

**REALIDAD, DOÑA PERFECTA, AND TORMENTO
IN DIALOGUE WITH THE 21ST CENTURY:
FERNANDO MÉNDEZ-LEITE'S *GALDOSIANA***

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Galdosiana, the stage play written and directed by Spanish cinematographer and playwright Fernando Méndez-Leite for the Compañía Nueva Comedia, premiered at the Teatro Pérez Galdós in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria on December 11, 2009 and toured throughout Spain during the next two years, including performances at the prestigious Teatro Fernán Gómez in Madrid from October 11-31, 2011. *The Dossier de Prensa* that was circulated in conjunction with its appearance in Madrid explains that the play was commissioned as “un proyecto centrado en personajes femeninos de Galdós” with multiple roles for its two principal actresses, Cristina Higuera and Fiorella Faltoyano (5). Furthermore, it states that *Galdosiana* continues the Nueva Comedia’s tradition of basing its plays on “textos de calidad” that are presented in “un formato ligero y dinámico, sin por ello traicionar el espíritu de la obra original y el rigor literario de sus diálogos.” Nevertheless, *Galdosiana* is additionally described as “un nuevo reto” for the company because it is their first adaptation that is not based on a single work. Rather, its script draws on individual scenes from three non-related novels by Galdós: *Realidad*, *Doña Perfecta*, and *Tormento*. In so doing, the company indicates its intention to “aunar la tradición clásica española con una visión más libre del espectáculo teatral” (4). Méndez-Leite explains that “*Galdosiana* juega en el tiempo y el espacio para relacionar las criaturas literarias de Galdós con los espectadores de hoy,” and he goes on to state that “me atrevería a calificar *Galdosiana* como un espectáculo teatral culto y popular a un mismo tiempo” (4-5). However, he also was sure to mention in an interview quoted by Julio Bravo that he approached his adaptation “desde el respeto y la afición a Galdós, un autor que siempre me ha gustado mucho.”

These statements speak to the concept of adaptation as being both a product and a process, which Linda Hutcheon addresses in her book, *A Theory of Adaption*. As defined by Hutcheon, adaptations are “deliberate, announced, and extended revisitations of prior works,” and each adaptation is the product of a process of interpretation and creation by the adapter (xiv). This process involves transcoding, transposing, or transcontextualizing, and it is by definition an intertextual endeavor. Hutcheon notes that “because adaptation is a form of repetition without replication, change is inevitable” (xvi). This raises the issue of fidelity that has bedeviled adaptation studies since its origins in the 1950’s. Because adaptations are based on source texts, comparisons between the two have traditionally been rooted in finding similarities and differences, with the common conclusion that the adaptation is a derivative and inferior version of its source material. Over the past two decades adaptation scholars have been reevaluating the concept of fidelity and redefining adaptations as artistic works in their own right (eg. Elliott, Cahir, Cardwell, Sanders, McFarlane, Stam, and Whelehan). Hutcheon joins these voices in exposing the “unproductive nature” of the “morally loaded rhetoric of fidelity and infidelity”

(31), which uses such terms as “betrayal,” “deformation,” “violation,” “desecration,” and “vulgarization” to refer to adaptations that have significantly reworked or transformed their source texts (85). Hutcheon challenges this hierarchical thinking, both in terms of its valuing of fidelity over creativity, and in terms of its ascribing secondary status to the adaptation. The fact that the source text precedes the adaptation chronologically does not mean that it is always received by the audience in that order. On the contrary, “our interest piqued, we may actually read or see that so-called original *after* we have experienced the adaptation, thereby challenging the authority of any notion of priority. Multiple versions exist laterally, not vertically” (xiii). Furthermore, in the case where a work has been adapted more than once, it exists in “a continuum of fluid relationships” with its various revisitations (171).

Hutcheon speaks of adapters as either appropriators, whose goal is to “supplant the prior works” and “contest the aesthetic or political values of the adapted text,” or salvagers who “pay homage” to their sources and can be “motivated by a desire to preserve stories that are worth knowing but will not necessarily speak to a new audience without creative ‘reanimation’” (20, 8). Méndez-Leite clearly falls into the latter category. He takes three novels by Galdós and reanimates them through a process of transcontextualization in hopes that his “visión impresionista del mundo de Galdós” will entice his contemporary Spanish public to “volver a las páginas” of his work (*Dossier de Prensa* 5). Méndez-Leite not only transcontextualizes Galdós’s novels by rendering them in a theatrical medium, but in other ways as well. He transcontextualizes their historical relationship with each other by placing them out of chronological order, beginning his play with the 1889 *Realidad*, then going to the 1876 *Doña Perfecta*, and ending with the 1884 *Tormento*. He also transcontextualizes the characters by having all of them performed by just three actresses and one actor, thereby linking together fictional characters from different novels through the same living people who physically incarnate each of them on stage. But the most important transcontextualization is achieved through Méndez-Leite’s introduction of a 21st-century narrator who interacts with Galdós’s 19th-century characters. Dressed in modern-day clothing, this narrator from the present era is physically distinguished from Galdós’s characters in period costume. She is fictional, but she is an original creation of Méndez-Leite rather than of Galdós. Through her presence the 21st-century literally shares a stage with the 19th-century. *Galdosiana* is not an updating of Galdós’s novels, but rather it is a reworking that puts them in dialogue with the social norms and values of today. By retaining the 19th-century setting, but introducing a 21st-century narrator as an active participant, Méndez-Leite establishes a framework for comparisons, both explicit and implicit, between the two eras. The *Dossier de Prensa* states that “los personajes de Galdós viven en circunstancias históricas y sociales muy distintas a los de hoy, pero son prototipos que traspasan el tiempo y por ello fácilmente reconocibles en nuestro entorno” (5). Both continuity and difference are at issue here, and Méndez-Leite plays out that dynamic by structuring his play around a single prototype from each novel: *Realidad*’s Augusta, the eponymous *Doña Perfecta*, and *Tormento*’s Rosalía de Bringas.

