introduction of paper money; the opening of railway lines, the spread of gas lighting, the construction of roads and waterways; improved sanitation, a developing interest in public and private health, together with the advances of medicine – anesthesia (1840s), germ theory (1847), antisepsis (1867), vaccination (1876), asepsis (1883), and radiology (1895).³

¹ Simon Blackburn, “Logical Humanism.” *New Republic* (17 and 24 April 2001), p. 96.

² Blackburn, “Logical Humanism,” p. 96.

³ Lilian R. Furst, “Introduction.” In *Realism* (New York: Longman, 1992), p. 2.

These inventions and discoveries came later to Spain than to the rest of Europe; thus the process of modernization occurred only in a rapid, uneven way.⁴ Galdós saw this lately arrived modernity as a tumult generated by the influx of foreign ideas and fashion imposed on native folkways. At the same time, of a liberalizing cast of mind, he proposed to unmask the ways that traditional religious morality opposed new, positivistic views. His aim, as expressed in his great novel, *Fortunata y Jacinta*, was also to expose that “capa con tantos remiendos” (“patched old cloak”⁵) of political maneuvers, since successive reforms had only strengthened ingrained habits of favors and bribes. In Galdós’ time, the tensions between such diverse phenomena as coins and credit, free trade and protectionist tariffs, factory work and domestic economy, masculine and feminine, and private and public exacerbated friction among peoples – those of “pueblo” and rural origins, whose voices rasped and whose bright colors raked the eye, and a nascent, insecure bourgeoisie who, fearful of the masses, strove to imitate the aristocracy.

Old and new converged also with the question of suffrage and citizenship to aggravate social malaise and political upheavals – Carlist wars, palace intrigues, the Revolution of 1868 and overthrow of Queen Isabel, the brief reign of Amadeo of Savoy, the aborted First Republic and the Bourbon Restoration (1875–1885), which reached Spain from England in the imported person of Alfonso XII. These turbulent events undergird the cultural, historical, and political events of the novels by Galdós to be discussed in this chapter.

Galdós is the author of seventy-seven novels, twenty-six original plays, and numerous occasional pieces, written between 1867 and 1920. These divide into two main categories: the historical and the contemporary social novels, now more appropriately described as “novels of modernity.”⁶ The forty-six historical novels, called “Episodios nacionales,” make up five series, each consisting of ten interconnected novels, except the fifth series, left unfinished. The thirty-one “novels of modernity,” published between 1870 and 1915, also divide into two groups: “Novelas de la primera época” (“Novels of the Early Period,” 1870–1879) and “Las novelas de la serie contemporánea” (“The Contemporary Social Novels,” 1881–1915). The novels of the early period comprise Galdós’ first attempts at novel writing, as well as four so-called “thesis novels”: *Doña Perfecta* (1876),

⁴ Stephanie Sieburth, *Inventing High and Low. Literature, Mass Culture, and Uneven Modernity in Spain* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), pp. 27–30; Jo Labanyi, *Gender and Modernization in the Spanish Realist Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. viii.

⁵ Benito Pérez Galdós, *Obras completas*. Ed. Federico Carlos Robles (Madrid: Aguilar, 1966), vol. v, p. 295. All subsequent references will be to this edition and will appear in the text.

⁶ Labanyi, *Gender and Modernization*, p. 91.

the sequel *Gloria* (1876–1877), *Marianela* (1878), and *La familia de León Roch* (“The Family of León Roch,” 1878–1879). The next group of novels represents what Galdós called his “segunda manera” – his “second style,” a “different kind of writing . . . a more sophisticated and varied mode of narrative presentation.”⁷

Born in 1843 in Las Palmas, Canary Islands, the last of ten children, Galdós left home and a domineering mother at the age of nineteen to study law at the University of Madrid, bringing the experience of early years of island life to Spain’s capital city. In 1867, having abandoned university classes for cafés, the theatre, and for the heady world of journalism and politics, Galdós made his first trip to Paris, discovered Balzac, and, as he says, “me desayuné” (“I breakfasted” [“Memorias de un desmemoriado,” *Obras*, Vol. VI, 1656]) on the novels of *La Comédie humaine* (“Human Comedy”). From Balzac he conceived the idea of writing a series of interrelated historical and social novels, adapting the technique of using recurring characters. He saw himself as a writer, not a lawyer, and started *La Fontana de Oro* (“The Golden Fountain Café,” 1867), his first, full-length novel.

In two essays, written nearly thirty years apart (1870, 1897), Galdós states the premises that shaped his Realist novels: the central role played by the rising middle class; the religious problem, which either divided or dissolved families; adultery and prostitution, which posed the contested question of personal and civil rights; and the rising mix of rural and urban masses, occurring as peasants flocked to the cities after the disenfranchisement of Church lands (1837), the tariff reforms of 1849 and 1868, and as the ensuing boom in real estate development and industrialization began to produce an upper bourgeoisie. We find the mercantile and banking families like the Santa Cruzes and Moreno Islas (*Fortunata y Jacinta*) mixing with “indianos,” people from impoverished, rural areas who emigrated to the West Indies (Cuba, Puerto Rico), made fortunes as slavers or entrepreneurs, and returned to Madrid to flood the markets with money, as does José María Manso (*El amigo Manso*). Soon “indianos” and the newly rich of Old Madrid’s trading neighborhoods evolved into ruthless financiers and speculators like Sánchez Botín in *La desheredada* and the usurer Torquemada, who starts as a ragpicker at the Gate of Toledo (the southern entrance to Madrid) and ends as a mogul, virtually owning the city.

