

NEW HISTORICISM AND THE STORY OF MADRID: *FORTUNATA Y JACINTA AND TIEMPO DE SILENCIO*

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Este Madrid que entonces era futuro.

(*Fortunata y Jacinta* 1: 154)

Un hombre es la imagen de una ciudad y una ciudad las vísceras
puestas al revés de un hombre.

(*Tiempo de silencio* 16)

It is well known that the North American political domain of the 1980s was marked by the policy of an actor who made good use of his theatrical capabilities in the propagation and public acceptance of that policy. It is also known that in the domain of literary studies the 1980s witnessed a revitalization and reconsideration of the connections between literature and social history. While these phenomena are seemingly unrelated, one of the initiators of the recasting of history, Stephen Greenblatt, suggests that there is a connection. In an essay titled "Towards a Poetics of Culture," he writes of the significance of Ronald Reagan as a product of a "durable" structure not only of power but of "pleasure, recreation, and interest, a structure that shapes the spaces we construct for ourselves" (8). That this seminal essay appears in a collection that synthesizes and grapples with the most recent critical thinking and methodology in literary studies indicates the possibility of a resistance to and even criticism of the Reagan ethos. More importantly, Greenblatt and the New Historicists have presented a challenge to the dominant critical postures of the past three or so decades: formalism, New Criticism (the first word of which is by now a misnomer), and structuralism.

"New Historicism" originated in Renaissance English studies with attempts to reinspect the Elizabethan theater in the light of its ideological significations and underpinnings. Jonathan Dollimore, another initiator, wrote in a preface to a collection titled *Political Shakespeare* that formalism constructed barriers to the understanding of Shakespeare's works and that the more novel use of literary theory was an important step in the opening of these works to their vital economic and political dimensions. This preface reads at times like a manifesto; the author speaks of the need for a "combination of historical context with theoretical method, political commitment with textual analysis" (vii). Structuralism and other modern theories of language served to dismantle the proscriptions against the consideration of "extrinsic" philosophical issues. "History and philosophy," writes Dollimore, "could be retrieved from their background status and become part of the content and the perspective of criticism" (2).

Dollimore's (and other New Historicists') acknowledgement of the importance of literary theory as a bridge between the text and the philosophical issues that shape it pinpoints the differences between what we might call the "old historicism" (or positivism) and the "new historicism." While "old historicists" view the relationship between literature and history as given and are not concerned with the developmental processes of that relationship, the "New Historicists" are focusing their tex-

tual analyses on those very processes. Rather than the old notion of reflection, that *literature reflects a certain historical or intellectual current*, New Historicists prefer the notions of mediation, dialogue, as well as conflict between two overlapping discourses: literature and history. Also important is the strong influence of Marxism, especially the modern British variety, on New Historicist thinking. Raymond Williams and Terry Eagleton are important figures in the rise of "cultural materialism," still another term for basically the same phenomenon.¹

Hispanic studies seem to be relegated to the margins of the New Historicist thrust, yet there is no reason for this marginalization. Our discipline has always been marked by the connections between our literatures and their historical contexts. Even in the heyday of the New Criticism, Hispanists resisted the neglect of political and historical issues simply because it seemed to them that these issues informed virtually all their literary texts. Moreover, Hispanic studies is not lacking in New Historicists, such as Juan Antonio Maravall, whose work on the culture of the baroque is in tune with the current critical methods. North American Hispanists like John Beverley and Paul Ilie have also been interested in the elucidation of texts within an ideological or hegemonic framework that is in turn made of other texts.²

What I would like to do as a typical Hispanist who has always tried to keep political issues in check is to enter the New Historicist debate with an examination of two of our most prominent novelists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: Benito Pérez Galdós and Luis Martín-Santos. As many of the essays in H. Aram Veerer's collection on the New Historicism attest, one of the central problems in a consideration of literature in conjunction with history is the tension between the specificity of a given historical, political, or economic issue and a universality that is often the target of a literary text. It seems that New Historicists move from the specific to broader issues, from costumes to political statements, from economic exchange to symbolic exchange, or from a given play performed for a given audience to the elaboration of the relationship between theater and society. The specific issue or figure that concerns me in the major novels of both authors, Galdós's *Fortunata y Jacinta* and Martín-Santos's *Tiempo de silencio*, is the representation of the capital of Spain. The two novels are ideologically charged, yet ideology manifests itself through the recreation of a concrete urban space. It is precisely the significance of these urban spaces that critics have neglected.³