Just as adaptation involves a process of creation by the adapter, it also involves a process of reception by the audience, and the intertextual nature of the adaptation draws on “our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation” (Hutcheon 8). But

Hutcheon stresses that in order to experience the adaptation *as an adaptation* the audience must recognize it as such and be familiar with its adapted text. Thus, she speaks of the “knowing audiences” for whom “there will be a constant oscillation” between the source text and the adaptation (120, xv). This is a form of “interpretive doubling, a conceptual flipping back and forth” which is not experienced by the “unknowing audiences” who simply receive the adaptation as they would any work (120, 139). In between are those who do not have personal knowledge of the source text, but “rely on a ‘generally circulated cultural memory,’ ” as often happens with canonical literature (122). According to Hutcheon, “for an adaptation to be successful in its own right, it must be so for both knowing and unknowing audiences” (121). Addressing this concern, Cristina Higuera has stated:

Yo definiría *Galdosiana* como una forma muy directa y muy interesante de acercar a Galdós al público de hoy y Fernando [Méndez-Leite] ha logrado conectar Galdós con el público del S. XXI. . . La gente que no había leído nada de Galdós sale del teatro con ganas de leerlo, y la gente que lo conocía ya descubre facetas diferentes que no había visto en una primera lectura. Ese era realmente el objetivo de *Galdosiana*: compaginar un espectáculo entretenido y con calidad que no solamente puede serlo, sino que realmente debe serlo.

Indeed, it is not necessary to know Galdós’s *Realidad*, *Doña Perfecta*, and *Tormento* in order to enjoy *Galdosiana*, but for those who are familiar with one or more of the novels—either directly or by reputation—Méndez-Leite provides a layered experience commensurate with the individual viewer’s level of knowledge. Each of the three novels in *Galdosiana* not only features a character prototype that persists into the modern day, but each novel also helped to shape Spanish literature as it is known today. As will be seen below, Méndez-Leite employs Galdós’s novels to allow both knowing and unknowing audiences to compare and contrast attitudes and values from Galdós’s era with those of their own. In addition, the continuum of fluid relationship between each novel and its various versions by Galdós and Méndez-Leite provides knowing audiences with new viewpoints from which to examine Galdós’s aesthetic contribution to the development of Spanish Realism.

Realidad

The first prototype that Méndez-Leite presents to his viewers is the adulteress. In his novel *Realidad* Galdós explores the issue of adultery through the character of Augusta Cisneros. She is married to an intelligent and virtuous man, Tomás Orozco, whom she loves and who loves her but pays more attention to his charitable activities than attending to his wife’s emotional and sexual needs. Childless, bored, and resigned to a sexless marriage, Augusta enters into an affair with Orozco’s closest friend, Federico Viera. Méndez-Leite begins *Galdosiana* with two consecutive scenes from the “Primera Jornada” of *Realidad*.¹ We first see Augusta speaking privately with Federico during one of her *tertulias*, with the two quarrelling about a possible *rendevous* the next day in the secret apartment where they normally meet. This encounter is taken *verbatim* from scene six of *Realidad* and serves the same function as it did in the novel, namely to establish

the two characters as lovers. In the novel this is a crucial revelation because it answers the questions about Augusta's fidelity or lack of it that were posed by various characters throughout *La incógnita*, the novel that preceded it. Since *Realidad* is the sequel to *La incógnita* and was described as "la otra mitad" to that work, its 19th-century readers would have approached it with a desire to learn "la verdad profunda" and "la descripción interior del asunto" that it was promised to contain.

But Méndez-Leite delivers this scene from *Realidad* to the modern-day audience without the pre-context of *La incógnita*, and consequently, Augusta becomes the protagonist of her own story rather than the object of speculation from a previous one. Whereas Galdós divides the focus of *Realidad* among the three characters that compose the love triangle, Méndez-Leite solidly centers his story on Augusta, with Orozco and Federico becoming ancillary characters.

This is made explicit in the next scene when David Sentinella, the actor who plays Federico, makes a costume change on stage, and the 21st-century narrator addresses the audience to explain that he now will be portraying Orozco instead of Federico. She lays bare the artifice of dual casting by then saying: "El actor es el mismo, pero, fijense en que ahora lleva gafas y un poblado mostacho." The dual casting of minor roles is common in theatrical productions, and the foregrounding of this practice for Federico and Orozco signals their secondary importance in relation to Augusta. Indeed, Méndez-Leite told José R. Díaz Sande in an interview that "los personajes masculinos de Galdós son muy inferiores a los femeninos."

This scene between Augusta and Orozco takes place in their bedroom. Both are unable to sleep, Augusta because of her conflicted feelings for the two men in her life, and Orozco because of his obsessive attention to his charities. When Orozco says that his conscience troubles him about not doing enough for others, Augusta's protestations to the contrary and her assertion that "todo tiene su límite, hasta la bondad" make him lament that she doesn't understand the system of ethics he has designed for himself. It is not based on societal norms and standards, but rather, it is Orozco's personal conception of "los fundamentos del bien y el mal" that has emerged from him sounding the depths of his heart and conscience. Although he repeatedly explains his ideas to Augusta, he is aware that she does not wish to make them her own.

"¡Ay, Augusta! ¡Qué lejos estás de mí, pero que lejos!" declares Orozco, and in the novel Galdós represents that distance by having the couple engage in long passages of internal reflection that they hide from each other. But Méndez-Leite visualizes this emotional distance by having the characters tell their problems to the audience. By breaking the fourth wall that separates the actors playing roles on the stage from the viewers watching them in the theater, Méndez-Leite incorporates the 21st-century audience into the marital situation of Galdós's 19th-century couple. But each character relates to the audience in a different way. Orozco stares out into the audience and says: "Ustedes me van a entender: solo dentro del círculo de mis pensamientos, consigo restablecer mi personalidad, me gozo en mi mismo, examino mis ideas y me recreo en este sistema... llamémosle religioso..., en este sistema que yo mismo he inventado, sin auxilio de nadie y sin abrir un libro." Although Orozco is formally talking with the audience, he really is talking *at* it, assuming that his listeners agree with him about the importance of his ideas and not soliciting any feedback. In this way Méndez-Leite reveals the

“insidious egoism” and “strong element of pride” that underlies Orozco’s characterization in the novel (Penuel 416). Augusta, on the other hand, relates to the audience on a more personal level. Rather than addressing it as a group, she begins by speaking to just one of its members, asking “¿Usted cree que Dios se ocupa de nuestras pequeñeces?” and she listens to the answer “Sí” from an actress who has been placed in the front row to play the role of a spectator. Although this is a scripted interaction, it gives the impression of an actual conversation taking place between Augusta and the people attending the play. Augusta even answers questions posed to her by the actress in the audience concerning the nature of her relationship with Federico.