In between rich and poor we find a chafed petty bourgeoisie of moneylenders, laborers, artisans, salesmen, disgruntled office-seekers, civil servants, and, a step up, professional people – pharmacists, lawyers, doctors, and engineers. Galdós celebrates this motley, nascent middle class as the

⁷ Linda Willem, *Galdós’s Segunda Manera* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), p. 12.

“inexhaustible source” of creativity and entrepreneurial energy.⁸ One example, which occurs in the first part of *Fortunata y Jacinta*, is the column of an old-fashioned storefront in Old Madrid. Shopkeepers have dressed the column in corsets – red, black, and white – transforming it into an erotically charged, novelistic personage – female, wily, slightly sexual, who beckons provocatively to passers-by. The narrator sees this transformation as a shopkeeper’s “sentimiento pintoresco” (“flair for the picturesque” [*Obras*, v, 99]) but now the old notion of “picturesque” has become a culturally transparent sign for the changing status of women. In the novel of modernity women have taken to the streets as consumers, like the matriarch Barbarita Santa Cruz, but also as sexual objects, like Rosalía de Bringas, who squeezes her body into a corset and becomes, literally, a streetwalker who sells that plumped, perfumed body for money to buy luxury items. This surging middle class holds the key to the novel of modernity. Even in the early essay (1870), sure of his mission, Galdós registers doubt and unease about modernity’s trends and conflicts – “graves cuestiones” (“serious matters”) for which he, as a Realist writer, cannot supply solutions.

At the outset of his career (1870) Galdós saw the retarded development of the new novel as owed to slackers – a reading public that preferred either the nostalgia of archaic folkways (*costumbrismo*) or facile, serialized romance and salon fiction modeled on French writers like Dumas and Soulié. The nation, seduced by popularized serial fiction – in his eyes, a “peste nacida en Francia” (“plague born in France” [“Observaciones,” 125]) – seemed to have forgotten the masterpieces of those two great illusionists, Cervantes and Velázquez. In making a plea for a new, national novel, Galdós inveighed against the stereotypes of the French *folletín* and its Spanish imitations – “traidores pálidos y de mirada siniestra” (“pale traitors with a sinister look”), “modistas angelicales” (“angelic seamstresses”), “meretrices con aureola” (“whores with hearts of gold”), “duquesas averiadas” (“wayward duchesses”), “jorobados románticos” (“romantic hunchbacks”), “adulterios, extremos de amor y odio” (“adultery, extremes of love and hate” [“Observaciones,” 125]).⁹

Once again, gaps open and contradictions abound. Galdós himself saw foreign writers – Balzac in France and Dickens in England – as masters of the art of the new novel. Through a complex range of narrative

⁸ Benito Pérez Galdós, “Observaciones sobre la novela contemporánea.” In *Ensayos de crítica literaria*. Ed. Laureano Bonet (Barcelona: Ediciones Península, 1999), p. 130. Subsequent references will be to this edition and will appear in the text.

⁹ At the same time – as demonstrated by Alicia Andreu, in her pioneering study *Galdós y la literatura popular* (Madrid: Sociedad General Española de Librería, 1982), and, most recently, by Elisa Martí López in her essay, “The *folletín*: Spain Looks to Europe” (*The Cambridge Companion to the Spanish Novel* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003], pp. 65–80) – Galdós relied on the melodrama and the plots of the *folletín* to create the new Realist novel.

perspectives he exploited in his own fiction those self-same, clichéd character types. Further, as feminist critics have shown, Galdós' scorn for the popularized serial novel is another culturally transparent marker for gender bias. Gender stereotyping, which construed the notions of artistic genius and creativity only with male writers, presented women as passive consumers of both fiction and fashion.¹⁰ They become those columns dressed up in corsets, supporting the new economy at the cost of their own degradation. Male critics saw women as congenitally unfit to be creators of the Realist novel, which, when all was said and done, was preeminently masculine – a rational, even scientific, and a nationalistic enterprise. The imprint of gender stereotypes tainted critical opinion about fiction as much as it became manifest in those fictions, for running beneath gender stereotyping was the deeper, branching root of Spain's uneven modernization and what that process implied for women.

Modernization transformed, almost overnight, the “villages” of Madrid and Barcelona into powerful administrative and urban centers but left rural areas virtually untouched. Even after the “Glorious” (i.e. bloodless) Revolution of 1868, which dethroned Queen Isabel and ushered in the First Republic (1868–1871), Spain was more a national territory than a politically and culturally unified nation. For example, in *Doña Perfecta*, obdurate regional strongholds like the town of Orbajosa were rife with factionalism, fanatic Catholicism, and a belief in the Carlist cause, an insurgency led by Fernando VII's exiled younger brother, don Carlos.¹¹ Orbajosa is a town stinking of garlic (“ajos”), as well as the corruptions of local bossism (“caciquismo”), and as a world all its own (“orb”), Orbajosa opposes deviously and violently the liberalizing mandates of the central government of Madrid. Sporadic civil war was the order of the day in northern Spain.

Thus Galdós' novels not only highlight anew that time-honored gap between mind and world. They also register collective anxieties and interpersonal conflicts arising from a host of new, disconcerting gaps in the social fabric. Such gaps generated a series of troubling interconnections and reversals. As Jo Labanyi notes, one salient example is the “woman question.” It soon elided with the “social question,” redefining without precedent the meaning both of “woman,” which now referred to suffrage, property and civic rights, access to education, and of “social” – a term targeting the disconcerting question of the inclusion of the expropriated masses in civic life.¹² Galdós, like other Realist writers, focused on

¹⁰ Alda Blanco, “Gender and National Identity: The Novel in Nineteenth-Century Spanish Literary History.” In *Culture and Gender in Nineteenth-Century Spain*. Ed. Lou Charnon-Deutsch and Jo Labanyi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 128; Labanyi, *Gender and Modernization*, p. 9.

