

SLIDING INTO THE VORTEX: PATTERNS OF ASCENT AND DESCENT IN *LA DESHEREDADA*

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Over forty years ago, Joseph Frank introduced the concept of spatial form to describe recurrent techniques in modern literature that appear to undercut or obfuscate the linear flow of language and the chronological sequence of events in texts (*Widening Gyre* 54-62). Since that time, the terms "spatial form" and "spatialization" have proven to be remarkably flexible and adaptable to a wide variety of literary styles and forms, no longer limited to a specific historical period. As Frank has stated: "Spatial form is . . . one of the permanent possibilities for the organization of all literary texts . . . [T]he emergence of spatial form in twentieth-century narrative should no longer be regarded as a radical break with tradition" ("30 Years After" 236).

At first glance, Galdós's *La desheredada*, a novel that appears to depend almost exclusively on the conventions of causally and chronologically structured narratives to produce meaning, might seem an unlikely text to associate with spatialization. As Stephen Gilman and Peter Bly have shown, Galdós uses the linear progression of Isidora Rufete's life as the central narrative focus of the novel, skillfully interweaving threads of fictional and historical discourse and alternately foregrounding these two components in a complementary fashion to unmask the moral vacuity of Restoration society.¹ But while in the earlier *Episodios nacionales* and the *Novelas de la primera época* the focus and disposition of the material (historical and ideological, respectively) are relatively straightforward, the aesthetic task facing the author of *La desheredada* is considerably more complex: to present in a unified, convincing, moralistic, and entertaining fashion a tale that is at once historical, representative, ideological, exemplary, and fictional in its appeal. Accordingly, the novel at times lacks focus and is digressive, diffuse, and decidedly nonlinear in its structure. In fact, a closer look reveals that there is another, overarching organizational and thematic principle at work in *La desheredada*: a scheme that supersedes linear causality is closely allied with spatial form and accounts at least in part for the "uneven, repetitive, overemphatic" qualities that an initial reading of the novel has suggested to some critics (Gilman 84).

As in the apprehension of picaresque fiction, the reader of *La desheredada* perceives the downfall of Isidora as a moral, symbolic story of negative exemplarity. In this case, the antiheroine's destruction illustrates and warns of the disastrous consequences of succumbing to the national disease of acquisitive madness. The text attempts to spur its readers to an *examen de conciencia* and to inspire them to reestablish an internalized, ethical code of conduct. To achieve this end, Galdós has recourse to a narrative and imagistic pattern of ascent and descent, a pattern derived from the myth of Icarus and alluded to in both the *Dedicatoria* and the *Moraleja*. The Greek *mythos* is already imbued with an ethical imperative, and Galdós in turn utilizes the tale as a narrative and thematic unit to shape the form and interpretation of the novel. In the final analysis, the insistent repetition of the ascent and descent motif in *La desheredada* serves two major, synergic purposes: 1) to generate a rhythmic cell that

permeates the novel and unifies its seemingly loose structure; and 2) to fuse all narrative and thematic levels in the text on the transcendent plane of moral discourse and reform.

In the *Dedicatoria*, Galdós provides the reader with cues for the interpretation of *La desheredada* and introduces the sardonic tone that will characterize the text's narrative voice. He disingenuously questions to whom to dedicate a novel in which, "Saliento a relucir aquí . . . algunas dolencias sociales", he uncovers society's lack of appreciation for "Aritmética, Lógica, Moral y Sentido común" (985). The ironic pairing of *relucir* with *dolencias sociales* predisposes the reader to recognize and identify with the informed, superior moral position of the implied author. In addition, the reader's attention is drawn to one of the major techniques used in the novel to unmask false values: the play of shining surface appearance against underlying depravity and self-delusion. Galdós ends by dedicating the novel "a los que son o deben ser sus verdaderos médicos: a los maestros de escuela" (985), who have the power to shape and reform moral consciousness in children. Indirectly, the implied author casts himself in the role of both satirist, the doctor who diagnoses and prescribes medicine for society's ills, and docent, who guides the readers through society's pitfalls and instructs them in social reform.