In addition, Augusta engages the audience through humor. When she is lying in bed unable to sleep due to her troubled thoughts, she says to the audience:

Si estuviera en una situación real, yo podría pensar estas cosas sin que mi marido se enterara, pero como estamos en un teatro y están ustedes ahí, no me parece de buena educación ocultárselo a ustedes. Por eso lo digo en voz alta, en la convención de que Orozco no me oye, lo que contradice las leyes físicas de la acústica, porque si nos dejáramos llevar por la lógica geográfica, él se estaría enterando de todo. Así que quedamos en que él me cree dormida y que yo aprovecho la soledad para meterme en mí y que yo estoy pensando en silencio aunque ustedes me oigan perfectamente. Por otra parte, llegados a este acuerdo, no veo ninguna razón para permanecer en la cama, puesto que si hemos convenido que Orozco no me oye, estando ahí mismo, tampoco verá que me levanto.

The audience’s laughter that follows this statement indicates that they are well aware of the theatrical convention of asides and soliloquies, but Augusta’s foregrounding of this artifice serves to create a closer bond between her and the audience by sharing a joke with them about the conspiratorial nature of these theatrical features.

The characters’ violation of the line that divides their fictional world from our real one is the key to Méndez-Leite’s handling of Augusta’s infidelity. Augusta tells the audience that “esta unión no satisface las necesidades de... mi alma, digámoslo así, y que otro cariño me salió al paso y lo tomé porque llena mi vida hasta los bordes,” and she speaks of her affair as “la consecuencia lógica de las leyes de la naturaleza.” But she also admits that her conscience at times bothers her and she says “casi, casi estoy tentada de contárselo todo a mi marido.” At that point the 21st-century narrator suddenly enters the stage and says: “Uy, no se lo aconsejo, las infidelidades no deben airearse más de lo necesario.” This narrator now becomes Augusta’s on-stage interlocutor, complementing the function of the actress pretending to be a member of the audience.

When the narrator continues to dissuade Augusta from confessing by saying “Yo acabo de conocer a su marido, pero no me da la impresión de que sea capaz de comprender las sutilezas de su conciencia. Vamos, que yo me olvidaría,” Augusta responds with:

Digan lo que digan, estamos gobernados por leyes estúpidas, hechas para regular lo irregular. . . Si no estuviéramos atados por esos nudos del convencionalismo, yo podría seguir queriendo a ese santo varón y disfrutando de mis encuentros con el otro. ¿Qué inconveniente habría en que este hombre, al que miro como a mi hermano del alma, este hombre de entendimiento superior, supiera que yo tenga un amante y que lo oyera de mi propia boca?

This speech exemplifies how Augusta is being portrayed in *Galdosiana*. Méndez-Leite told Días Sande that in Galdós's *Realidad* "el personaje de Augusta resulta muy moderno y me he detenido en esa 'modernidad,'" and in the same interview Cristina Higuera elaborated on this idea by saying that Augusta is "sorprendentemente moderna. Lo que no le da su marido lo encuentra en otro y pacta con los dos. Algo inaudito en el siglo XIX. Pero en nuestro siglo siguen ocurriendo estas cosas." Furthermore, Fiorella Faltoyano is quoted by Bravo as saying that Galdós's characters can be "muy adelantados a su tiempo. La Augusta de *Realidad*, por ejemplo, se pregunta por qué no puede tener a dos hombres la vez, si uno solo no le satisface del todo. Es un planteamiento muy revolucionario para su época."

Indeed, Galdós did write against the traditionalism of his era through Augusta's views on adultery, but he did not word the references to her affair in quite such direct a manner. The vast majority of Augusta's statement is from the novel, but Méndez-Leite made two changes. He has her say "y disfrutando de mis encuentros con el otro" instead of Galdós's milder wording of "podría tener un gran consuelo," and he substitutes "supiera que yo tenga un amante" for Galdós's "supiera lo que me está pasando." Thus, in the original text the reader is required to interpret "un gran consuelo" and "lo que me está pasando" as allusions to her infidelity. This is an example of what Robyn Warhol calls "the antinarratable," which pertains to something that "shouldn't be told" because it transgresses social conventions or taboos, and therefore is implied rather than explicitly stated (224-25). Galdós's modernity resides in the *concepts* he has Augusta voice, and the indirect wording that he uses would have been understood by his contemporary readers as conveying those concepts while staying within the bounds of linguistic propriety. But today's audience both tolerates and expects more direct references to sexual activity. Consequently, Méndez-Leite's rewording clearly states what Galdós could not, and in so doing, he makes manifest to his modern-day audience the latent meaning in Galdós's 19th-century text. This rewording also reveals that the past/present dynamic between the two texts extends to the language in which they are written, with Méndez-Leite having more freedom to openly address sexual matters today than Galdós did in *fin de siglo* Spain.

The issue of language is further explored through the different ways that the 19th- and 21st-century characters speak. "Personalmente me preocupa nuestro idioma que está muy deteriorado" Méndez-Leite told Días Sande. "Cada vez hablamos peor. El castellano de Galdós es muy bueno y he dialogado con las construcciones de Galdós. Es un castellano muy rico y divertido. En la narradora he recurrido a un lenguaje actual pero sin perder la calidad, y en personajes galdosianos me he ceñido más a Galdós. El contraste de los dos lenguajes funciona muy bien." Thus, while recuperating Galdós's characters for a modern audience, Méndez-Leite also is recuperating the language that they used. Although changes in Galdós's wording occasionally occur, as evidenced in the discussion above, the lines that the 19th-century characters speak throughout *Galdosiana* are overwhelmingly taken directly from the novels, and their interactions with the 21st-century narrator allow Méndez-Leite to contrast not only social norms but linguistic ones as well.

The conversation between Augusta and the narrator is cut short when Orozco awakes. He tells Augusta about a letter that he received from Federico's father, and she warns him to be wary of having any further dealings with the man who had taken advantage of him financially

two years previously. Orozco counters by saying “Debemos perdonar todas las ofensas.” This statement, coming on the heels of Augusta’s thoughts of confessing her affair to Orozco, prompts her to ask “Todas, ¿Crees tú que toda ofensa se debe perdonar?,” and Orozco reiterates “Todas, y sin reserva de ninguna clase.” But Augusta still persists, posing her question more personally this time as “¿Estarías tú dispuesto a perdonar cualquier ofensa que se te haga”, and Orozco again confirms his position by saying “Sin género alguno de duda.”

