

GALDÓS THE PLAYWRIGHT PARODIED

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Parodies are fun, both for the general reader and the student of literature. In addition to the smiles or outright laughter that their broad humor evokes, everyone enjoys being in on the joke of making one author's serious work the butt of another's wit. Curiously, parody is both dependent on and independent of its subject; it must be close to the work that aroused comic treatment and yet mark its distance. However, the many styles of achieving this teasing relationship create a difficulty for the student of literature who seeks to identify the essential pattern that underlies parody.¹ Contemporary scholars have wrestled with the difficulty of defining it and even more with distinguishing parody from «burlesque,» «travesty,» or «pastiche.» The authors at the turn of the century who made sport of Galdós's plays illustrate the fuzziness of such distinctions by the way they characterized their own works.² Only one pair of them claimed in straightforward manner to have written a «parodia» (Casero and Larrubiera's *Feucha*). Instead, Gabriel Merino subtitled both his pieces «humorada» and noted immediately afterwards by way of explanation, «Parodia de...» Pérez y González was pleased to style his as an «humorada cómico-lírica» before adding, «Casi parodia de la comedia...» Granés designated his play grandly, «Pseudo-parodia político musical.» Had these works been written as exposures of grave faults, the subtitles in all likelihood would have reflected more pointedly the intention to censure. Clearly the authors were indicating by these tongue-in-cheek descriptions that their plays were primarily humorous embroideries on earlier plays.

The basic feature that the six parodies of Galdós share with all parody is humor. The comic tone arises from the controlled exaggeration or trivialization of prominent characteristics of the original. Furthermore, in such over- or understatement lies another fundamental quality of parody: criticism. For us, however, the critical aspect is what is most problematical about the six plays under discussion, for how can we regard as disapproving works in which the authors take pains to express their admiration for Galdós? Pérez y González, for example, modestly concludes his humoresque: «Pero esto no vale nada, / obra de un pobre magín, / y porque tenga buen fin / como tributo de honor, / aplaudamos al autor / que hizo *La de San Quintín*.» Merino, no less deferential, has the hero of *Electroterapia* turn to the audience at the end to ask for «perdón e indulgencia / para este humilde homenaje / de admiración y respeto / al autor incomparable / del drama *Electra* y de *Los / Episodios Nacionales*.» In the case of *La del capotín*, Merino actually dedicated the parody to his target in these words: «Al señor D. Benito Pérez Galdós,

verdadero Patriarca de la literatura nacional, tiene el atrevimiento de dedicarle este modestísimo trabajo su admirador más entusiasta, el Autor.»

Such warm and enthusiastic tributes make clear that the parodists intended no sharp criticism of Galdós and were writing as admirers, not literary rivals or antagonists.³ Galdós, as the twentieth century approached, was acknowledged to be one of Spain's foremost authors, notwithstanding the occasional objections to his political or religious beliefs. The great novelist had given such rich expression to the preoccupations of Spanish life in the preceding century that, even though he was seen by some to be less skillful as a dramatist, he could not be faulted as an untalented or unimportant writer. The parodists, therefore, did not design their works to deride, to make fun of, *La de San Quintín*, *Electra*, and *Mariucha* but to have fun with them; as true supporters, they were confident of being rightly understood. Thus their plays paradoxically attest to the secure position of Galdós in Spanish literature at the turn of the century. Moreover, since all of the parodies derive their humor from developing situations that bear some resemblance to the originals, the authors indirectly confirm that Galdós's plays were very well known to the public.