The *Dedicatoria* has a concluding counterpart in the *Moraleja*, in which the narrator issues an ethical imperative to the reader: "Si sentís anhelo de llegar a una difícil y escabrosa altura, no os fiéis de las alas postizas. Procurad echarlas naturales, y en caso de que lo consigáis, pues hay infinitos ejemplos que confirman la negativa, lo mejor, creedme, lo mejor será que toméis una escalera" (1181). In this final exhortation, the narrator alludes to the myth of Icarus, a cautionary tale in which an unnaturally high ascent motivated by excessive pride and realized by unseemly means precipitates a disastrous plunge to destruction. The readers are asked to reevaluate retrospectively the trajectory of Isidora's life as a contemporary Icarian model and then to make the leap from fiction to reality so as to review their own consciences and aspirations as well as the structure and moral fiber of society. In essence, Galdós has created a didactic frame, a sensitizing device that directs the reader's expectations, establishes a rapport of dramatic irony between the reader, narrator, and implied author, and instructs the reader in interpreting and applying the lessons of the text.²

From the beginning of *La desheredada*, Galdós identifies Isidora and her inability to read and interpret reality accurately with the play and place of madness (Gilman 88-89; Risley 114-17). Equipped with the "alas postizas" of forged documents and personal ambition, Isidora arrives in Madrid to climb the "difícil y escabrosa altura" of high society by assuming her ostensibly rightful place as the Marquesa de Aransis and heiress to the family fortune. She first reveals her plans to Canencia, a patient in the Leganés insane asylum whom she mistakes for an employee. The *cuerto loco* advises her not to overreach her grasp when envy is the prime motivating force: "'una de las enfermedades del alma que más individuos trae a estas casas es la ambición, el afán de engrandecimiento, la envidia que los bajos tienen de los altos, y eso de querer subir atropellando a los que están arriba, no por la escalera del mérito y del trabajo, sino por la escala suelta de la intriga, o de la violencia, como si dijéramos, empujando, empujando . . .'" (994). The wise fool implies that the stairway of merit or hard work, which reappears at the end of the novel, is accessible to everyone, as is the ladder of intrigue. In his opinion, success or failure is essentially the responsibility of the individual, a matter of personal choice. Canencia's sentiments, echoed by the narrator

and others, set in motion an admonishing subtext of ethical discourse in the novel that consistently advises Isidora to turn back from her illusory quest. Later in part 1, Miquis assumes the role of counselor, reminding the disdainful protagonist of their equality as human beings: "Somos hijos del Pueblo, en el seno del noble Pueblo nacimos; . . . usted se ha mamado el dedo como yo, y ahora somos iguales . . ." (1011). Despite the playful irony of the tone, the statement asserts that honor and nobility are universal spiritual qualities, not characteristics unique to a particular social class, and that humankind possesses an innate potential for morality and dignity as well as for immorality and shame.