Fortunata y Jacinta is an arena of historical and political conflict over the progress (or lack of it) of the Spanish nation as it vacillates between monarchical and constitutional authority. The work has been read as a historical allegory, with the various elements of the love triangle (Fortunata-Juanito-Jacinta) corresponding to the political changes that brought on the First Republic and later the Restoration.⁴ Yet it is also undeniable that Madrid is the locus of the love triangle as well as the center of governmental authority. And the clashes that are the result of Spanish political vacillation between the crown and the parliament, such as the "Noche de San Daniel" in which Juanito participates as a student, happen in Madrid. For Galdós a clearly articulated historical or political argument concerning the future of Spain seems to take a subordinate position to the writing of history and, more importantly, to the assimilation or reading of history and its transformation into consciousness. For this reason the focus of the Galdosian historical imagination on Madrid sheds needed light not only on *Fortunata y Jacinta* but on the entire narrative project of Spain's "second" novelist.

The distinctly local aspects of *Fortunata y Jacinta*, however, cannot stand alone, given the narrative and fictional context into which they have been cast. In assessing Dickens's London, Raymond Williams points out that the local aspects of history in Dickens are directly related to the flow of history as it is transcribed into writing. Like Galdós, Dickens makes choices in his narrative recreation of the city, and, in so doing, he not only reflects a certain collective consciousness but creates it (155). Thus, while the perceptions of the city change as a result of economic and social transformations, they also develop along with those transformations and follow a similar dynamic.

Galdós offers a series of perspectives of Madrid through his character portrayals and in the narrative voices as well. His narrators and characters have multiple voices, and on some occasions he outdoes his twentieth-century counterparts in literary experimentation and self-commentary.⁵ The narrator of *Fortunata y Jacinta* is a difficult entity to apprehend. He changes voices frequently: a seemingly omniscient describer of events and situations, a historian (cultural, social, economic, local), an aloof ironist, and one of the many characters that populate the novel, one who was personally acquainted with the other characters ("Les conocí en 1870" [1: 142]). Yet in *Fortunata y Jacinta* this seemingly omniscient narrator is not the only one who contributes to the story. At some points the characters seem to be telling their own stories, writing their own historical novels: Fortunata as she imagines a dialogue with Juanito (2: 262-65) or Moreno-Isla as he unfolds his own personal drama about whether or not to leave Spain (2: 342-44). In the midst of all these characters and narrative voices is a Madrid that is the sum of all these fictional components. It is a city that stands both in the background and in the foreground. Far more than a setting, the city provides the reader with a sense of historical change, a sense that the novel itself is part of the continuum of history.

The significance of Madrid's history is especially apparent in the entire first part of the work. In his lengthy introduction, Galdós allows his characters to emerge from their economic and sociological backgrounds within a city that has had a past life and will continue to develop according to changes in social, economic, and technological activity. The personal, the urban, and the historical are constantly fused so that the population of Madrid is (as Williams says of Dickens's Londoners) "forced into consciousness" (155). The section titled "Vistazo histórico sobre el comercio matritense" (ch. 2) is the most obvious example, with its references to Baldomero I and Baldomero II in an ironic comparison of the Santa Cruz-Arnaiz clan to a royal dynasty. In this initiating section, Galdós describes the relationships between his characters and the technological-economic changes in the city: the transformation from coins to paper monetary exchange, the new gas lights, the changing fashions that will have a direct bearing on the textile market.