¹¹ See Rodolfo Cardona's edition of *Doña Perfecta* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1984).

¹² Labanyi, *Gender and Modernization*, p. viii.

married women “because it was not clear where they stood, particularly if they were members of the property-owning class, which by definition constituted society.”¹³ At the same time, throughout Europe, the old order (patriarchy, religious dogma, and a domestic economy) braced against new ideas and actions. Settings large and small registered the gaps, as shown in the heated debate at the table in *Doña Perfecta*, or in a husband’s patronizing lecture to his wife in the privacy of their bedroom in *Fortunata y Jacinta* (1886–1887).

In *Fortunata y Jacinta*, Galdós’ four-volume masterpiece, triangular relationships, combining with the “woman question” and the “social question,” structure the plot. Juanito Santa Cruz, the dauphin or bourgeois prince (as he is called), seduces Fortunata, half-gypsy and a working-class woman. He then marries his first cousin Jacinta but keeps visiting his former mistress. Couples cross as Fortunata marries little Maxi, while Jacinta, the legitimate but spurned wife, imagines a love relationship with the banker Moreno-Isla. Aurora, former lover of Moreno-Isla and new lover of Juanito, betrays Fortunata, while Fortunata, having purposefully conceived a child, before dying delivers that child to Jacinta, bringing about a reconciliation between the two women.

Adultery, identified by Galdós in his early essay (1870) as problematic, blurs boundaries between private and public spaces. As Jo Labanyi observes, “if it is possible to be simultaneously inside and outside, the boundary between the two positions disappears.”¹⁴ *Fortunata y Jacinta* illustrates this insight. One instance is the moment when Fortunata, mistress to Juanito Santa Cruz, seizes upon the blurred, reversible status of her own marriage to Maxi and of Juan’s to Jacinta. In the intimacy of their affair Fortunata proposes to trade “el nene grande” (“the big boy”) – Juan – for “el nene chico,” the infant son and heir that Jacinta, supposedly sterile, cannot produce. Fortunata’s “gran idea” (“great idea,” [*Obras*, v, 280]) of a trade across marriages, from the outside to the inside, turns into a “pícara idea” (“madcap idea” [*Obras*, v, 238]), fleshed out in a real event when she delivers her newborn son by Santa Cruz to her childless rival.

Fortunata’s image of both husband and child as a “nene” (“baby boy”) also captures the deeper reality of other traded relations within the paired marriages of the Santa Cruces. Responding to Fortunata’s “madcap idea,” Juan immediately expresses his fear that *any* newborn son would, in the end, supplant *him* and his privileges as the only man-child in the family. Thus he inadvertently discloses the Oedipal nature of the paired Santa Cruz marriages of father, mother, son, and wife. Juan’s formidable mother, doña Bárbara, had arranged his marriage to his first cousin Jacinta. Doña

¹³ Labanyi, *Gender and Modernization*, p. 40.

¹⁴ Labanyi, *Gender and Modernization*, p. 40.

Bárbara, grooming the “sisterly” Jacinta as a daughter-in-law, transforms her into a kind of “calza” (“leash”) that ties son (and husband) to her – doña Bárbara’s – maternal rule. Thus the barren Jacinta finds herself brought into the family expressly to mother the son, ironically and to her great grief reinforcing – but also obliterating – any truly maternal ties. For in this marriage, mothering has meant that Jacinta herself will never be a mother.

As literary Realism evolved as part of the twin processes of modernization and nation formation, Galdós adhered to the aesthetic of mimesis, which he understood both as the observance of facts and as a mirror of minds in action; his aim was to reproduce in fiction what in life was “la novela de verdad” (“truly real” [“Observaciones,” 124]). Once the moral category of truthfulness became a fundamental premise, the representation – “reproducción” (“reproduction”) is his word – of people and places, events and society acquires moral as well as spatial dimensions. The novel, like the human mind, is a huge, hospitable realm where everything has a place although not everything coheres. The “true” and the “real” arise within intermediate spaces between pieces and parts, parts and wholes, and, correspondingly, between the two poles of “exactitud” (“factual accuracy”) and what Galdós calls in his later essay (1897) “belleza” (“beauty” or aesthetic design). When things fit together, when the “perfecto fiel de la balanza” (“perfect point of balance”) of form and content is achieved, the novel enacts the truth of fiction, since truthfulness perforce encompasses the whole of a thing in its relation to everything else.¹⁵

Every fact, every response and point of view counts. Thus something as small as a mouse let loose in a convent (*Fortunata y Jacinta*) is as much a catalyst for action as something as large as “la mole aquella” (“that hulking mass” [*Obras*, v, 557]) in *Miau* (1888), in which massive presences trace out the imprint of power in both public and private domains. The heavy tread of Cucúrbitas’ wife – a massively overweight woman – reflects in miniature (!) the huge stone façade of the Treasury Building that broods over the Villaamil household, located across from the Women’s Prison. Just as Cucúrbitas’ wife lurches about the hall, imprisoned in her fat, the meaning of the epithet *Miau* – a catcall referring to the unemployed Villaamil and his luckless family – turns the novel’s title into another “mole,” a veritable punning, prison house of language.

