

THE CONTEXTS OF CANON FORMATION

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The first question I want to ask on examining the Galdós canon is which canon, where and when? The body of texts that make up any canon is conditioned by the interests and needs of the consumers of those texts, particularly the transmitters of cultural values. Variations in the canon are a function of differing needs of those transmitters and consumers. By looking at just a few specific cases, we can see how this relationship has operated with respect to changes in the Galdós canon.

Perhaps the most striking example is Spain in the last fifty years. Galdós was clearly not high on the list of authors who inspired and appealed to the ideologues of the Franco regime. By and large, Spanish students who grew up in the forties, fifties, and sixties read little Galdós, and what they did know of him was related primarily to the *Episodios nacionales*. One enlightening anecdote comes from Francisco Caudet: "En la universidad apenas leíamos [a Galdós]. Era una referencia más en los desvaídos programas. Yo recuerdo una librería de la calle Arenal en donde casi permanentemente se exponía una edición de los *Episodios nacionales* con la bandera franquista en las tapas. Habían 'nacionalizado' a Galdós. Yo empecé a leer *Fortunata y Jacinta* porque vivía en la calle Mayor. Mi habitación daba a uno de los arcos de la Plaza Mayor."¹ Such a situation was hardly apt to inspire interest among students who were coming to reject and rebel against the structures and ideology of the dictatorship.

In recent years things have changed. In addition to the international Galdós conferences held in the Canaries, in 1987 the Facultad de Ciencias de la Información of the Universidad Complutense in Madrid organized a week-long symposium to celebrate the centennial of the publication of *Fortunata y Jacinta* and groups in Madrid and Las Palmas began a collaborative program to promote research on Galdós. At the Universidad Autónoma in Madrid, Galdós is taught in Spanish literature and comparative literature classes. According to Caudet and Julio Rodríguez-Puértolas, they concentrate on the *Novelas contemporáneas*, with a special place given to *Fortunata y Jacinta*. Rodríguez-Puértolas points to the importance of recent international conferences in helping to develop interest in Galdós in Spain. A *Novela contemporánea* (for example, *Tormento* or *Miau*) is frequently selected to be taught in the third year of the *bachillerato*. (The choice is between a novel by Galdós and one by Clarín.) Fragments of Galdós texts are also included in literary anthologies at lower levels. Thus, it is not surprising to find Caudet reporting that "los alumnos han leído algo de Galdós cuando vienen a la universidad, pero al leer sus novelas se quedan maravillados." I have little information about other parts of the country, although I do know that Galdós is barely studied at the University of Salamanca.

My own experience in the United States is that Galdós's novels are effective pedagogically precisely because, among other things, they are a good means to approach Spanish society. They often present humorous, poignant, clear cases of social and psychological problems in Spain that allow my students to feel "close" to the society they are studying. Galdós's novels can be a good bridge between Spain and Anglo-American students. Another important aspect of this bridge is that so many of

the major Galdós scholars have been Spaniards who have lived and taught in the United States. The examples abound from the 1940s until today: Del Río, Casaldue-ro, Ricardo Gullón, Montesinos, Blanco Aguinaga, Rodríguez-Puértolas, Caudet, Germán Gullón.

In the Anglo-American world and in Spanish departments in North American universities, Galdós has enjoyed a privileged place. For example, when one inquires about Pérez Galdós, Benito, in the MLA bibliography from 1981 to 1989, one finds 436 entries, roughly the same as for García Lorca (438) and García Márquez (421). This number is far higher than for any of Galdós's contemporaries (there are 172 entries for Clarín, the closest) but still considerably lower than for Calderón (607) and for Cervantes (830).²

Galdós was translated into English early.³ From 1879 to 1896 there appeared nine English translations of Galdós's novels. All were of four of the *Novelas de la primera época*: *Marianela* and *Doña Perfecta* were each translated three times, *Gloria* twice. There were then no new translations until 1951. From that date until the present eighteen translations have been published. In this group are two *Novelas de la primera época* and thirteen *Novelas contemporáneas*. *Misericordia* and *Fortunata y Jacinta* were translated twice, *Torquemada en la hoguera* three times. Since 1985 new translations of seven *Novelas contemporáneas* have been printed.

Another component of my unscientific perusal of information was an analysis of the titles of articles in *Anales Galdosianos*, the principal journal which serves as a vehicle for dialogue among students of Galdós internationally and in which scholars based in England and the United States have played a significant role.⁴ The most frequently analyzed novels in *Anales Galdosianos* have been *Fortunata y Jacinta* (14 articles), *La desheredada* (12 articles), and *Doña Perfecta* (11 articles, 7 of which are included in the 1976 centennial issue). There are nine articles each on *Tristana* (all since the appearance of the Buñuel film based on the novel) and the *Torquemada* series, eight on *Nazarín* and *Misericordia*, six on *La de Bringas*, *Angel Guerra*, and *Miau*, and five on *El amigo Manso*. There are fifteen studies on the *Episodios* (one more than on *Fortunata y Jacinta*). In the early years these articles tended to be about one particular series or about the *Episodios* in general; in recent years more studies have focused on individual novels. Of the 134 titles I examined, ten dealt with *Novelas de la primera época* other than *Doña Perfecta*. These numbers reflect what one would expect to find, namely that certain of the *Novelas contemporáneas* and *Doña Perfecta* form the core of the Galdós canon.⁵