The variety of voices in *Fortunata y Jacinta*, the shifting perspectives, the descriptions of actual streets and squares within the city, and the influences of those city loci on the characters (such as the changing horizon of Cuatro Caminos as Maximiliano passes by the Micaelas Convent to catch a glimpse of Fortunata [1: 600-03]) are all factors in the development of the novel and in the development of the city. When the narrator interjects at one point, "este Madrid que entonces era futuro" (1: 154), he seems to refer to his own historicizing inclinations as well as to the way in which a historical reading of a city can contribute to its future. The reader of *Fortunata y Jacinta*, especially the Spaniard of the late nineteenth century, is bestowed a sense of

community, continuity, and openness to change. With the constant use of “nosotros,” especially in the chapter on Madrid commerce, the reader may even sense that he or she is part of that historical change. The conventional Marxist view that Galdós reveals the socioeconomic and historical changes through which Spain was passing with the development of capitalism (Bosch, Rodríguez-Puértolas, Blanco-Aguinaga) gives only part of the picture. With these multiple narrative voices and their perspectives of the city, Galdós demonstrates his awareness of language and image as determining factors in the creation of consciousness. Once more Williams’s reading of Dickens serves as an illuminating picture of the way in which Galdós not only reflects consciousness but creates it: “Dickens’s ultimate vision of London is then not to be illustrated by topography or local instance. It lies in the form of his novels: in their kind of narrative, in their method of characterization, in their genius of typification What matters is that the vision—no single vision either, but a continual dramatization—is the form of the writing This creation of consciousness—of recognitions and relationships—can be seen as the purpose of Dickens’s fiction. The need for it is at the center of his social and personal vision” (154-55).

Nearly a century after the publication of *Fortunata y Jacinta*, Martín-Santos replicated the nineteenth-century need to create consciousness through his own representation of urban experience. The specific locus of his narrative is the same as that of Galdós: Madrid. Yet *Tiempo de silencio*’s city is altogether different from *Fortunata y Jacinta*’s. Although Galdós would have recognized the capital of Spain had he come back for a visit, he certainly would not have enjoyed it. Martín-Santos describes a city in the aftermath of a war, in the midst of hunger and cultural sterility, a city suffering from an authoritarian government far worse than the Madrid of the Bourbon Restoration. And the differences do not end with the historical comparison. Along with the city, the novel as a genre has witnessed a transformation. A New Historicist might say that the system of exchange, both in economic and aesthetic terms, has been altered. The ironic narrator of *Tiempo de silencio* does not see himself as one of many historical narrative voices. Instead, the narrative need to create consciousness manifests itself through debasement and defamation. In *Tiempo de silencio*’s Madrid, consciousness is false, and nothing seems to replace that falseness. The creation of false consciousness makes Martín-Santos’s Madrid far less tangible than that of Galdós. While in Galdós’s novel the artificiality of the story of Madrid is merely suggested with multiple voices and a plurality of historical visions, in *Tiempo de silencio* Madrid’s history is rendered as a series of cultural texts, all of which lead the city to its present lamentable condition. As in *Fortunata y Jacinta*, Madrid is a microcosm, yet the microcosm reaches beyond the Iberian Peninsula and encompasses a larger philosophical and historical project. The representation of Madrid is itself a historical vision, and in spite of the deadpan irony of the narrator, the reader of *Tiempo de silencio* senses the presence, although a ghostly one, of the entire western humanistic tradition. The clearest indication is the often quoted description of Madrid that runs for three pages with inordinately long sentences and includes medieval, renaissance, baroque, and Bourbon culture as manifested in the history of a perpetually stagnant city that never should have been the capital.

Hay ciudades tan descabadas, tan faltas de sustancia histórica, tan traídas y llevadas por gobernantes arbitrarios, tan caprichosamente edificadas en desiertos, tan parcamente pobladas por una continuidad aprehensible de familias, . . . tan globalmente adquiridas para el prestigio de una dinastía,

ran doradas de tesoros . . . , tan desasidas de una auténtica nobleza, . . . tan heroicas en ocasiones sin que se sepa a ciencia cierta por qué . . . , tan insospechadamente en otro tiempo prepotentes sobre capitales extranjeras dotadas de dos catedrales y de varias colegiatas mayores y de varios palacios encantados —un palacio encantado al menos para cada siglo—, . . . tan abundantes de torpes teólogos y faltas de excelentes místicos, tan llenas de tonadilleras y de autores de comedias de costumbres, de comedias de enredo, de comedias de capa y espada, de comedias de café, de comedias de punto de honor, de comedias de linda tapada, de comedias de bajo coturno, de comedias de salón francés, de comedias del café no de comedia dell'arte, . . . que no tienen catedral. (13-15)