Throughout the novel, Isidora refuses to heed such warnings, electing instead to reshape reality imaginatively to conform with internalized fictional patterns. Along with "el don de imaginar fuerte" (997), she possesses a hypersensibility that enables her to fabricate, exaggerate, and maintain illusions and permits her to endow vulgar materialism with a transcendent, noumenal glow. The reader enters the protagonist's consciousness on countless occasions, during daydreams or bouts of insomnia when her imagination works feverishly to construct a second, idealized existence: "En aquella segunda vida, Isidora se lo encontraba todo completo, sucesos y personas . . . Las funciones de la vida se cumplían detalladamente, . . . todo ello destacándose sobre un fondo de bienestar, opulencia y lujo. Pasar de esta vida apócrifa a la primera auténtica, érale menos fácil de lo que parece" (1006). Popular romances serve as mediators and models in this constant substitution of a fictional world of wealth, elegance, and self-indulgent independence for the reality of poverty, hunger, and dependence on the charity of the Relimpios or the self-serving Joaquín Pez. Especially in part 1, Isidora's obsession with the idealizing world of romance precipitates a type of moral blindness in which she confuses form with substance. Consequently, her social aspirations take on a markedly acquisitive and superficial cast. In the key chapter, "Tomando posesión de Madrid," the young beauty from the provinces lays siege to the capital (in her own mind) by purchasing what she considers aristocratic accoutrements—a parasol, a fan, a change purse, gloves, earrings. Imitating romance heroines, she strolls down the street distributing alms to the poor, writes letters on expensive stationery, and uses up the water of the Relimpio family by taking baths. From Isidora's point of view, all of her actions have a talismanic power. She looks and acts the part of a great lady; therefore she is one. The protagonist's blindness renders her incapable of evaluating the genuine worth of people and things as well. She prefers the womanizing wastrel Pez to the intelligent, hard-working Miquis, because with his handsome face, elegant dress, and noble affectations, Pez's façade more closely resembles that of a romance hero. And while the narrator emphasizes the ugly commonness of the crumbling Aransis palace with its aura of abandon and morbidity, Isidora perceives it as a magnificent dwelling worthy of her possession.

As she grows more enthralled with the imagined role of Marquesa, narcissism and personal vanity figure more prominently in Isidora's daydreams, bolstering her delusions of grandeur: "¡Qué hermosa soy! Cada día estoy mejor. Soy cosa rica, todos lo afirman y es verdad . . ." (1051).³ Yet inevitably illusion and reality collide, shattering the romance narrative Isidora envisions as her future. Before visiting the Marquesa, the protagonist, "falsificando la realidad," foresees a beautiful scene of anagnorisis in which she is welcomed back into the bosom of the family (1071). When she encounters only denial and rejection in the subsequent interview, pride dictates that she fight her putative grandmother in court, while both vanity and need motivate her

fall into an amoral abyss in which she abandons true nobility of spirit by offering her virtue to Pez. In an analysis of the final chapter of part 1, "Igualdad. —Suicidio de Isidora," Gilman states that the novel is "realigned" when Isidora awakens to historical consciousness with the crowd's shouting of "Todos somos iguales" as the King and Queen abdicate and the new Republic is declared. In this scene, fiction and history become one (Gilman 106-07).⁴ But the author also completes a process of narrative realignment in this chapter, transforming the romance pattern, ironically undermined throughout part 1, into a tragic Icarian model. Galdós has inverted the romance plot's upward turn towards discovery and restoration, pushing the protagonist downward and away from the pinnacle of the social hierarchy.

The rhythm of acquisition/dispersal, economic rise/moral fall developed in part 1 of *La desheredada* is spun out repeatedly in part 2, unifying the episodes both within the section and in the two divisions of the novel. This system of repetition with variations enables the reader to gauge Isidora's decline with a clear critical eye. At the beginning of each new amorous liaison, she dresses and eats well and assumes an air of nobility but once again loses everything to extravagant indulgence. As Isidora moves down a scale of lovers from Pez to Gaitica, the cycles increase in frequency and level of depravity and decrease in duration (Russell 797-98). The resultant acceleration of textual rhythmicity creates a spatial equivalent to the growing sense of desperation that invades Isidora's mind.