Even so, there is a slight element of criticism beneath the good-natured raillery, and to understand it we might begin with the context in which the earliest of the parodied plays appeared. *La de San Quintín* (1894) was the fourth of Galdós's dramas to be performed. The three that preceded it were *Realidad*—something of a success, vigorously defended but also attacked by a divided partisan public; *La loca de la casa*, which enjoyed a more tepid success in 1893; and in the same year, *Gerona*, which proved to be a dismal failure. All three were revisions either of novels or of an unperformable, lengthy composition in dialogue; but with *La de San Quintín*, Galdós wrote his first performed work conceived entirely as a play. It was a tremendous success. Berkowitz conjectures that if the general public disliked *Gerona* for having dramatized a Spanish defeat at the hands of the French, Galdós, eager for good box office receipts, would flatter the masses with this original play. Berkowitz reports that at the first performance, when the Duquesa de San Quintín called the proletarian Víctor «pobrecito mío» just prior to the embrace that symbolized the uniting of the two classes, the audience broke out into frenzied applause. The next day, he adds, all Madrid was seized with «Galdosismo,» a wave of intense admiration and fervid acclaim (267-69). Against such an outpouring of praise adverse criticism was muted. Typical of this reluctance to dwell on the faults was the review by Francisco F. Villegas: «Por mi parte, renuncio con gusto a hacer este enojoso análisis, reconociendo que, a pesar de todas estas incorrecciones de forma, hay en la comedia tanta fuerza dramática, tanta cantidad de talento, tanta verdad y tantas bellezas que, al contemplarlas, todo lo demás se borra. Pasa con *La de San Quintín* lo que con el sol: lo vivo de su luz impide que se puedan ver sus manchas.» Even so, people who took pleasure in Galdós's success but felt that the great novelist had not fully solved all his problems in writing plays turned to lighthearted parody as a way of pointing out shortcomings.

With some appreciation of the critical tone of these parodies, let us look at what features provoked the humorous sallies, beginning with *La de San*

Quintín. The caricature of names first catches one's attention. José Manuel de Buendía, an old man and a tightwad, whom certain of the characters would convert into a venerable patriarch, becomes «Noé» in two of the parodies and «Matusalén» in the third. The heroine of the title, Rosario de Trastamara, forced by economic failures to leave her lands, makes an entrance in Pérez y González's play as «Rosarito de Tracamundana, Duquesa de Vámonos.» Granés neatly dispatches the Duchess as «Rosario de Trasto-Maula» and disposes of Rufina, the granddaughter, by calling her «Tontina de Noche.» Her father is no longer Don César de Buendía but, without apology to Moreto, is «Don Diego de Noche.» Galdós's extravagant creation of the name Marqués de Falfán de los Godos turns into the «Marqués de Flin-flán» for one parodist and for another, the «Marqués de Farfantón.» Of course, Canseco will become «Perro-seco» or «Panseco,» and the very, very good son, Víctor, is skewered with the name of «El Niño Bitongo.» Máximo from *Electra*, as might be expected, turns into «Máximo Progreso» and Pantoja into «Espantajo»; and, finally, Mariucha ends up as «Feucha.»

The distortion of names gives us the surest clues as to the aim of the parodist's humor. The five of them pick up the places where Galdós strains to make his points or to create the necessary situations or characters. Nevertheless, in their parodies they uniformly accept the original social message. The wedding of upper and lower classes, the regeneration of Spanish society, the importance of hard work, an end to a stifling and life-denying piety are not primarily the subjects of humor (see Sobejano; Fox; Finkenthal). But unlike the ardent liberal supporters who had only praise for the presentation of these socio-political ideas, Galdós's fellow authors spotted the contrivance and artificiality underlying the ways he worked them into his plays.

It is true, as Ruiz Ramón writes (367), that Galdós's characters seem already to have been made before the curtain rises; the spectator does not see them creating themselves with their words. Víctor and Rosario are attractive creations but not fully convincing. Can one believe, for example, that Víctor was once such a dangerous socialist? Certainly Pérez y González had his doubts, for he writes the following dialogue when his equivalent of Rosario learns with horror about the young man's past:

[Rosario] ¿Usted es anarquista?
 [El Niño Bitongo (i.e., Víctor)] Eso.
 [Ros.] ¡Jesús, qué barbaridad!
 [Bit.] ¡No se asuste usted, duquesa!
 porque con usted no va. (*Con misterio.*)
 Cuando yo ponga una bomba
 la pondré en otro local
 porque al fin, la casa esta
 la tengo yo que heredar
 y si se me estropeará
 no me resultaba, ¿verdad? (22)

Víctor (or El Niño Bitongo) as a socialist or anarchist is too repentant; he lends himself too willingly to the training that will make possible his becoming a bourgeois, the heir of his father's wealth. Later in the parody, Rosario again questions him: «¿Pero tú eres anarquista?» / «Desde el pelo hasta

los pies.» «Los nombres te importan poco,» she notes, and he replies, «Pero me importa el parné» (37).