The historical view is clear in spite of all the narrative experimentation and irony, far clearer than in *Fortunata y Jacinta*, which tells a plurality of histories without the coherence of a dominant voice. In *Tiempo de silencio* there is a city characterized by lack of cultural authenticity and lasting traditions, by political and religious intolerance, and by economic exploitation. These past institutions, public works, and modes of behavior have contributed to the shortcomings of the city and its inhabitants: resignation, fear, superficiality, and inauthenticity (in the existentialist sense). The entire passage is a commentary on collective false consciousness and how the writing of history and literature creates that consciousness. Many if not all the references are to written and aesthetic phenomena: icons, cathedrals, literary texts and codes, theatrical works, and religious beliefs. The commentary remains wholly within a textual field and has to do not so much with a conjured reality as with imitation and repetition of a set of conventions. As opposed to Galdós, who forces his characters and their forefathers into a variety of specific historical and economic situations and allows them to contribute to the changes in those very situations, Martín-Santos accords his characters little freedom within his system of conventions. In *Fortunata y Jacinta* the characters act within a city that presents far fewer limitations. Moreover, Galdós's characters in some instances can be seen as the creators of their own urban environment. The relationship between the individual and the city in *Tiempo de silencio*, by contrast, is grounded in the city's inauthenticity. As a result, individuals are alienated from their very being.

As the description of Madrid continues, the narrator speaks almost as if he or she were in the lecture hall offering a theory not only on the history of the city but on the way the capital of Spain has contributed to the imprisonment of its own citizens:

Es preciso, ante estas ciudades, suspender el juicio hasta [que] un día . . . tome forma una cosa que adivinamos que está presente y que no vemos, hasta que esa sustancia que se arrastra ahora por el suelo se solidifique

Hasta que llegue ese día . . . nos limitaremos a penetrar en las oscuras tabernas donde asoma sobre las botellas una cabeza de toro disecado con los ojos de vidrio . . . , a contemplar en una plaza grande el rodar ingenuo de los soldados los domingos . . . , a contemplar la airosa apostura de un guardia cuando pasa una mujer que es más alta que él

De este modo podremos llegar a comprender que un hombre es la imagen de una ciudad y una ciudad las vísceras puestas al revés de un hombre, que un hombre encuentra en su ciudad no sólo su determinación como persona y su razón de ser, sino también los impedimentos múltiples y los obstáculos invencibles que le impiden llegar a ser, que un hombre y una ciudad tienen relaciones que no se explican por las personas a las que el hombre ama Podremos comprender también que la ciudad piensa con su cerebro de mil cabezas repartidas en mil cuerpos aunque unidas por una misma voluntad de poder . . . que el hombre —aquí— ya no es de pueblo . . . porque eres como de pueblo, hombre. (15-17)

In Martín-Santos's Madrid, individuals act according to formulas. Even the policeman who stands up straight when a woman taller than he walks in front of him does so as a result of an honor or sex code, a set of rules transmitted through generations and which is imprinted unwittingly onto his behavior.

The above passage is emblematic of the entire work. As a creation of textual and urban space, it informs much, if not all, of the other components of the text: the figure of Amador with his thick lips behaves according to his class and his race, the embodiment of the Moorish legacy of Madrid and all Spain. Cartucho is similarly imprisoned by the same honor and sex code that made the policeman stand up erect, yet the consequences are far more drastic. When he kills Dorita, he acts almost as a prop within the author's scheme to create the impossible situation in which the protagonist finds himself at the end of the novel. The description of the Madrid cemetery (142-47) is also the continuation of and commentary on a textual and humanistic tradition that ranges from Larra's "Día de difuntos de 1836" ("El cementerio está dentro de Madrid. Madrid es el cementerio" [917]) to Dámaso Alonso's poem, "Insomnio" ("Madrid es una ciudad de más de un millón de cadáveres" [112]).

The protagonist, Don Pedro, is of course most severely imprisoned by his city. Ironically, he is the only one capable of escaping, because he is one of the few characters who is aware of the lack of freedom. Yet his silence, described in the culminating monologue as a castration (237), is in keeping with the urban atmosphere the author has created. Don Pedro is himself a textual machination; he is the existentialist Everyman, a Don Quixote in his mock epic journey to the Madrid shanties with his sidekick Amador, and a Joycean hero or antihero in the final monologue.