Similarly, something as illusory as the misguided musings of a professor of philosophy in *El amigo Manso* turns upon linguistic paradoxes. Manso’s speculative reasoning has a practical impact: he brings about a

¹⁵ Benito Pérez Galdós, “La sociedad presente como materia novelable.” In *Ensayos de crítica literaria*. Ed. Laureano Bonet (Barcelona: Ediciones Península, 1999), p. 220.

marriage and a political career; but his “reasoning” points to the fictiveness of the novel and of its narrated lives. Manso, who declares from the outset that he does not exist, that he arises from an inkwell, having traded his story for a novel, becomes simultaneously author and narrator, character and reader. Manso’s declaration of nonexistence, at beginning and end, frames the story of his unrequited love for Irene, of her betrayal, and of the rising power and prestige of the “mental gymnastics” (*Obras*, IV, 1290) of his pupil Manuel in that illusory game of politics. The novel’s metafictional frame transcodes spatially and morally an incisive critique of those self-same political and social “fictions” which were only too real in Restoration Spain.

While *El amigo Manso* represents Galdós’ most self-conscious metafictional experiment, framing devices occur throughout the series of “novelas contemporáneas”¹⁶ and, to a lesser degree, in the “Episodios nacionales.”¹⁷ One example is the hair-picture in *La de Bringas*, which depicts in miniature the compulsions of both individual and nation – miserly thrift, the hoarding of capital, fetishism.¹⁸ In *Fortunata y Jacinta* bits and pieces of theory about novel writing evolve *within* the novel, one partially reflecting the other. In *Misericordia*, Benina dreams up a fictional character who, like Galdós’ own fictional characters, turns out to be simultaneously real and imagined.

The complexity of the fictiveness of truthful representation relates also to the central role that Galdós’ novels played in “writing the nation” as these texts became, in a development parallel to the writing of legal codes that created citizenship, a “forum for critical debate.”¹⁹ Thus the provincial, mulish town of Orbajosa evolves as an allegory of rural, Carlist Spain. An impassioned love of luxury, of stylish appearances, which characterizes Isidora Rufete, protagonist of *La desheredada*, becomes a metaphor for the nation.²⁰ In *La de Bringas*, Manuel Pez, the consummate bureaucrat, is a symbol of the corruptions of the Spanish Civil Service and of the sloe-eyed, sleepy nation, and Rosalía, the “pretty, plumpish” protagonist driven by a desirous, even erotic, passion for fashion, is manifestly an image of Queen Isabel.²¹

¹⁶ Hazel Gold, *Reframing Realism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 2.

¹⁷ Diane Urey, “Galdós and the Fabrication of Historical Reality.” In *Toward a Poetics of Realism / Hacia una poética del realismo*. Special issue of *Letras Peninsulares*. Ed. Harriet Turner. Vol. 13, No. 1 (Spring 2000), p. 97.

¹⁸ Hazel Gold, “Francisco’s Folly: Picturing Reality in Galdós’s *La de Bringas*.” *Hispanic Review* 54 (1986), p. 53.

¹⁹ Labanyi, *Gender and Modernization*, pp. 3, 5.

²⁰ Stephen Gilman, *Galdós and the Art of the European Novel: 1867–1887* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 121.

²¹ Peter A. Bly, *Pérez Galdós, “La de Bringas”* (London: Grant and Cutler, 1981), p. 70.

In *Fortunata y Jacinta*, the narrator takes special care to link births, marriages, and deaths of ordinary people to historically resonant dates, blending fact and fiction to reflect the depth and range of economic, legal, political, and social change. This change was a fitful, uneven process, not at all uniform but rather like “a fugue in which old voices do not cease to sound when new voices enter.”²² Old and new voices mix as history goes on parade in the reminiscences of Estupiñá, old family retainer of the opulently mercantile Santa Cruz family. Jacinta’s mother, Isabel Cordero, is as adept at manipulating birth dates as she is at peeling potatoes. The vicissitudes of Juanito Santa Cruz mirror those of his times, and the alternations of marriage and mistress follow the political interchanges between monarchy and republic.

The intersection of public and private discourses oriented the instructional potential of Galdós’ novels toward a new objective: the creation of a public-spirited reader. At the same time, a renewed interest in mind-body dualism, which, in the 1880s, took a decisively inward turn toward psychic formation, converged with the need to capture deeper cultural anxieties, arising as high, middle, and lower classes blurred into each other. Thus the notion of “lo cursi” – a derisive epithet applied to those who, like Rosalía Bringas, strive to imitate in fashion and gesture the glossy ways of the aristocracy – becomes a culturally transparent mode.²³ “Lo cursi” manifests obliquely the anxieties accruing to a jumble of class alliances and aspirations taking place in the wake of the new economy and while, in the main, the term applies to women, impoverished dandies like don Frasquito Ponte, in *Misericordia*, are also “cursi.” As Labanyi notes, “In emphasizing ‘lo cursi’ in his *novelas contemporáneas*, Galdós is identifying Spain’s insertion into capitalistic modernity, indeed, into a global network of economic relations.”²⁴

Galdós’ novels present an ambivalent critique of the process of standardization and imitation in late nineteenth-century Spain. The novels expose, on the one hand, the human suffering, loss, and waste incurred as “pueblo” – people of rural and working class-origins – either strive or are forcibly molded into “personas decentes” (“decent people,” model bourgeois citizens), or as the state invades private life, as in *Miau* (1888), which recounts the story of Villaamil, an elderly civil servant, who is dismissed from the employ of the Minister of Finance. In the case of Isidora (*La desheredada*), her illusions of noble birth transmute into counterfeit – but charismatic – images of artistic, aristocratic bearing, “high” postures that inevitably turn upon the “lows” of prostitution.

²² Raymond Carr, *Spain, 1808–1975* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 2.