Víctor's labors also provoked considerable mirth in the parodists. We understand, of course, that he must work hard, for diligent labor with his hands is the discipline that will effect his reform. But so many tasks? Such varied skills? Such unending drudgery? One of the characters in *La de Vámonos* comments on this prodigy of constructive activity: «Lo hace todo, si se empeña. / ¡Friega! ¡Guisa! ¡Parte leña / y toca el acordeón!!» (10). One hears his father speak in a similar vein as he accosts his putative son:

[Telémaco (i.e., César)] ¿Qué vienes a hacer
y por qué al trabajo dejas?
¿Has visto las botas viejas
que tienes que componer?
[Bitongo] Sí, señor, son dos «lanchones».
[Tel.] ¿Están muy malas?
[Bit.] Muy malas.
[Tel.] ¿Y qué necesitan?
[Bit.] Palas,
medias suelas y tacones.
[Tel.] Bueno; pues a trabajar
sin descanso ni sosiego,
compón las botas y luego
arreglas el palomar.
Es tarea meritoria
y lo harás por tu interés;
si queda tiempo... después
da unas vueltas a la noria. (13)

In «*La de Don sin Din*,» Víctor's tasks also include shoe repairs, as his father asks: «¿Pusiste los tacones a mis botas?» Víctor answers: «Los puse.» And then grandfather and father seem to vie for the role of chief oppressor:

[Matusalén (i.e., José M. de Buendía)] No te olvides que tienes que ponerme unos cuchillos
a los pantalones.
[D. Diego de la Noche (i.e., César de Buendía)] Y podar los árboles del huerto.
[Mat.] Y pegar un tubo que se ha roto.
[Die.] Antes de nada, ponte a levantar dos pisos a esta casa, pero necesito que estén en pie
al amanecer.

And the youth replies: «A las cinco estarán levantados» (cuadro I, esc. 6). The parodists, of course, have heaped exaggeration on what they saw as exaggeration in Galdós's original.

Victor, however, is not the only butt of this comic suspension of belief. Rosario de Trasto-Maula also comes in for her share of ridicule. Granés is downright mischievous when he has the lady tell old Matusalén what happened to her after the ruin of her family: «Vd. sabe que a la muerte de mis padres, cuando la ruina de mi familia, me fui a Madrid.» [Mat.] «¿Sola?» [Ros.] «Joven, honesta, y recatada.» [Mat.] «¿Y todavía soltera?» [Ros.] «Claro. Entré en casa de unos nobles—» [Mat.] «¿De doncella?» [Ros.] «No, señor, de ama de cría» (cuadro I, esc. 7). Pérez y González highlights

the awkwardness of this transition from duchess to housemaid by setting to music the following exchange between her and the patriarch:

[Ros.] Yo soy Rosarito de Tracamundana,
soy una duquesa requebarbiana.
Conservo mis trenes y mis carruajes,
y tengo trescientos veinticinco trajes;
y estoy hoy tronada de un modo, que ya
ni a un ciego podría mandarle rezar.

Yo no tengo un perro chico
partido por la mitad.

[Patriarca] ¡Olé ya!

[Ros.] Mire usted qué sandunguera
me ha partido mi mamá.

Mas yo no me inquieto, que en caso aputado,
soy para un barrido y para un fregado;
por eso aquí vengo buscando acomodado,
pero yo sé, a Dios gracias, servir para todo.

Yo guiso, yo plancho, yo lavo además,
y nunca echo polvos, de alumbre ni gas.

Y seré, yendo a la compra,
muy mirada en el sisar.

[Pat.] ¡Olé ya!

[Ros.] Mire usted qué sandunguera
me ha partido mi mamá.

Yo soy duquesa—por mi desgracia.

[Pat.] ¡Cómo ha bajado—la aristocracia!

[Ros.] Servir no es malo—¿por qué me tilde?

[Pat.] Una duquesa—de *Menegilda*.

[Ros.] Es que por esto—no me rebajo.

[Pat.] Serás princesa—del estropajo.

[Ros.] Es que yo soy—muy liberal.

[Pat.] Siendo duquesa—no es natural.

[Ros.] Sí tal.

[Pat.] No tal.

[Ros.] Liberal.

[Pat.] ¿Liberal?