The melodramas in miniature of part 2 are played out within the psychodynamic space of the households the protagonist establishes and inhabits. This succession of homes provides an objective correlative to Isidora's fluctuating moral state and punctuates the disintegration of her inner self.⁵ The furniture's thin veneer of elegance in the apartment she shares with Pez soon gives way to the shabby underlying materials it masks, just as Isidora's superficial respectability inevitably betrays the tawdriness of her affairs (Wright 232). As she moves from the comfort of her residence with Botín to the squalor of the Relimpio dwelling, from the tranquility of Emilia Relimpio's home to a small room she shares with Pez, Isidora finds the space she occupies more confining, her activity more restricted, and her much coveted freedom ever more elusive. When the protagonist exchanges her jail cell in the Modelo prison for the oppressive domination of Gaitica, she substitutes moral incarceration for physical restriction. The course of action she has chosen leads her into the streets of Madrid and the perpetual servitude of prostitution. Not surprisingly, in the chapter entitled "Disolución," she tells Miquis: "Yo me fui, ¿te enteras? Yo me he muerto. Aquella Isidora ya no existe más que en tu imaginación. Ésta que ves, ya no conserva de aquella ni siquiera el nombre" (1175). In her willful pursuit of the Aransis name and fortune, the protagonist relinquishes her authentic claim to human dignity and independence. She squanders a small inheritance, refuses Bou's marriage proposal, and turns up her nose at the idea of work. By persistently falsifying reality, Isidora initiates the process of diminution and debasement represented by the increasingly constrictive spaces that inscribe her movements in the novel. At the end, there is simply no room left for the original Isidora to reclaim. She can only terminate her unwitting advance towards self-effacement by committing "suicide," disappearing from view into the maze of the city like a ghost into the night.

Ironically, her vanity and capacity for self-deception grow apace with the precariousness of her socioeconomic position. Now she believes that beauty alone suffices to demand an aristocratic title ("bastaría a darle la ejecutoria su gran belleza, su figura,

sus gustos delicados, sus simpatías por toda cosa elegante y superior" [1134]), and she will endure almost anything, make any sacrifice to support Joaquín. Even in the depths of depression in prison, Isidora's narcissism is such that she conjures a vision of herself as Marie Antoinette victimized by the rabble to resurrect a feeling of superiority. As the protagonist becomes mired in these futile defensive impulses, the moralistic voices critiquing her thoughts and actions crescendo into a resounding chorus that condemns her immorality and ominously foretells her future. The teasing Miquis who reminds Isidora of their mutual, humble origin evolves in part 2 into a spiritual doctor who diagnoses her acquisitive madness as a "cancer" and predicts a bleak end for her: "si no acabas en la casa de Aransis, acabarás en un hospital" (1129). The narrator of part 2 of the novel, as in the case of *Don Quijote*, becomes more intrusive, insistent, and trenchantly sarcastic. At the beginning of the section, the narrative voice adopts an intimate, affectionate, slightly ironic attitude towards the young woman (the voice identifies itself as "voz de la conciencia de Isidora o interrogatorio indiscreto del autor" [1089]): "Mira, Isidorita: tu vida social está bastante desarreglada; pero tu vida moral lo está más aún" (1088). But the tone of the narrator who seeks to enter smoothly into the consciousness of Isidora and the reader eventually modulates into one of harsh condemnation. When Isidora must pawn her clothes to get money for food, the narrator sneers: "No era la primera vez que tuvo que desnudarse para comer" (1122). This is the same narrative persona who compares the bed she shares with Pez to a *catafalco* (1089) and the miserable room she occupies in the Relimpio house to a *sepulcro* (1117). By the end of *La desheredada*, the ethical discourse that in part 1 interjected a counterbalancing note of admonition into Isidora's flights of fancy has assumed an openly adversarial role in relation to the protagonist's degradation. She is the target of satirical discourse, an example of the dehumanizing effects of acquisitive madness.

The conclusion of *La desheredada* places Isidora's fall squarely within the tradition of the Christian portrayal of the unrepentant sinner. When she enters a life of prostitution, she bears the mark of the damned on her face, a knife slash made by the demonic Gaitica. In words charged with latent didacticism, José and Emilia Relimpio evoke the Icarian parallel to guide the reader's response to the protagonist's tragedy. The Relimpio patriarch laments his godchild's fate, yet, acting as a second Canencia, he recognizes that her corruption is the result of her own weakness, vanity manifested as temerity: "Ha caído en vuestro cieno por la temeridad de querer remontarse a las alturas con alas postizas" (1181). Emilia explains his mother's disappearance to the uncomprehending Riquín as if it were a morality play: "Aquella mamá tuya no existe ya, se ha ido para siempre y no volverá; se ha caído al fondo, hijo mío, al fondo . . ." (1181). The overt proselytism in these comments suggests that readers should extend their interpretive frame to a new level of moral intensity, analyzing the novel as a fictional sermon.