²³ Noël M. Valis, *The Culture of Cursilería* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 149–171.

²⁴ Labanyi, *Gender and Modernization*, p. 114.

On the other hand, the history of Fortunata shows how a step up the stair to bourgeois respectability can be a good thing. Unlike Papitos, the little gypsy girl found barefoot in the mud holes of Cuatro Caminos – orphaned, illiterate, truly poor, and truly “pueblo” – in the novel, Fortunata emerges midway on the great stone stair, shod in stylish shoes – a manufactured, middle-class article of which she is very proud. Through her liaison with Feijoo, a retired, elderly military man who gives her a Singer sewing machine and who provides in his will for stock options, this working-class woman of the people, who at times had been a prostitute, gains a measure of legitimate financial independence. At the beginning of the novel, wealth, privilege, and political power had placed her seducer, Juanito Santa Cruz, and his powerful family at the top of the social pyramid. At the end, Fortunata, rising from below to form a new family, heroically challenges tradition and entrenched social codes to bridge the gap.

There is the view that Fortunata’s incorporation into bourgeois society only illustrates the confounding, tragic result of any attempt to bridge the gap between social classes: as a savage, as “pueblo,” she pays the price of death for her striving to become part of the nation’s stable, propertied, middle class. Fortunata’s death, however, comes not as she gives birth to the Santa Cruz heir and assembles, atop the stair, the kind of new, integrated family of intersecting social relationships to which the nation aspired. A passion for revenge precipitates her death. Gripping a house key like a brass knuckle, Fortunata, once again a savage, lacerates Aurora’s face on the floor of Madrid’s most fashionable foreign shop. She avenges Aurora’s treachery – those aspersions on the legitimacy of the newborn heir and the supreme insult levied against both Jacinta and herself through Aurora’s liaison with Juan and the vicious rumor that Aurora has propagated about a liaison between Jacinta and Moreno-Isla. Fortunata’s savage behavior, which Jacinta recognizes as a “justiciada” (“righteous action” [*Obras*, v, 528]), arises from her passionate nature but also from a clear sense of right and wrong, of legitimacy, of civic and natural rights, and from the conviction of being a proper and “propertied” individual: the child is hers and hers to keep or give away.

Not only savages experience passion and a protest against bourgeois norms. Fortunata’s ideas and feelings, which evolve as a mix of “pueblo” and bourgeois values, also characterize don Manuel Moreno-Isla, an expatriate, an island (“isla”) to himself, a banker of wealth and social prominence allied to the Santa Cruz family. As the novel develops Fortunata’s story, it develops also the story of Moreno’s obsessive love for Jacinta and his unspoken kinship to Fortunata. The manner of his death prefigures Fortunata’s, and it is no coincidence that he owns the building in La Cava where she dies as she contemplates her infant son. Moreno

and Fortunata, from opposite poles of the social spectrum, die in a gush of blood, refusing to moderate their passions; the prescriptions of modern medicine (Moreno-Rubio) and mentors (Feijoo) are as nothing before the wave. Each is an island, an orphan; each imagines a child, and each gives birth: Fortunata, a “paloma-madre” (“dove-like mother” [*Obras*, v, 60]), conceives a dove-child. Jacinta imagines that child as belonging to Moreno, and Moreno, thinking of Jacinta, retrieves in himself a lost child, imagines “ideas . . . palomas” (“dove-ideas” [*Obras*, v, 461]) and persists in his passion, which he prizes more than any bourgeois notion of virtue. The plebeian Fortunata, rising on the social stair, and the aristocratic Moreno-Isla, who descends that stair, remain true to those perspectives and passions at the core of life. Each changes, rising and dipping, but each resists the imposition of a common standard in language, thought, morality, and politics. Each functions in his or her own way as a kind of rebel, as do Jacinta, Maxi, and Mauricia *la Dura*, articulating a personally felt resistance to the collective norms of their social world. Those norms, invoked by such fatuous guardians of morality as the priest Nicolás Rubín, are hardly sufficient. Nicolás excoriates his sister-in-law Fortunata for her ruinous behavior, envisaging her degradation as “habas contadas” (something as “countable” as a plate of beans [*Obras*, v, 292]). Fortunata, however, like the others who try “heroically” to bridge the gap between mind and body, masculine and feminine, prescribed roles and individual aspiration, overrides those norms, answering to higher imperatives.

In consequence, given Galdós’ two-fold objective of representation and critique, as well as the aesthetic imperative to create, in fiction, the illusion of an autonomous, real, and truthful world, his novels offer deftly mediated narrative points of view. This technique creates a fictional, intermediate space, open to the reader, which, like other gap-like features, allows his novels to become forums of public debate. At the same time Galdós continuously retains control of his story, guiding the reader through the perceptions of both character and narrator via monologue, dialogue, and that effervescent, polyphonic mixture known as the free indirect style. The narrator is styled *as* a character:²⁵ he evolves as a person; he may or may not be reliable, and he inevitably becomes compromised by what he sees and tells. Yet this sly, winking narrative persona leads the reader to perceive the complexities of his fictional world. As a creator of shifting, intermediate spaces and as one who occupies the vantage point of the reader, who identifies with that reader, and who is, at times, manifestly a reader *himself* of the faces and texts he has invented, the narrator, through various disguises, becomes perhaps the most subtle culturally transparent mode of Galdós’ fiction. Now and again, like the blinded Francisco Bringas

²⁵ Ricardo Gullón, *Técnicas de Galdós* (Madrid: Taurus, 1970), p. 18.

who surreptitiously lifts the edge of the band covering his eyes, peeping through a little “ventanita” (“window” [*Obras*, IV, 1614]), the narrator occasionally drops his mask to reveal the unexpected or unseen. He also frames scenes, focalizing through various “ventanitas” – “claraboya” (“transom”), curtains, keyholes, doors set ajar, balconies, even openings in a hedge – to transmute the import of narrative point of view into an image of what is being seen.