This dialogue foreshadows the end to Galdós’s novel, where Orozco pardons Federico and offers forgiveness to Augusta if she confesses, and where her unwillingness to do so results in their moral divorce. But Méndez-Leite never reaches that end. The audience only sees Augusta during the first act of *Realidad*, while she is grappling with the very concept of confession. She rejects the idea of religious confession because it would be hypocritical to promise to end the affair when she has no intention to do so. In the novel, she longs for “un sacerdote extraordinario, ideal, superior a cuantos hombres andan por el mundo, de un saber tan grande y de una sensibilidad tan fina para tomar el pulso a las pasiones,” and then she imagines the shadow of her husband becoming that confessor, listening to her explain her reasons for being unfaithful but then vanishing without saying a word. Méndez-Leite cuts this speech and has Augusta confess her infidelity to the narrator and the audience instead. It began, she says, when Federico declared his love for her, and she responded because “tener un secreto, burlar a la sociedad, que en todo quiere entrometerse, es un recreo esencial de nuestras almas con corsé, oprimidas, fajadas.” She concludes by saying “Aborrezco esa vida, muy legal, muy buena y muy santa para quien se pueda amoldar a ella, pero que no es para mí.” When she asks the narrator if she is a sinner, the narrator responds by saying: “Te recuerdo que usted y yo estamos en tiempos distintos y que lo que en el siglo XIX se veía de una manera, en el XXI lo vemos de otra muy diferente. Ahora no hablamos de pecadores ni de confesores.” In the novel, Augusta wishes to be judged by “la razón grande, el metro elástico” that does not measure behavior by “las reglas chiquitas” of her society, and in *Galdosiana* Méndez-Leite provides her with a “metro elástico” that extends all the way to the 21st-century. Méndez-Leite has placed Augusta’s infidelity within the context of the more tolerant attitudes of present-day secularized Spain, allowing her confession to be heard by those who can understand it better than members of her contemporary society. Galdós used the corset—a clothing item common to his own age—as a metaphor for the oppression of 19th-century women, and when Méndez-Leite retains that image, the disuse of corsets in modern-day fashion clearly highlights the difference in situation for today’s woman, who neither has her body oppressed by a corset nor her independence constrained by the unyielding societal norms that Augusta experienced more than a century before.

The modernity of the *Realidad* plot has long been recognized as resting on Galdós’s decision to resolve the issue of adultery with forgiveness rather than following the traditional Calderonian honor code of revenge.² This ending makes Orozco the ultimate agent of societal change, and Augusta’s refusal to confess to her husband places her in an inferior position to Orozco, who wished to raise her to his moral plane, and to Federico, whom Orozco recognizes as a kindred spirit who sacrificed his life in order to follow the dictates of his conscience. But Méndez-Leite shifts the focus away from Orozco and makes Augusta the spokesperson for change instead. At the end of the novel Augusta refuses to confess to Orozco because he cannot fulfill both of her

requirements for a confessor: someone who has risen above the values and “reglas chiquitas” of *fin de siglo* society, and someone who can “tomar el pulso” of her passions. Orozco has succeeded in the former, but not in the latter. His personal doctrine of spiritual perfection does not allow him to understand her passions. But in *Galdosiana* Augusta is given the confessor she desires: the 21st-century narrator and the audience. Augusta’s words in opposition to the constraints placed on her by society were penned by Galdós, but they resonate differently when spoken to listeners over 100 years in her future. This explicitly highlights the difference between 19th- and 21st-century attitudes, but it also implicitly shows that Galdós’s handling of adultery in *Realidad* is modern not only because of Orozco’s rejection of outmoded values of honor, but also because Augusta’s views anticipate changes in attitude about female sexuality that are reflected in Spanish society today.

Méndez-Leite has stated that “El sentido de humor es una de las claves del espectáculo,” but he does not use it to make fun of Galdós’s work or the ideas contained in it (*Dossier de Prensa* 4). Rather, humor serves to create an intimacy between the characters and the audience, and to bring the audience’s attention to the contrast between Galdós’s era and our own. This can be done with simple references to objects that were not in existence in the 19th-century, as seen in the dialogue where Augusta asks the narrator’s advice about the letter she is composing to Federico, and the narrator responds by saying “Tú sabrás. Este tipo de billetitos amorosos no los usamos ya. Mandamos mensajitos por el móvil.” But more importantly, humorous contrasts also highlight differences in literary convention that distinguish Galdós’s novel from Méndez-Leite’s theatrical adaptation.

For example, in addition to serving as Augusta’s confessor, the 21st-century narrator is used to make Augusta aware that her 19th-century story now is part of a larger three-part play that the modern-day audience is watching. So when Augusta continues to elaborate on her “antipatía por el orden perfecto” and her love for “lo que no es común” (12), the narrator interrupts her by saying “Querida, es el monólogo más largo que he oído desde el ‘To be or not to be.’ Podrías ir abreviando,” and later she comments that “lo que me preocupa es que te estás alargando. ¿A ti te han dicho que Doña Perfecta, Tormento, y la de Bringas están entre cajas, esperando que tú acabes de contarnos tus cuitas con estos dos panolis?,” to which Augusta replies “Pero si no he pasado del planteamiento.” Together these comments function as a humorous device to bring the *Realidad* segment to a close, but they also constitute an in-joke aimed at those members of the audience who are familiar with Galdós’s original text. *Realidad* is a dialogue novel, and as such it is written in the form of a play to be read rather than performed. Before being revived by Galdós in *Realidad*, this genre was little used in Spain beyond its famous example of *La Celestina*. However, it did enjoy popularity in England during the 18th- and 19th-centuries, where it was known as the closet drama. Catherine Burroughs states that “speech-making is *the* central action” of the closet drama, and as such, “monologues and soliloquies dominate,” “interiority is privileged,” and interactions among the characters typically work out “a philosophical problem” or “a moral position” (219). Consequently, both closet dramas and dialogue novels posit a reader who is prepared to patiently approach their complex concepts and lengthy discussions with “slow reflection” (226). The same is not true of performed theatricals. Indeed, the 21st-century narrator’s

preoccupation with the amount of time that is being spent on Augusta's story highlights the practical concerns of staged plays, which are constrained by length in ways that dialogue novels are not.³

Burroughs stresses that authors of closet dramas did not need to deal with the demands of mounting a theatrical production nor did they have to "accommodate a paying audience" (222), and Galdós was well aware of the logistical difficulties of stage plays, as evidenced by the comments he made in his 1885 essay "Viejos y nuevos moldes":

No hay arte en que la ficción de la naturaleza esté más cohibida que en el teatro. . . . La limitación prudencial de personajes, la tiranía del lugar de la escena, la corta duración de los actos, la falta del elemento descriptivo y episódico, la graduación forzosa del interés encierran la inspiración dramática en límites estrechos. . . . Mientras el teatro consista en presentar una acción viva, en plazo de dos o tres horas, ante un público congregado en locales *ad hoc*, no es fácil que el convencionalismo escénico varíe. Convencido al público para que soporte actos de más de cuarenta minutos hacedle comprender que debe prestar atención a un diálogo de carácter analítico, que no hay razón ninguna estética para que los actos terminen con una emoción viva; quitadle de la cabeza la preocupación de los *caracteres simpáticos*, y el teatro ganará en verdad. (152)

The generic conventions of the closet drama gave Galdós a way to circumvent these problems, allowing him to use dramaturgical elements outside of the traditional stage environment. For Burroughs, this is "theatre without consequence—without real people, without real bodies—and the result is a discrete form that pays homage to a theory of playwriting but not to a practice; to the idea of a staged play but not to its gritty reality" (222).