The same motif reverberates throughout the text, taking shape in microcosm in the lives of other characters and in their historical moment. The protagonist's father, Tomás, describes his career as a climb that began with a step on the *escalón* of merit (989), progressed up to political authority and financial security, and ended with his descent into criminal activity, imprisonment, and, finally, the insane asylum. The Relimpio family believes that Melchor can ascend the stairway (*escalera*) of fame and fortune (1040), using his handsome face and fine figure to get ahead.⁶ In fact, Melchor does rise to power and wealth, but in the end he must flee the country as a

wanted criminal when his involvement in lottery fraud and embezzlement comes to light. And the Marqués de Saldeoro lives alternately in riches or penury, depending on his ability to find a woman who will support him. Although he marries into money at the end of the novel and apparently escapes impoverishment, the years of dissipation have taken their toll on his attractive façade. Mariano, Isidora's younger brother, provides perhaps the most frightening negative example of the wages of sin in his attachment to superficial appearance and material possessions motivated by vanity, greed, and envy. He is in concept a shadow figure for the protagonist, a Doppelgänger who bears the symbolic nickname *Pecado*, embodies the ugliest, basest part of Isidora's soul, and presages her downfall (Risley 123). Mariano emulates Melchor and anyone who has money and systematically rejects every opportunity for advancement through education and honest work. When Isidora pays his school tuition, Mariano skips classes to associate with the ruffians who frequent the streets near the Plaza de Toros and becomes one of them. In those rare moments in which he has money, he gambles or drinks it away and indulges in the promiscuous behavior he identifies with the monied class. He eventually dies in a public execution after attempting to assassinate the King, the ultimate act of hypocrisy in which a desire for fame masquerades as social consciousness. These secondary narratives focus the reader's attention on an implicit didactic message: "Vuelve en ti, lector. No seas como ellos."

The full significance of spatialization in *La desheredada* can only be perceived within the context of the sweeping changes that took place in Spanish society during the years 1872-76, the period roughly encompassed by the novel. In the panoramic view Galdós provides of the political and moral instability of the time, the reader witnesses what Mikhail Bakhtin has identified as a fundamental characteristic of the realistic novel, the embodying of space with time, the recreation of a venue in which public and private life interact and become inseparable (246-47). One senses the stagnation and decay inherent in the endless, repetitive historical cycles—the collapse of the monarchy, the rise and fall of the First Republic, the return of the monarchy. The ongoing war in Cuba, shifts in political parties in power, military uprisings, the growth of anarchism, and the resurgence of Carlism, all contribute to an ever-changing governmental landscape. But Galdós has captured the social climate of the epoch as well, painting a bleak portrait of a collectivity that values material wealth over solid moral values. Pervasive corruption, risky speculation, favoritism, laziness, and get-rich-quick schemes create an atmosphere of giddiness, uncertainty, and imminent disaster. The titled, landed aristocracy represented by the Marquesa de Aransis is weak, anachronistic, and unable to supply the energy and resources necessary to shore up the sinking economy and morality of the nation. The gentry have ceded their power to the upstarts, like Don Manuel Pez, who have turned hypocrisy and expediency into an art form. As politician/entrepreneur, Pez's piscine ideology of shifting allegiances enables him to survive the changing tides of fortune. He has assured himself and his family of a relatively consistent margin of success by setting up a support network built on bribery, flattery, and other activities of a questionable nature. The author's depiction of the formation of a national lottery as an activity undertaken by mysterious figures who meet in a dimly lit room of the Relimpio house lends an eerie, suspicious air of criminality to the endeavor that soon permeates all of part 2.