The case of *Doña Perfecta* (1876) is instructive. A so-called “thesis novel,” it poses oppositions. There is modernity, represented by Pepe Rey, a civil engineer from Madrid, and there is a traditional, entrenched religious intolerance, wielded in the person of doña Perfecta. Perfecta, as her name implies, stands as a stiff-necked icon of the Church. Wishing to repay services rendered by her brother, Juan Rey, Perfecta conceives the plan of offering the hand of her daughter, Rosario, to Juan’s son, Pepe Rey. She is eager to welcome him into the family. However, no sooner does Pepe arrive in Orbajosa than troubles begin. With every word, Pepe offends; with every apology, dissension grows; with every courteous gesture, strife ensues. While Rosario and Pepe recognize themselves as betrothed, obstacles proliferate: civil suits over Pepe’s land holdings, town gossip, shunning in public places, each of these actions fueled by the persecutory animosity of don Inocencio, Perfecta’s spiritual advisor. Soon lines of battle are drawn. Skirmishes over coffee and cigars escalate into civil war. Doña Perfecta locks up her daughter. Pepe moves out of the house to plot an elopement. As he steals into the garden, Perfecta gives to one of her minions the order to fire. Murder, insanity, never-ending penance come to the ironically named don Inocencio, *el penitenciario*, to doña Perfecta, and to the hapless Rosario, consigned to an asylum.

Styled as allegory, *Doña Perfecta* tells the story of made-up words and names, of surfaces and beliefs, of appearances that contradict what is real. The narrator participates in these linguistic shifts. He introduces the novel as artifice. It is manifestly a fiction, a cautionary tale, for the sign “Villahorrenda,” name of the train station serving Orbajosa, is conspicuously a piece of allegory, a piece of “propiedad” (“property”) owned by him, the narrator–author, in his guise as story teller. Yet it is also Rey’s exclamation “¡Villahorrenda! ¡Cinco minutos!” (“Villahorrenda! Five Minutes!” [*Obras*, IV, 407]) that makes up the chapter title. Events appear to have happened. The narrator has seen them and so appends a moral with which he addresses the reader. Now the story of *Doña Perfecta* is akin to fact; it belongs to the history of the nation. The novel is fact and fiction at the same time.

From the beginning the narrator’s point of view overlaps with Pepe’s. As chronicler, he knows all, just as Pepe knows all, representing as he does modern-day enlightenment. “Intelligence” and “Strength” are Pepe’s

watchwords, which the narrator sees as engraved upon his character as upon a statue. Pepe, like his adversary doña Perfecta, is an icon. At the same time this narrator appears limited in knowledge. As he tells, he adopts Pepe's point of view in time, taking care to pace chapters according to Pepe's bewilderment or his ignorance. Titles turn into exclamations or questions. Events are structured elusively as phantom chapters, and descriptions of landscape, the town, and its dwellers often coincide so closely with Pepe's thinking as to constitute a kind of free indirect style. Finally, knowledge is deliberately withheld, even dissembled as ignorance, as the narrator feigns astonishment or hazards a guess or tells as if he knows nothing.

Only by chapter 26, near the end, does this bemused narrator refer back to real causes: the plans of María Remedios for her son, an inauspicious rival for Rosario's hand. Through marriage to the landholding family of doña Perfecta, María Remedios, niece to the cleric don Inocencio, aspires to rise above her station. At one time doña Perfecta had employed María Remedios as a laundress, a humiliation still smarting in the consciousness of this working-class woman. So it transpires that the prime mover of the murder of Pepe Rey is not so much religious intolerance or the political system of local bossism that enables Perfecta to give the order to fire. The primal cause is the invidiousness of class distinction, thrust forward by the process of modernization. María Remedios seeks a remedy, a way to step up; thus she manipulates her uncle, who in turn manipulates doña Perfecta to reject, even murder, Pepe, whom she had invited as a suitor for Rosario, only daughter and heir to the Polantinos estate.

Coincidences in narrative point of view not only blur the borders between narrator and character. They call into question the matter of cause and of interpretation. As Galdós' narrator advises, the story told in *Doña Perfecta* is about things that are not as they seem. Pepe appears to be all of a piece and up front; yet he quickly becomes off-guard, speaks out of turn, and unwittingly plays into the verbal deceptions of Orbajosa, becoming, as he himself recognizes, as brutal in counter attack as doña Perfecta. In turn, Perfecta focuses her energies and verbal resources on what she believes to be a just cause – saving Rosario from modernity's monster, Pepe Rey. As in the later novels of adultery, unexpected exchanges and reversals occur. Rather than villain, Perfecta is a victim of unseen ambitions (María Remedios) and of a veiled, active corruption (don Inocencio). The narrator's intermediate, compromised stance communicates these reversals and representations as a moral injunction but also as a lively and tragic process of manipulation and cultural misunderstanding. By showing the intersections of story-telling styles Galdós anticipates the aesthetic and ethical complexities of later novels of modernity.