I can only speculate as to why this is the case. Certainly Galdós was promoted after 1943 by some of the major figures mentioned earlier, and, inspired by their work, their students and others helped to build a tradition. Furthermore, New Criticism privileged the kind of realist discourse found in the *Novelas contemporáneas*. *Fortunata y Jacinta* would do well on any telling/showing kind of test. These novels are also relatively easily accessible to readers already accustomed to the realism of those nineteenth-century writers whose works are well known in the English-speaking world: the Victorians, Balzac, Dostoyevski, Tolstoy. Moreover, the *Novelas contemporáneas* are amenable to the kind of socio-historic criticism that became popular in the late sixties. *Fortunata y Jacinta* does as well when seen from the perspective of Lukács's narrating or describing as it does from Booth's telling and showing. If we can say that *Anales Galdosianos* was an indicator as well as a crucial stimulator of a mini-boom in Galdós studies, then we can argue that since 1966 Galdós's novels, and

especially those that might be considered part of the canon, have been the site of a debate between socio-historic critics and those who prefer a more intrinsic approach. The Gilman-Blanco exchange on *Fortunata y Jacinta* is perhaps the clearest example of this polemic in which much more than the "meaning" of any novel was involved. Such debates are ideological insofar as diverse readings of these novels are a constituent part of different ways of representing and relating to the hierarchies of power of the world in which we live.

My sense is that currently the Galdós canon is being and will continue to be reshaped by two trends in criticism that, as part of a broader social critique, are questioning the bases of canonicity in general. If I stress the importance of the broader social critique offered by feminism and cultural studies, it is because I have found that the vitality of canon questioning among feminists is intimately related to the various conflicts confronted by those who seek to establish a space and to forge and maintain an identity in the face of hostile patriarchal institutions. That is, the most exciting questioning of the canon occurs when what is read and taught is intimately related to the real-life situations of students and teachers. Feminism and cultural studies may or may not lead us to read different novels by Galdós, but they will help us to read those novels in a context in which women writers have not been erased and in which the *folletín* is not treated as merely peripheral. Certainly Susan Kirkpatrick's *Las románticas* has problematized the romantic subject in a way that compels us to reconsider all romantic writers, female and male, under a prism of gender. The session on nineteenth-century women writers at the 1988 Modern Language Association convention which addressed the contradictory location of female authors was a step in the same direction. Likewise, Carmen Simón Palmer's catalogue of nineteenth-century women writers, the ongoing work of various feminist scholars, and the growing interest in cultural studies—an instance of which was the symposium held in March 1989 at the Ateneo in Madrid on *Narrativa decimonónica: creación popular y literatura de consumo*—will recontextualize our studies of Galdós. The situation of this dialogue on the Galdós canon provides further confirmation of the direction I am suggesting. Among the many canon questionings taking place at the 1989 MLA convention, this one was preceded by an eighteenth and nineteenth-century Spanish literature session focusing on "The Subject, the Gaze, the Realist Novel: Women, Feminism, the Critic" and was immediately followed by "Cultural Studies and Nineteenth-Century Spanish Literature" as well as by a session on the twentieth-century canon of Spanish literature in which the place of women writers in literary history was further examined.

The impact of feminism and cultural studies throughout the humanities is being felt increasingly by Hispanists and will have profound effects on the ways in which we understand the relations among questions of gender, race, and class in general, including how we read, teach, and write about Galdós.

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¹ The comments from Caudet and Rodríguez-Puértolas are from personal correspondence.

² Some other nineteenth-century European comparisons are Balzac (553), Dickens (941), Tolstoy (469), and Fontane (227).

³ I wish to thank Robert Russell for providing me with the information on translations.

⁴ To proceed somewhat more scientifically, it would be necessary, among other things, to separate authors based in the United States from others in the bibliographies and to examine the relations between academic interest in Galdós and the publication of translations that should be of interest to a larger public. Clearly everything that I am suggesting is hypothetical.

⁵ Botrel points out that the texts that Galdós scholars study most frequently are not the ones the public has bought the most. In a study that examines data to 1973, he states: "Le bilan du succès de l'œuvre de Galdós, qui est aussi le verdict des ans, peut paraître décevant: . . . dès les années 1930-1940, le public a majoritairement retenu de l'immense production galdosienne, un prétexte à l'expression du sentiment national ou nationaliste (*Trafalgar* et la première série des *Episodios nacionales*) et un roman sentimental (*Marianela*), les autres séries d'*Episodios* figurant, il est vrai, en bonne place ainsi que *Gloria* et *Doña Perfecta*. . . . L'évolution ultérieure de la faveur du public n'a guère altéré la hiérarchie établie, sauf pour *Misericordia* et *Fortunata y Jacinta*, seuls 'romans espagnols contemporains' à connaître un certain succès, grâce, semble-t-il, à l'appui conjoncturel du cinéma" (43-44). Of course, a great deal has happened since 1973 which has had an impact on the consumption of Galdós's novels, including such diverse events as the end of the dictatorship, the publication of new editions, the *Fortunata y Jacinta* television series, as well as changes in academic curricula.

WORKS CITED

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