In the course of the novel, however, Galdós goes beyond the diagnosis and de-

piction of acquisitive madness to probe the source of the illness and the dynamics of its transmission. René Girard's theory of mimetic desire offers perhaps the best analytical model for exploring this issue of psychosocial motivation and interaction in *La desheredada*. Girard juxtaposes spontaneous desire—motivation based on the inner drives, values, and passion unique to the individual—with “triangular” or mediated desire—motivation derived from envy of an exterior model. While those inspired by passion act in accordance with personal beliefs and a genuine moral code, the *vaniteux* competes with an envied model for the same object of desire, transforming the model into a rival whose every gesture, comment, and act is imitated. The *vaniteux* sacrifices an inner core of being to assume the role of a calculating actor who wears a mask to hide true sentiment. Over a lifetime the thus enslaved individual will lose all capacity for authenticity and be reduced to a protean creature of numerous superficial faces and forms but without solid, underlying substance. The *vaniteux*'s character has disappeared, falling into an interior, self-created vacuum (Girard 1-51).

The world of *La desheredada* is saturated with mediated desire. When the mad Tomás Rufete calls Madrid *Envidiópolis* (985), he alludes accurately to the origin of the nation's illness. Envy rules the life of Isidora and those around her. The protagonist strives to imitate the idyllic *folletines* and longs to be like the Marquesa de Aransis, but when the elderly woman repudiates her claims, Isidora substitutes envy for emulation as she vows to destroy the grande dame and take her place. Triangular desire consumes her youth, beauty, and generosity of spirit. The Pez family, the embodiment of the *parvenu* mentality, tries to adopt the manners and habits of the very social class they wish to replace. The narrator's biting sarcasm in presenting Manuel Pez and his progeny serves as a constant reminder that hypocrisy, abuse, and criminality lie just below their pseudoaristocratic mask of comfort, power, and prestige. Mariano Rufete, Melchor Relimpio, and Joaquín Pez all aspire to the life of a *señorito* as exemplified by someone a step higher on the social ladder.

The taint of envy crosses age as well as class barriers, threatening to poison future generations. As Galdós illustrates in the case of the macrocephalic Riquín, who has inherited the “swollen-headed,” unrealistic ambitions of his parents, the seeds of vanity are present in early childhood. Miquis explains: “Yo le digo que su delirante ambición y su vicio mental le darán una descendencia de cabezudos raquícticos” (1083). Vanity is not only inherited but is also copied from adults. Scenes of play in the novel reveal that envy has a crucial role in children's socialization. In the chapter entitled “¡Hombres!” Mariano's friends from the *barrio* play at war in imitation of their elders. Each child is willing to compete violently with neighborhood companions to take on the role of General Prim. It is a forceful elimination game of “king-of-the-mountain” in which the last boy standing will dominate the others. The narrator observes that the children are a sketch, *croquis*, of humanity and of Spain's future: “¡Allí la envidia, aquí la generosidad, no lejos el mando, más allá el servilismo, claros embriones de egoísmo en todas partes!” (1022).

Galdós's relentless anatomy of the causes and effects of triangular desire prods readers to use the critical distance created by the novel to witness and condemn the disintegration of their own cultural heritage—a society founded on a shared, collective, spiritual nucleus of guiding moral values—into a whirlpool of status, money, and goods with envious, grasping people scratching and clawing to acquire them. The void left by the rejected values has created a vacuum into which everything and everyone is inevitably swept and carried downward. The dominance of hypocrisy and

criminality in the world of *La desheredada* reflects the eddying of Spain's collective moral character into a drain of vanity and envy.

As might be expected, the whirlpool-sewer image figures prominently in *La desheredada* as a central, unifying emblem. Throughout, Isidora finds herself caught between the centripetal and centrifugal forces one could identify with society as whirlpool. A desire to seek the center—the focus of money, power, and status—motivates her to emigrate to Madrid. Like the reader, the protagonist perceives the capital as the nucleus of Spain's past greatness. But as Galdós illustrates in the course of the novel, the traditional moral and political center has disappeared, leaving only a vacuum in its wake. Isidora thus deceives herself that she is on her way to wealth and power. By approaching the center one can only either slide into the vortex of envy and greed that now occupies that space, that is, be devoured by the monster outside in society as well as the beast inside the individual, or be pushed away from the center by forces beyond one's control. In the final analysis, of course, society's centripetal and centrifugal forces are one and the same thing. The monster ingests people and spews forth human detritus, pushing the rubbish away from the focal point of ingestion.