But Mendez-Leite *did* have to contend with real people—both on stage and in the audience—as well as their expectations that he remain within the typical 90 minute running time of modern theatrical performances, so for his *Realidad* segment he limited himself to just two acts from the original text and he streamlined the length of the monologues. But despite Mendez-Leite's pruning of Augusta's speech down from over 1,100 words in Galdós's novel to under 300 words in his own, it still seems too long for the decidedly unreflective 21st-century narrator, whose comment alludes to the difference between the performance-based medium of a play (where monologues are listened to in real time) and the dialogue novel genre (where they are read and pondered at one's own pace and can be reread if desired). Monologues that are written to be spoken must be shorter and easier to follow than those that are written to be read, and humor is used here to make this distinction between Galdós's novelistic medium (that looks like a play but isn't one) and Méndez-Leite's adaptation of it for the stage.

When Galdós published his *Realidad* novel, he did so without an explanatory prologue, but in the prologue to his dialogue novel *Cassandra* Galdós refers to the genre as a hybrid form that is the "producto de cruzamiento de la Novela y el Teatro" (193), and in the prologue to his dialogue novel *El abuelo* he speaks of the "sistema dialogal" as combining the best of both worlds: when characters reveal themselves directly through their own words as in a play rather than through narration and description, the novelistic experience becomes less mediated by the author, and when monologues and dialogues can be read rather than performed, they can contain

greater depth and complexity than theatrical material typically exhibits (189). Galdós was undertaking an aesthetic revitalization of traditional genres, and he places that endeavour within an historical context by stating in the *Cassandra* prologue that “los tiempos piden al Teatro que no abomine absolutamente del procedimiento analítico, y a la Novela, que sea menos perezosa en sus desarrollos y se deje llevar a la concisión activa con que presenta los hechos humanos el arte escénico” (193). Thus, by recuperating the dialogue novel format that had been long dormant in Spain, Galdós was able to both enrich and confront the existing genres incorporated within it.

In the *Dossier de Prensa* Méndez-Leite makes a point of stating that for *Galdosiana* he drew upon Galdós’s novels rather than his plays (5), and in the case of *Realidad* that decision gave him access to the full complexity of Augusta’s psychological portrait and the depth of her arguments rather than being limited by the cuts made by Galdós when he adapted his own dialogue novel for the stage in 1892. Indeed, much of what Augusta says in the sixth scene of the novel’s first jornada is omitted in the *Realidad* play, and her dissatisfaction with societal norms is simply paraphrased by Orozco rather than voiced by his wife. Méndez-Leite’s reliance on Galdós’s dialogue novel of *Realidad* allowed him to focus on Augusta instead of Orozco, and the lengthy speeches of that genre provided him with a wide array of Galdós’s own words that he could select from and condense into the monologues and dialogues for his *Galdosiana* play. Furthermore, by just focusing on two scenes—the story’s “planteamiento”—Méndez-Leite could transfer the psychologically rich characterization of the dialogue novel onto the stage while keeping within the practical time constraints required by a performance-based medium. Serving as the “patient salvager” described by Hutcheon (8), Méndez-Leite not only reanimates Augusta’s story through her interactions with the 21st-century narrator and audience, but he also preserves for the stage what was omitted by Galdós himself in the transition between the novelistic and theatrical versions of *Realidad*.

Doña Perfecta

The second segment of *Galdosiana* deals with the novel *Doña Perfecta*. Méndez-Leite continues the device of the 21st-century narrator, but now that role is shared by both of the principal actresses. Dressed in pants and knit tops, they alternate in giving the audience background information about Pepe Rey, his relationship with Rosario, and Doña Perfecta’s machinations to prevent their marriage. Doña Perfecta is the prototype of this segment, and she is characterized as “la personificación cristalina de aquello de que las apariencias engañan.” We are told that she is “déspota, fría, intransigente, fanática en materia religiosa” as well as being a “maestra en el arte de dominar.” As these opening remarks come to a close, one of the actresses begins to dress on stage in a 19th-century costume, transforming herself into the Doña Perfecta character just in time to assume her role in the scene with Pepe Rey. This scene is based on chapter 19, entitled “Combate terrible.—Estrategia” and it portrays the first open confrontation between Pepe and Perfecta. Their dialogue closely follows the original text, but as the verbal battle between them gets more heated, a second Doña Perfecta—dressed identically to the original one—suddenly appears on stage and begins to alternate lines with

what she calls her “alter ego.” Once again both of the principal actresses are playing the same part on the stage, but whereas earlier it was the role of the 21st-century narrator that had been doubled, now it is being done to the role of Doña Perfecta. With the addition of this second Doña Perfecta, Pepe Rey finds himself physically under attack from both sides, raising the emotional tenor of the scene to such a degree that at one point the actors break out of character to engage in a conversation about the aesthetic nature of the play they are performing. It starts with a question:

Cristina Higuera: Oye, ¿no crees que esto es demasiado melodramático?

Fiorella Faltoyano: Bueno, esto es lo que es: *Doña Perfecta*.

Cristina Higuera: Pero es que el melodrama ahora....

David Sentinella: Este es el lado melodramático, pero hay que saber ver el aspecto de crítica social y de costumbres. Cada texto tiene una segunda lectura.

Fiorella Faltoyano: Mira, no te pongas pedante. Vamos a seguir que ya estamos acabando y dejaros de disquisiciones literarias.

Cristina Higuera: Bueno, lo que tú digas, pero si estos (pointing to the audience) se largan....

Of course, this is a scripted portion of *Galdosiana* and the actors are only pretending to play themselves instead of their 19th-century characters, but this self-referential moment is important because it brings the audience's attention to the issue of melodrama as an evolving aesthetic genre, both in terms of its use and its reception.