If *Doña Perfecta* ends with insanity and penance, *La desheredada* begins in Madrid's municipal asylum of Leganés. The narrator now adopts the guise of a doctor, a diagnostician, who sees inmates as objects of study but also as exemplars of humankind. Their aberrant behavior, taken to extremes, simply mirrors what ordinary people think and feel. Leganés is a "masked," mediated world ("Limbo enmascarado del mundo" [*Obras*, IV, 969]) that registers the events, trends, and collusions of the real world of modernity. The mind of Tomás Rufete, Isidora's father, exhibits such a telling mixture of sick and sane. He is a "loco razonable" ("rationally crazy man" [*Obras*, IV, 967]) whose predicament exhibits a novelistic imagination run amuck, the contested question of property rights, the incitations of high capitalism, and the tensions produced by new regulatory systems of medical, social, and national reform.

These tensions arise from a natural affinity between writers of Realist fiction and doctors, emphasized during the latter half of the nineteenth century and characterized by the gradual infiltration of new scientific findings into both medical and artistic thought. The process accelerated rapidly in the 1880s and 1890s. On the one hand, the products of laboratory investigations in physiology and bacteriology were finally shown to be of practical use at the bedside.²⁶ On the other, observation, hypothesis, experiment, and verification shaped the more or less scientific determinist philosophy that broadly underlay the aesthetic theories of nineteenth-century Realist fiction.²⁷ *La desheredada* reflects that determinism in the description of inherited traits – stunted growth in street urchins, manias and mental aberrations in adults, delinquency in vagrants and ragpickers, and the brutalizing consequences of industrialization. Juan Bou's rope factory is a case in point.

Galdós articulates these fluid interactions of science and the Realist novel in three major ways: through the propositions of his essays and prologues about Realist fiction (e.g. 1870, 1889, 1897), the recurring presence of doctors and disease in his novels, and the literary figurations that represent the inner workings of the mind of both narrator and character. *La desheredada* opens with an elaborate description of Leganés, which, as a municipal institution, mirrors the operations of state surveillance and control; these operations are "as deranged as Rufete's fantasies of national life."²⁸ Each sector of Madrid, which Rufete sees as the "Envidiópolis" ("City of Envy" [*Obras*, IV, 967]) finds a correlative in Leganés: correctional officers ("loqueros"), whom the narrator compares to civil servants,

²⁶ Sherwin B. Nuland, "The Uncertain Art." *American Scholar* (Spring 1998), p. 139.

²⁷ Cecil Jenkins, "Realism and the Novel Form." In *The Monster in the Mirror*. Ed. D. A. Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 2.

²⁸ Labanyi, *Gender and Modernization*, p. 104.

patrol the grounds; access to living quarters follows social differentiation and gender bias, for the “low life” of the patio for women is more deprived, more desperate, than that of men; privileged quarters are only for people who pay. Rufete’s head rattles with the business of the state; he believes he *is* the state, consumed by defaulting payments to the point of death. Public and private have become fused through his madness in a manner not dissimilar to the fusions in society at large. Rocking from one extreme to the other, like the ball of mercury sliding around in Rufete’s brain, all classes, it would appear, are either uprooted, disinherited, or confined to the dustbin by modernity’s capitalistic economy.

Chapter 1 of *La desheredada* frames in a literary way the reversals of these intersections between madness and sanity, public and private, old privileges and new civic rights. The title “Fin de otra novela” (“The End of Another Novel”) alludes to the origins of Rufete’s own “novel” of modernity, ending as Isidora’s “novel” begins. Rufete and his family come from La Mancha. Incited by the fictions of a relative, the canon Santiago Quijano, Rufete believes his daughter Isidora to be the illegitimate granddaughter of the Marchioness of Aransi, and so inculcates that image in her mind – a familiar story line in serialized fiction. Thus the cause and effect of Isidora’s own novel of disinheritance – her illusory claim to an aristocratic title and her descent into prostitution – evolve in reverse as a nested structure of fictions, running counter-clockwise to turn “ends” into retrospective and retroactive beginnings.

While the narrator, in his guise as diagnostician, lays claim to the writing of this novel, Isidora’s imagination is far more powerful. She has, he says, a gift for imagining, for anticipating events, for representing these in exalted images and “de una manera muy viva” (“in a lively way” [*Obras*, IV, 977]). It is she who really writes the novel of her disinheritance. Her conviction of noble lineage is so strong, so deeply rooted, that the narrator himself keeps slipping into that imagined reality. In Chapter 2 she has already won him over. He can hardly refer to her as Rufete’s daughter, thinking of her beauty as somehow consistent with her claim to the aristocratic title of the Aransis family. The reversed literary format of this novel, which combines a classic (*Don Quijote*) with popular, serialized fiction, mirrors the narrator’s own reversals about art and life. His slips from critique to belief in Isidora’s image of herself reflect his vulnerability to Isidora and his own fear of modernity, of losing his identity in a mixed upside-down world. Isidora’s claim to the house of Aransis, her innate sense of style, her artistic temperament, love of art, and her great beauty are not far from his own ideals. Now the so-called balance between “exactitud” (“factual accuracy”) and “belleza” (“beauty”), which Galdós proposes in 1897 as the secret of the Realist novel, tilts toward the pole of aesthetics.