In the insane asylum, the final resting place on the outskirts of Madrid for those destroyed by acquisitive madness, Isidora is informed that moral weakness can lead to ostracism, to denial of access to the center, and, perhaps more significantly, to dehumanization. Shortly thereafter, the protagonist must confront the horrifying squalor of her Aunt's neighborhood on the edge of the city: "a mano derecha hay una vía que empieza en calle y acaba en horrible desmonte, zanja, albanal o vertedero, en los bordes rotos y desportillados de la zona urbana" (997). She must descend the spillway to the drain that lies at the end in order to reach her destination, a journey that foreshadows her own descent from potential middle-class respectability into prostitution. Once again the shining vision of the center eludes her, although Isidora refuses to acknowledge that the slum is a product of her idealized Madrid, the excreta of a morally flawed society. She salvages her dream through disassociation by casting an imaginative pall of unreality on the scene before her: "creyó por un momento que estaba en la caricatura de una ciudad hecha de cartón podrido. Aquello no era aldea ni tampoco ciudad: era una piltrafa de limpieza para que no corrompiera el centro" (998). Isidora fails to see that the center itself is corrupt and produces even more corruption.

Galdós recontextualizes the whirlpool-sewer motif in part 1, chapter 3 ("'Pecado'"), where its symbolic register shifts to the introspective probing of the individual consciousness (a tactic reminiscent of the Cave of Montesinos episode in *Don Quijote*). Isidora resolves to visit her brother Mariano, alias *Pecado*, at his workplace. (For a different reading of this chapter, see Risley [118-21].) Mariano is employed in a rope factory located in a cavelike structure. It is a hellish, dehumanized tunnel of total darkness and incessant, monotonous, mechanical noise in which a person can neither stand nor breathe nor see. Consequently, the individual becomes an automaton or an animal. The narrator identifies the rope factory with the sewer image, transposing the vertical into the horizontal: "Allá en el fondo de aquella cisterna horizontal debía estar la fuerza impulsora, alma del taller" (1001). In essence, downward motion is translated into inward motion, and at the bottom, or innermost point, lies the soul, the animating force. Isidora walks blindly towards that objective, where she finds her Shadow, *Pecado*, Sin. Without realizing it, the protagonist has plumbed the depths of

her own soul only to discover symbolically the corruption that will cause her downfall. The entire scene functions as a melodramatic tableau, a visual representation that encapsulates in one vivid image a moral anatomy of the antiheroine, a microcosmic judgmental perspective of the moralizing narrator.

Scattered allusions to whirlpool-sewer emblems prevent the image from fading from the reader's memory. Ever the ironist, Miquis labels the world of the *parvenu* "una sentina, una cloaca de vicios" (1013). When *Pecado* tries to escape the police after killing Zarapicos, he hides in the drain into which the sewer flows, at the bottom of the vortex: "buscó un refugio en el agujero negro de la alcantarilla por donde aquella agua blanquecina y nada limpia desembocaba" (1028). All the allusions culminate at the end of the novel when Isidora consciously chooses to leap into the whirlpool of self-destruction: "Salió, efectivamente, veloz, resuelta con paso de suicida: y como éste cae furioso, aturdido, demente en el abismo que le ha solicitado con atracción invencible, así cayó ella despeñada en el voraginoso laberinto de las calles. La presa fue devorada, y poco después, en la superficie social, todo estaba tranquilo" (1180).