Just as attitudes toward sexuality have shifted between Galdós's era and our own, as was seen in *Realidad*, so have attitudes concerning melodrama, and Galdós was instrumental in creating that shift through his novels, plays, and essays. The opening sentence to his 1870 “Observaciones sobre la novela contemporánea en España,” written six years before his *Doña Perfecta* novel, states: “El gran defecto de la mayor parte de nuestros novelistas, es haber utilizado elementos extraños, convencionales, impuestos por la moda, prescindiendo por completo de los de la sociedad nacional y coetánea les ofrece con extraordinaria abundancia” (105). Also, in his essay “Espíritu de imitación,” written 11 years before his 1896 *Doña Perfecta* theatrical adaptation, Galdós expresses a similar critique of the Spanish playwrights of his day, attributing the “esterilidad de sus concepciones” to their transplanting of foreign examples of political dramas to the Spanish stage “sin tenerse en cuenta que en ella se han de presentar los elementos, las luchas, los tipos de nuestra sociedad, y que todo lo extraño ha de aparecer aquí sin atractivo, sin carácter y sin interés que le presta el país que representa” (179, 181). In both cases, the problem lies in the dominant influence of French models, which had managed to “inundar la Península de una plaga desastrosa” that infected the novelistic and theatrical genres alike (“Observaciones” 108). This plague created a Spanish industry of translations and imitations that featured a constant supply of “traidores pálidos y de mirada siniestra, modistas angelicales, meretrices con areola, duquesas averiadas, jorobados románticos, adulterios, extremos de amor y odio” for readers (“Observaciones” 107). In addition, it instilled in theatre audiences a taste for “efectos de la índole más grosera y vulgar,” a morality “enteramente artificiosa y circunstancial” that existed no where except “de telón adentro,” characters that have been reduced to “una tanda

de tres of cuatro figuras que se repiten siempre,” action based on “media docena de asuntos, repetidos hasta la saciedad y aderezados con distinta salsa,” and language which “es de los más pobres” in its vocabulary and range of expression (“Viejos” 154-156). This “peste nacida en Francia” is melodrama, and Galdós fought against it on two fronts: first to create “la novela nacional de pura observación,” and later to reform the Spanish theatre “en decadencia” (“Observaciones” 107, “Viejos” 151).

The actor portraying Pepe is correct when he states that it is important to look beyond the melodramatic aspects of *Doña Perfecta* in order to see its critical component. Context is indeed the key to both how Galdós dealt with the issue of melodrama and how Méndez-Leite uses melodrama to support his past/present contrast between Galdós’s era and our own. Although the origins of melodrama date back to the 18th-century, Guilbert de Pixérécort, known as the father of classic French melodrama, “established overnight the pattern of popular melodrama for the next hundred years” with his 1800 *Coelina, ou L’enfant du mystère* (Williams 196). According to Wadda Ríos-Font, performances of classic French melodrama in translation—including the Spanish debut of Pixérécort’s *Celina o el mundo incógnito* in 1803—became the standard for melodrama in Spain throughout the century (26), the defining characteristics of which “had as much to do with a repertoire of specific plot and staging devices (family conflicts, mistaken identities, a fixed inventory of characters, spectacular chases and battles) as with the moral framework (an emotional clash between virtue and evil) that we now acknowledge as its basis” (50). It is this emotional clash between good and evil within a familial context that is “el lado melodramático” of the scene, but Galdós problematized that moral binary by having each of the combatants—Doña Perfecta and Pepe Rey—ascibe the role of “evil” to the other character and the role of “good” to her/himself. Furthermore, the battle that is being fought within this family dynamic echoes the military confrontations of the third Carlist war that are occurring during the historical time period of the novel. Unlike the serial novels translated or adapted from French texts, *Doña Perfecta* is politically and socially engaged with issues pertaining to the Spanish nation, and Galdós shows that the ideological differences between liberals and conservatives are too complex to simply assign guilt or innocence to any one side. This is “el aspecto de crítica social y de costumbres” that lies at the core of Galdós’s vision of “la novela nacional de pura observación” that he outlined in his “Observaciones” essay.

As Sherman Eoff explains, from 1870 to 1880 there was “an increasing conviction that the novel should deal with important problems of contemporary society” (544). This type of ideologically engaged fiction was commonly called *la novela de ideas or la novela de tesis or la novela tendenciosa*. Some of its authors preferred an overtly didactic approach, “teaching morality by praising virtue and condemning vice. This attitude is a continuation of the reactionary sentimentality of the preceding decades” (554). Other authors, like Galdós, provided an indirect lesson that flows reasonably from the plot and the psychological make-up of the characters “so that the reader may draw his own conclusion” (552), thereby avoiding what Ríos-Font calls “the obligatory moralizing” of melodrama (48). *Doña Perfecta* was Galdós’s first thesis novel, and by choosing aesthetics over didacticism Galdós was able to contribute toward a reform of the novel genre in Spain by providing a counterexample to the

dominant melodramatic and foreign-based serialized literature of his day.

But in bringing Galdós novel *Doña Perfecta* to the 21st-century stage, Méndez-Leite chose to have his actors perform their scenes in the melodramatic fashion that was common to theatricals at the time of the novel's composition in 1876. This included "histrionic body language" and "radically inhibited or exaggerated expression" in which "sweeping gestures come to a point in the body's brief pose" and serve as "blatant incitements to audience reaction" (Williams 194-95). During the scene with Pepe Rey, both actresses portraying Doña Perfecta move their arms in broad gestures, pointing to the heavens with upraised arching arms that they momentarily hold aloft before lowering them. Sometimes these gestures are made facing the audience in an appeal to the viewers, and other times these outstretched arms encircle Pepe from both sides as if he were being caged. The melodramatic acting style continues into the next confrontation scene, this time between Doña Perfecta and her daughter, who has arranged to run away with Pepe that evening. Both of the principal actresses continue to play Doña Perfecta, with the addition of a third actress appearing on stage for the first time in the role of Rosario. This scene is taken from chapter 31 of the novel, in which Galdós specifically indicates Rosario's movements at two points: she runs to her mother and embraces her while crying "Áteme usted," and later she kneels and kisses her mother's feet while saying "Conozco que debo amarla... Me condenaré si no la amo." The emotional intensity of this scene rests on Rosario's conflicted feelings. Hers is not a simple choice between right and wrong, and Galdós uses her actions to show the degree to which her words are at odds with her desires. But Galdós does not allow this emotional excess to last. Doña Perfecta accepts Rosario's embrace, but with the command "Levántate" she quickly cuts short the other extremes to which Rosario is going. Méndez-Leite, on the contrary, accentuates the emotional excess of Rosario's actions, having her fall to her knees both times, the first to embrace her mother's skirt and the second to face the audience with her arms extended. Furthermore, following each of these outbursts of emotionality, Cristina Higuera, the actress who had stopped the action in the previous scene, breaks out of character again to make additional comments. Seeing Rosario on her knees the first time (and Doña Perfecta responding by placing the back of her hand on her upraised forehead in an exaggerated gesture of tragic despair) Cristina sarcastically says to the audience "Volvemos al melodrama," and later when Doña Perfecta tells Rosario to get up, Cristina exasperatedly says to the actress playing Rosario "Eso, Levántate, que está un poco pasada." These self-referential comments provoke audience laughter and reinforce the past/present contrast of acting styles, making the subsequent melodramatic gestures of the actresses even more evident. Consequently, when Cristina resumes her role as one of the two Doña Perfectas, no further commentary is needed. Without prompting, the audience chuckles when Doña Perfecta faces it and ostentatiously fans her face while exclaiming "¡Qué traición! ¡Qué infamia!" after the escape plan between Rosario and Pepe is revealed. Similarly the audience laughs when both of the Doña Perfectas walk across the stage with their arms aloft and their eyes to the heavens while one after the other exclaims "¡Este hombre aquí!" and "¡Este hombre en mi casa!" Melodramatic body movements also contribute to the visual sensationalism of the moment when Pepe is ordered to death. With a sweeping upward motion of the arm, as if charging into battle, one of the Doña Perfectas says "Caballuco, ¡Dispara! and the other one repeats the gesture saying ¡Mátale!" To add to what Ríos-Font calls "melodrama's aesthetics of