Isidora strives to become the person she imagines herself to be, to exert her rights as a citizen of the nation, to be first among equals, to rise from plebeian origins to occupy her rightful place in society. As Jo Labanyi argues, the lesson Isidora learns when her claim to the Aransis family is rejected is that “wealth is acquired through private initiative in the public sphere of the market.”²⁹ If she cannot be noble, if she is socially disinherited, she will inherit her true self by entering the marketplace; her only property is her person, which she then determines to sell to the highest bidder. That property is alluring. Even the prudish narrator, like Augusto Miquis, senses something dangerously alive in Isidora’s ruinous passion for luxury. Both he and Miquis, when confronted with Isidora as she turns before the mirror in the studio of a French dressmaker, waver in their convictions: her beauty seduces them again and again. Isidora’s passion responds to something deeper than the mere love of ostentation, as is the case of Milagros in *La de Bringas*. For Isidora, as for her aging, alcoholic godfather, the addiction is existential: “Ser algo por diez minutos” (“to be something for ten minutes” [*Obras*, IV, 1150]). The much-maligned doña Pura, housewife in *Miau*, is another case in point. While Pura, like Isidora, is a spendthrift, her behavior owes much to the human need for self-expression, sounded in the second sentence of the novel as a “himno a la libertad” (“hymn to freedom” [*Obras*, IV, 551]); such an attitude is surely justifiable in a person who lives as a shut-in, facing the Woman’s Prison House.

Augusto Miquis, rising in society, counsels prudence, thrift, obscurity – the Krausist family ideal achieved by Isidora’s cousin who marries an honest man, sews for a living, and cares for Riquín, the illegitimate son whom Isidora has abandoned as she takes to the streets. The narrowness of this regulated ideal, however, cannot hold. The mix, in Isidora, of a gift for high art and the imperative – the social punishment – of a low life exceed the prescriptions of doctor and narrator. A gift for high art, in a woman like Isidora, has nowhere to go but down. We last catch a glimpse of her in *Torquemada en la hoguera* where, fittingly, she reappears as the lover of an impoverished painter. Art trails her skirts, even to the end.

Another example, in *La de Bringas*, of the imagistic power of narrative point of view is the ceremony (“Lavatorio”) on Maundy Thursday in which the queen and her courtiers wash the feet of the poor. Perched high on a stair, near the ceiling of the vast interior of the Royal Chapel, children spy through a round, half-window (“claraboya”) the particulars of the event. The ceremony appears in bits and pieces, mediated, as it were, by the amazed eyes of the children and giving a staggering, close-up view of paintings on the ceiling: huge, monstrous figures of nymphs and

²⁹ Labanyi, *Gender and Modernization*, p. 105.

angels tumble in grotesque postures. Down below, where the ceremony is taking place, everything appears in miniature – tiny figures crowding and scurrying to take part in the “pomposo acto de humildad regia” (“pompous act of royal humility”). In this upside-down world, children peering through a half-window register the decadence and deformity of this “comedia palaciega” (“palatial farce” [*Obras*, IV, 1585]).

In this way, point of view imprints upon the reader’s eye an image of fragments and exaggerations typical of Queen Isabel’s reign. Later the child Isabelita Bringas, named for the queen, vomits in reaction to the confusions of the entire event. Like family, like nation, high is low, large is small, Christian is pagan, art is caricature, charity is greed, indeed, governance no more than a parasitical exchange system of favors, bribes, and defaulting payments. The representatives of the poor, humiliated, not honored, by the ceremony, sell their parcels of royal largesse to rapacious agents waiting outside the chapel. Indeed, the narrator himself begins the novel by straying into the labyrinthine inner world of the “palace-city” where the Bringas family lives. He parlays the system of favors and bribes to his own advantage, and while he dismisses the hair-picture as a “mamarracho” (“travesty”), he also “lives” inside that “social picture”³⁰ and its deceptions, dozing on the terrace, half-hearing, half-seeing, finally to enjoy sexual relations with the protagonist, Rosalía. The hypocrisy and corruption of the narrator illustrates to perfection a cynical comment a character makes in *Miau*: Spain is “el país de las vice-versas” (“the country of vice-versas” [*Obras*, v, 600]).

The decisive factor in Galdós’ Realist novels is story telling itself. The notion of “narraciones interiores” (“inside stories”)³¹ of characters who, in telling, become the makers of their lives, transmutes story telling into the illusion of immediate experience. Family ties, business interests, political affiliations, religious practices, money, fashion, adultery, prostitution – even the luck of the national lottery – fabricate the networks that engender the stories that give rise to the novel that beckons to the reader. In *Fortunata y Jacinta*, the first bits of news about Juanito Santa Cruz blow into the ear of the narrator from friends and acquaintances; thus the genesis of a story about birth and betrayal arises from itself – from its own living speech. The origins of the “Torquemada” series reach back to other novels. It is as if Torquemada, an insistently recurring character, had staked a claim not only to unpaid loans but also to the indignation of the narrator, who now feels compelled to write the four-part series.

³⁰ Bly, “*La de Bringas*”, p. 51.

³¹ John W. Kronik, “Narraciones interiores en *Fortunata y Jacinta*.” In *Homenaje a Juan López-Morillas*. Ed. José Amor y Vázquez and A. David Kossoff (Madrid: Castalia, 1982), pp. 275–291.

Another narrator-character, whining and waving his arms, had claimed Máximo Manso's story, trading pen and ink for a novel.

These examples show how, in Galdós' Realist novels, the meaning of the term "novel" keeps changing as it becomes an image for those various forms of thinking, feeling, and imagining, of dreaming and dissembling, in which people engage as they tell their stories. Some "novelas" are copies or parodies of the social text. Others, evolving through the freedom to think and the power to imagine, redefine social norms and alter perceptions about morality. Still others deliberately deceive and some become letters that either deny or discover or both, while certain "novelas," whole or in part, turn into dialogue, adapted as plays. In all Galdós' novels, however, what is real is alive on the page. For even things as stupidly plain as a plate of beans, which the puffed-up priest Nicolás Rubín compares to the probable outcome of Fortunata's adultery, have an unexpected story to tell.

Published in *The Cambridge History of Spanish Literature*, edited by David T. Gies (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 392–409. Copyright © 2004 Cambridge University Press. Used by permission.