Martín-Santos's formal attempt to synthesize his urban voices into one as opposed to Galdós's polyphonic and freestanding histories of Madrid beg for an appraisal of the political statements of both authors. If we compare the ideological content of *Tiempo de silencio* to that of *Fortunata y Jacinta*, Martín-Santos appears far more critical of Franco's Spain than Galdós of Restoration Spain. In fact, Galdós's criticism seems mild, if not benign, in comparison to Martín-Santos's devastating portrayal of the shanties and the people who live in them, of the conditions that lead to a grotesque abortion, and of the all-encompassing backwardness in the capital of a dictatorship. Galdós's statement about Madrid, his political, historical, social, and moral assessment, is far more ambiguous than that of Martín-Santos. *Fortunata y Jacinta* is an open-ended novel, and as such it leaves its readers in limbo regarding the past, present, and future of the city. The final image of Maxi being carted off to the Leganés insane asylum is not only an apt ending to a story filled with eccentrics and neurotics; it is yet another anecdote in a seemingly endless series of anecdotes.

Still, if one considers Galdós's process of representation, as would Williams or a New Historicist, the implicit statement on Madrid's history is a "progressive" one, a view that places the city in an ever-changing and ongoing line of development, at both the social and individual levels. Unlike Martín-Santos's highly deliberate irony, a mocking and bitter tone that serves as a critical reading of Madrid's (and Spain's) entire history, Galdós's commentary is structured around disparate and at times conflicting voices. The associations among these voices and real events or conditions are open to a public reading, to the very citizens ("vecinos") who are the objects of the author's imitation. It may even be possible to affirm that Galdós's view of Madrid's history is far less immutable than that of Martín-Santos, and, by that score, Galdós might appear more modern.

Admittedly, even New Historicists would say that political criticism in a novel is a slippery issue, considering the variety of factors (literary, economic, social) that motivate and surround the text. A critic's attempt to discredit an author for having taken a political position (wittingly or unwittingly) is still taboo in the literary acad-

emy. Yet the New Historicists' challenge to formalism and its ongoing search for the relationship between the political and the literary does not preclude assessments of an ideological nature. As the depictions of Madrid by Galdós and Martín-Santos attest, ideology is not located outside their texts; it is their fabric.⁶

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NOTES

¹ The collection of essays edited by Dollimore and Sinfield is designated by John Turner as "an introduction to this new critical methodology" (221). See Greenblatt's introduction to *Representing the English Renaissance* for a concise explanation of certain assumptions of all (or most) New Historicists. Aram Veesser's collection shows the polemical nature of the New Historicism. See also Howard and O'Connor's as well as Cox's readings of Shakespeare. Williams and Eagleton may be read as New Historicist precursors. The Dollimore and Sinfield collection contains an "Afterward" by Williams. Eagleton's commentaries on the insights (along with the shortcomings) of modern literary theory and its relation to the understanding of history and society are models of the New Historicist assimilation of modern critical approaches to literature. That many New Historicists are or have been Marxists is, I believe, a mark of the self-sustaining and evolving nature of that theory as an aid in the understanding of culture.

² Arguably, there are further examples of unwitting New Historicists in Hispanic studies, especially among those who have written on Galdós, such as Germán Gullón, John Sinnigen, and Alicia Andreu. Diane Urey's book on the *Episodios nacionales* as a historical and metafictional discourse may also be classified in this category. See also Akiko Tsuchiya's book, especially the chapter on "History as Language in the First Series of the *Episodios*" (106-28).

³ See Anderson's and Zatin's essays on Madrid in *Fortunata y Jacinta*. These studies reveal the symbolic and structural significance of places within the city, but they do not deal with the consequences of Galdós's recreation of Madrid as they bear on his historical vision.

⁴ See Ribbans and Bly, although Bly does not hold the view that the author's intentions were purely allegorical.

⁵ The essays by John Kronik and Diane Urey are among several examples of treatments of Galdós that open his narratives to modern critical approaches.

⁶ Sections of this essay are included in two separate papers presented at the Purdue University Conference on Romance Languages, Literatures, and Film, October 1990, and at the MMLA Convention, Kansas City, November 1990.

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