No la hay de ese percal. (16)

The famous scene of baking *rosquillas* could not escape parody. Pérez y González introduces, under the guise of song and a game, some sharper notes of political criticism, but the most delightful treatment comes in Granés's «La de Don sin Din.» Víctor begins by saying:

[Víc.] Aquí está la masa, vida mía, para hacer los buñuelos.

[Ros.] Masa buena cuando bien se la trata. (Voy a hacer una escena buscando en cada cosa una alegoría para darle la lata.) Víctor, ¿ves esa harina?

[Víc.] Sí, la veo.

[Ros.] Esa es la humanidad.

[Víc.] Pues no lo creo.

[Ros.] ¿Ves como en el hornillo
chisporrotean rojos los carbones?
Esas son las pasiones.

[Víc.] (A esta chica le falta algún tornillo.) (cuadro I, esc. 5)

And so on.

The two reworkings of *Electra* are quite different from one another. Gabriel Merino changes Galdós's Máximo from a metallurgist to a veterinarian who uses electrotherapy to cure his patients, but he cannot get very far into his fun before he comes to grips with that extraordinary name of the heroine. He teases Galdós by having his Urbano explain to the character, renamed from Cuesta to «Cuesta-arriba,» that Pectra, as the young woman is now called, is really a contraction of «Petronila,» and Urbano's wife remarks smoothly: «¡Pues cualquiera lo adivina!» (10). The uncertainty about *Electra*'s mother is resolved, in the parody, by Cuesta-arriba, who claims he knew the unfortunate woman. He tells Pectra the story but at crucial moments falls into a kind of double-talk:

- [Cue.] ¡No preguntes, hija mía!
tu madre *por firio anchia*
marfendolio escalajón!
- [Pec.] ¡Pero eso es tomarme el pelo
y va usted a hacer que me cuadre!
¿por qué al nombrar a mi madre
siempre me habla usted en *camelo*?
- [Cue.] No debo decirte más;
y si Dios no lo remedia
al final de la comedia...
¡tampoco te enterarás!
- [Pec.] ¿Por qué no habla usted a los otros?
- [Cue.] Porque yo no puedo hacerlo;
¡esto... no debe saberlo (*Confidencialmente.*)
más que el público y nosotros! (18)

Cuesta-arriba's speech gains in piquancy because it exposes the artifice of referring to the «comediá» and the «público.» This is a happy device that appears varyingly in many of the burlesqued versions. Sometimes it lends a droll air of improvisation to the action, as in *La del capotín* when Malanoche (i.e., Don César) questions Vito (i.e., Víctor): «¿Te vas? / [Vito] Usted me arrojó. / [Noé] ¿Y el tercer acto? / [Vito] No espero. / ¡Si aquí no hay acto tercero, / ni Cristo que lo fundó!» (29).

The other parody of *Electra*, called ¡*Alerta!*, has its moments of comedy, such as a joke by the poor man, Juan Pagano, who has no counterpart in the Galdós play. He is present when Señá Ignorancia returns from shopping complaining about the high cost of beef but with a basket loaded with food. Juan asks: «¿Pero todavía existe / carne de vaca? / [Ign.] ¡Hombre, sí! / ¡Carísima! / [Juan] Sólo espero / comerla en una ocasión. / [Ign.] ¿Cuándo? / [Juan] ¡En la Resurrección / de la carne!» (9). But Escacena and Muñoz Esteban often carry parody of Galdós over into satire of his very targets. They seem to embrace Galdós's ideas so passionately that their exaggerations magnify the same wrongs that *Electra* deplored rather than, as befits parody, to heighten the dramatic excesses that Galdós's ardor created in the original. For example, still within the range of parody is the idea of having Juan Pagano borrow two pesetas from smug hypocrites like Señá Ignorancia and Timo-teo at a weekly cost of three pesetas. But Escacena and Muñoz Esteban's own convictions show through the verses in which Máximo Progreso informs the heroine, Patricia, about what her father was really like: «su padre / fue