In this final image, Galdós emphasizes that the vortex lies both within the individual in the form of acquisitive madness and outside in the vortical, societal forces that devour willing victims. Isidora's inner weakness has always made her easy prey to depravity, and as she draws closer and closer to its depths, the pull of the void grows stronger and stronger. There is no longer any moral distance between the inner and outer worlds, between Isidora and the monstrous whirlpool that has engulfed the city streets and turned them into a labyrinth, a place of moral chaos. As she rushes out and throws herself off the precipice of vanity, leaving rational thought and human dignity behind, the speed of her descent accelerates. Isidora slides into the vortex where she is indistinguishable from the rest of the depraved masses.

Despite the sarcastic tone, the narrator does point out in the *Moraleja* that there are two ways to escape the pull of the maelstrom. One can succeed either by developing one's special talents, the "natural wings" to which the author alludes ("echarlas naturales"), or by "climbing the stairs" ("toméis una escalera") of hard work and perseverance. Augusto Miquis comes to Madrid to cultivate his intellectual ability at the university. He does not hold the common aversion to discipline and hard work and achieves considerable success as a doctor. Miquis marries well and chooses to honor his vows to his wife when he has the opportunity to take advantage of Isidora. He remains a loyal, sympathetic friend to the protagonist until she disappears into the streets. In short, Miquis ascends the social ladder on merit, maintaining his moral integrity along the way. Emilia Relimpio, for her part, succeeds solely through effort. She has no special skills, but she does possess a kind heart, common sense, and a willingness to work. She, too, marries well, runs a peaceful household, and remains a faithful friend of Isidora, adopting Riquín as her own when the protagonist enters the criminal underworld. As the narrator observes: "Emilia había tomado un magnífico sitio en el anfiteatro de la vida, donde tantos están en pie o pésimamente sentados" (1132). While neither of these characters attains the heights to which the *vaineteux* aspires, their achievements imply that it is possible to find a margin of happiness in the fallen world of the novel (and society) without sacrificing moral integrity.

In *La desheredada*, Galdós provides a fascinating glimpse of Spanish society during an epoch of significant change. Drawing on the myth of Icarus for narrative structure, moral content, and spatial imagery of ascent and descent, he has constructed a novel

in which, as in a Baroque concerto, the ascent/descent motif is repeated autonomously in the lives of Isidora, her family, and her countrymen. At the same time, he has created an unrelenting, unifying rhythmic pattern linked to the pervasive theme of moral decay. Although Galdós's vision of society is starkly censorious in moral judgment and is saturated with didacticism inspiring reform, his identification of historical events and personal lives with spiritual values casts prophetic light on the works of his successors.

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NOTES

¹ Gilman describes *La desheredada* as a "novel designed to chronicle and to comprehend the special folly of the Restoration" (89). See Bly (2-23), Ruiz Salvador, and Durand for analyses of the conflation of history and fiction in the novel.

² Iser describes the role of the narrator in the realistic novel as that of a mediator of reality who controls the distance between the reader and the narrative (chap. 5). In *La desheredada*, the narrator provides a social and moral focus, shaping the reader's attitude towards the protagonist and her fictional/historical worlds.

³ See Schnepf for an illuminating article on narcissism in the novel and Galdós's perception of the disease as a national psychological disorder.

⁴ For more on the symbolic use of this historical event, see Bly (4-9) and Ruiz Salvador (55-58).

⁵ See Bachelard, "Maison et univers" (51-78), for a discussion of the home as an emblem of spiritual state, and Wright's analysis of Isidora's home as psychological and political symbol.

⁶ *La desheredada* is replete with allusions to ladders, stairs, staircases, climbing, and falling. I am indebted to Michael Schnepf who supported my interpretation by providing additional references to ascent and descent imagery from the original Galdós manuscript that were subsequently eliminated from the published version. It is interesting to note the prominence of the rising/falling motif in other novels by Galdós. Utt (83, 96-97) comments on the similarities between Gabriel Araceli's final words in *La batalla de los Arapiles* and the *Moraleja* in *La desheredada*. There are symbolic uses of *alturas* and *escalas* and other vertical images in both texts. Goldman (158-59) sees a correlation between Fortunata's movement up and down a spiral staircase and her changing position on the social ladder.

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