excess” (107), it is at this point, rather than earlier as in the novel, that Rosario faints. The scene ends with Rosario left in a prone position as the stage darkens and a spotlight shines on her inert body, thereby shifting audience attention away from the Realism of Pepe’s unjust murder to the Romanticism of Amparo’s emotional swoon.

The bodies of the actors are used not only for their movements but also for their ability to freeze position in a manner that evokes the tableau representations that were a mainstay of melodramatic performance. As Carolyn Williams explains, “static poses arrest the action, then dissolve into action again, then freeze into the next pose” (194). Twice during the *Doña Perfecta* segment Fiorella Faltoyano switches back to her role as the 21st-century narrator in order to relay additional background information from the novel. Each time the dramatic action stops as soon as she starts speaking, and the other characters retain their mid-action poses until she finishes talking to the audience and once again becomes the character of Doña Perfecta. The static nature of the tableau focuses the audience’s attention on the bodies of the actors. Normally this was done in 19th-century melodramas for symbolic, thematic, or sensationalistic purposes, but here it accentuates the artificiality of the acting gestures contained in each frozen pose.

The visual conventions of melodramatic performance were acceptable at the time that the *Doña Perfecta* novel was written in 1876, but they are no longer acceptable today, and this contrast is made through the histrionic acting, the self-referential comments of the actors, and the moments of tableau stasis. But melodramatic techniques also were going out of fashion by the time that Galdós staged his own 1896 adaptation of *Doña Perfecta*, twenty years after his novelistic version. Indeed, as early as 1885 Galdós recognized the need for actors to adopt a more natural style because “han caído en descrédito los tradicionales estilos de nuestros actores. La declamación campanuda y cantada, las contorciones espasmódicas, la rigidez y los modales trágicos gustan menos cada vez” (“Echegaray” 140). His aim was greater realism in characterization and performance. According to David George and Jesús Rubio Jiménez, Galdós “took up the challenge of renovating the theatre by moving it closer to the novel” (279).

The two incarnations of the *Doña Perfecta* story played an important role in that reformist agenda. Just as its novelistic version countered the melodramatic extremes of the foreign-based serialized fiction that Galdós criticized in his “Observaciones” essay, so too did his theatrical version advance his cause to raise Spanish theatre from the “decadencia notoria” into which it had fallen (“Echegaray” 137). As David Gies has noted, Galdós’s “characters tend to talk and think, react and contemplate, plan and absorb ideas rather than scream and shout, faint and gesture” (337). This is especially evident in how Galdós adapted chapter 31 of his *Doña Perfecta* novel for his final act of his *Doña Perfecta* play. Gone are Rosario’s pleas to physically restrain her from leaving, as well as her subservient kissing of Doña Perfecta’s feet. More importantly, instead of fainting, Rosario engages in a discussion about the political rebellion that Doña Perfecta has fomented and her “indigno espionaje” against Pepe. Thus, Galdós puts a damper on what the actor in *Galdosiana* called “el lado melodramático” of the novel while highlighting what he called “el aspecto de crítica social y de costumbres.” This is an adaptation for the more restrained tastes and authentically Spanish themes of 1896 theatre.

In the fluid continuum of revisitations of *Doña Perfecta*, Galdós's own theatrical version exists as an historical presence between the *Doña Perfecta* novel and Méndez-Leite's adaptation of that novel in *Galdosiana*. By performing the *Doña Perfecta* segment of *Galdosiana* with the type of theatricality that was prevalent at the time that the novel was written, Méndez-Leite was able to explicitly contrast the melodramatic performance conventions of 1876 with the more natural and realistic portrayals that audiences had come to expect in 2009. But Galdós's 1896 theatrical adaptation was instrumental in causing that aesthetic change, and as such, it is an implicit reference point for those members of the audience who are familiar with Galdós's contribution to the development of the Spanish stage. For the unknowing audience there is just one level of comparison (between 1876 and 2009), but for the knowing audience there are two more (between 1876 and 1896, and between 1896 and 2009). Thus, *Galdosiana* provides a multi-layered theatrical experience that each individual viewer may access according to his or her previous knowledge of Galdós's works.