uno que murió luchando / un día en las barricadas / contra viles reaccionarios» (35). This is an expansion of Galdós's description of him as «militar muy valiente» (I, ii). When Máximo persuades her to rebel against Espantajo (i.e., Pantoja), one hears outside a hand organ playing the *Marseillaise* (20). Where Galdós had his villain falsely claim that Electra and Máximo had the same mother, Escacena and Muñoz Esteban have Espantajo make the accusation that Máximo's father murdered Patricia's mother, while outside the room in which the scene takes place the audience hears «(...voces de niños que cantan el estribillo popular, 'Ahora sí que estarás contentón, carlistón, etc.）」 (28). The two authors make further use of music near the conclusion of their play, picking up the «coro de novicias» that sings in the church while Galdós's Pantoja exerts his final efforts to draw Electra into the convent (V, vii). A choir of nuns also accompanies Espantajo's pleas to abandon the world («de ese cántico divino / las dulcísimas cadencias»), but the mischievous authors introduce other offstage voices, those of children «que entonan la canción popular, 'Disfrazado de perro de presa / un carlista se vino a Madrid, / y un agente de la Policía / la morcilla le dio en Chamberí」 (35).

The use of songs from different contexts is a noteworthy device in some of the other parodies. Merino, for example, draws heavily on *zarzuelas* to enliven *La del capotín*. In addition, the authors weave into their texts passages from other plays, especially from Zorrilla's *Don Juan Tenorio*. These practices are understandable in light of the fact that every parody is by definition a kind of metafiction, because it requires the listener or reader always to have present the original literary work to savor the comic distortion. Therefore, the incorporation of some of those well-known romantic verses or popular melodies so enlarges the metafictional quality as to call attention to the exaggeration and thus to intensify its function as parody. Typical of this technique, which can be hilarious, is the following speech from *Feuicha* in which the hero, now «Cordero» rather than León, recites to the heroine how hard he worked as a rag collector (changed from a coal dealer) to make his way up from the ruins of his past:

Trapos viejos recogí,
clavos y broza atrapé,
a las bohardillas subí,
a los sótanos bajé,
en zahurdas me metí
y nunca consideré
qué hubiera sido de mí
si se me resbala un pie. (20)

The delightful abuse of Don Juan Tenorio's fanfarronade is just right for teasing Galdós about his creation of characters who are a bit too good to be true.

The eagerness of Casero and Larrubiera to have the audience laugh at their fun-making serves to confirm my observations about parody. The humorous revision has an existence of its own. Slipping in the often-heard verses of Zorrilla's hero was an inspiration entirely independent of the ideas and situations Galdós had been earnestly working through in *Mariucba*. Casero

and Larrubiera, like their companions in parody, wanted the public to appreciate their wit and inventiveness. Some had reputations as popular writers, and the plays considered here are works that added to their record of successes. The difference, however, between their other writings and these is that the parodies were not made up out of whole cloth. They have plots, characters, and scenes that take their motive for being from Galdós's plays. Thus, whether the hero is a metallurgist or a veterinarian, whether his regeneration is due to labor as a coal dealer or rag collector, or even whether the heroine's father really was a soldier fighting against wicked reactionaries, the parodists always develop their material following the lines set down in the original. The parallelism can be so close, as in the *rosquillas* scenes, that the audience almost hears both serious and comic texts at the same time. The variances, however, alert one to the parodist's desire to have the audience see the original work anew through the distorting lens of his cleverness. The result is a good-natured acknowledgment of Galdós's sometimes heavy hand and an appreciation of the parodist's lighthearted and amiable deftness in pointing it out.⁴

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NOTES

¹ See Rose. Particularly helpful among the numerous studies cited in her bibliography are Riewald (from which I briefly paraphrase below); Markiewicz; and Kiremidjian.

² There are three parodies of *La de San Quintín*: Merino Pichilo (*La del capotín*); Granés; Pérez y González; two parodies of *Electra*: Merino Pichilo (*Electroterapia*); Escacena and Muñoz Esteban; and one of *Mariucha*: Casero y Barranco and Larrubiera. Only the first four are mentioned in the extensive survey by Crespo Matellán.

³ Evidence that Galdós himself saw the parodies in this light is that he was happy to write a prologue for a volume of poems by Antonio Casero, *La musa de los madriles* (1914). In it he praises his former parodist's gift for capturing so vividly the sly humor and inventive wit of everyday Madrid speech (see Shoemaker 117-18).

⁴ A somewhat shorter version of this article was delivered as a paper at the Galdós Symposium held at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, March 8, 1985.

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