Tormento

The final segment of *Galdosiana* begins with the 21st-century narrator—played once again by just one actress—providing the audience with a biographical sketch of Rosalía de Bringas. Although Amparo is the protagonist of Galdós's *Tormento*, no mention is made of her in this introduction, and the action begins with the conversation between Rosalía and Cándida in chapter three of the novel rather than its dialogue between Ido del Sagrario and Felipe Centeno in chapter one. Much critical attention has been paid to how Galdós's *Tormento* simultaneously employs and subverts the foreign-based serialized novels he criticized in the "Observaciones" essay by mirroring their stale, formulaic plots and melodramatic emotions, and how the opening chapter of *Tormento* is instrumental in establishing a false parallelism between Amparo and the idealized romantic heroine of the *novela por entregas* that Ido is writing (eg. Percival, Andreu 21-29, Aldaraca 139-59, Sieburth 100-36, and Willem 113-29). But Méndez-Leite omits this first chapter and makes Rosalía rather than Amparo the prototype for this segment. The vain, manipulative, and deceptive Rosalía is indeed one of the "prototipos que traspasan el tiempo y por ello fácilmente reconocibles en nuestro entorno," but Amparo as the stigmatized "fallen woman" no longer is a viable prototype in the 21st-century. Knowing audiences are aware that Amparo's lost virginity and the "immoral" union between her and Agustín at the end of *Tormento* were used by Galdós to parody the heroine-based plots of serialized novels and to upend the melodramatic happy ending where virtue triumphs over evil. But for the unknowing audiences receiving Amparo's story from a 21st-century perspective on sexuality, a more modern impediment to the couple's marriage is needed, so by making Rosalía the prototype of this segment, Méndez-Leite allows his contemporary viewers to focus on Rosalía's attempts to manipulate the situation to her advantage rather than on Amparo's sexual history. Furthermore, there are no scenes in which either Pedro Polo or his sister Marcelina appear. Instead, the viewer is simply told about them by the 21st-century narrator and in asides that Rosalía directs at the audience. Thus, the multiple societal forces working against Amparo in the novel have been visually distilled into a single character: Rosalía. She is the only villain that the audience sees on stage, and it is through her

interactions with Amparo and Agustín that the complexity of Galdós's novel is pared down to a good vs. evil binary. Most importantly, by 21st-century standards the story has a happy ending: Rosalía's schemes have been foiled, and like many of today's couples, Agustín and Amparo have chosen to live together without being married.

Thus, due to the shift in social norms and values concerning pre-marital sex from Galdós's era to our own, for the unknowing audience Amparo's story seems to be a typical melodramatic romance rather than a parody of that genre, and that impression is reinforced through music. *Melos*—the Greek word for music—etymologically reveals the origins of melodrama as a mixed genre combining music and drama, songs and speech to create a form of audio-visual theatre. In *Galdosiana* music is used sparingly in *Realidad* and *Doña Perfecta*, appearing only twice for each segment, but in *Tormento* its frequency increases fourfold. Furthermore, it is only during the *Tormento* segment that a character sings on stage. It occurs when Agustín arrives at the Bringas home after returning from America, but rather than speaking about his time abroad, as he did in chapter 8 of the novel, he sings about it instead. The tune is based on Francisco Alonso's song, *Maitechu Mía*, about a man who leaves the woman he loves behind while he seeks his fortune, but when he returns with the wealth he had promised her, he learns that she had died of grief waiting for him. The final stanza ends with "el oro conseguí pero el amor perdí." This song, written in 1927, has retained its popularity in Spain through numerous recordings and performances by such luminaries as Plácido Domingo, José Carreras, and Alfredo Kraus, and the Spanish public's current familiarity with it is evidenced by postings on social media, including YouTube and Facebook. In *Galdosiana* Agustín begins the story of his own life with *Maitechu Mía*'s opening line—Buscando hacer fortuna como emigrante me fui a otras tierras—but the remaining lyrics are changed to recount his years of hard work, the death of his uncle, the company he established with his cousins, and his decision to return to Spain. Through the original lyrics of *Maitechu Mía* Agustín is implicitly equated with the role of a lover, except that in his case the woman with whom he will share his wealth is yet to be found. Amparo, of course, is that woman and the story of their romance will also be conveyed musically.

Speaking of how music functioned in 19th-century melodrama, Williams has noted that tunes played in the background of scenes served as "guides for the audience's affective response" (193). She goes on to say that

melodramatic music, in other words, is mood music. It is blatantly thematic, as ostentatiously typified as the characters and situations it helps to characterize. But it is highly effective and has had an enormous influence—on Richard Wagner's development of the leitmotif, for example, and of course in the form of the cinematic soundtrack, where it still exerts a powerful emotional and aesthetic effect today. (214)

All three of the *Galdosiana* segments employ the sound of a piano playing various keyboard sonatas by Domenico Scarlatti as occasional accompaniment to speeches directed to the audience by the narrator or characters, but none of the sonatas is repeated.⁴ It is only in *Tormento* that a single piece of recurring music is used to thematically link separate scenes.

This lushly orchestrated romantic melody is heard during three intimate conversations between Amparo and Agustín. The first is when Agustín visits Amparo for the first time while she is alone at the Bringas home (from chapters 8 and 9 of the novel), then when he proposes to her (from chapter 19), and finally during Amparo's confession to Agustín and their agreement to live together in Burdeos (from chapter 39). Thus, the romance between Amparo and Agustín is musically bracketed off from all other events in *Tormento*, with the same melody following the trajectory of their love story from the beginning to its successful resolution and guiding the audience's response along the way.

That response, however, differs according to which category of audiences each individual viewer belongs. For the unknowing audiences, the music validates their view of *Tormento* as a sentimental romance where the lovers ultimately find happiness together despite the villain's attempts to keep them apart. But for the knowing audiences, aware of the parodic nature of Galdós's source novel, the overall effect is ironic. In her book, *A Theory of Parody*, Hutcheon explains that "ironic inversion is characteristic of all parody" (6), and the knowing audiences of Méndez-Leite's *Tormento* are aware that what the unknowing audiences are taking at face value is actually an ironic inversion of the original ironic inversion of Galdós's parody. But the unknowing audiences are not mere dupes. Rather, they embody the aesthetic tastes of the 21st-century, and through their affective response to the love story between Amparo and Agustín, they are living proof of the fact that despite the success of Galdós's campaign to establish the Realist novel in Spain—in which his *Tormento* played an important part—public interest in melodrama still persists into the present day. As Williams notes, "melodrama has been a dominant shaping force of modernity for over two hundred and fifty years. We live, still, within its aesthetic regime in the twenty-first century." Due to the reforming efforts of realist writers, melodrama lost its prominence and became "ignored as bad drama until its rehabilitation began in the 1960's," but over the past several decades melodrama has slowly come to be viewed by modern critics as constituting a long-standing mode of aesthetic and social engagement that exists alongside the realist mode and finds expression in novels, plays, television programs, and films (193-94). Thus, Galdós's assessment of melodrama at the time he wrote *Tormento* in 1884 differs from how it is viewed today, and that is the essence of the past/present contrast that is being played out in the *Tormento* segment of *Galdosiana*. Whereas Galdós used his novel as a parody to turn 19th-century readers away from melodrama, Méndez-Leite exploits the on-going popularity and renewed critical appreciation of melodrama to make his adaptation of Galdós's novel attractive to the 21st-century audience.

Although the characterizations and plotlines of 19th-century melodramas continue to resonate with modern audiences, its histrionic acting does not, so a more natural performance style is used for the *Tormento* segment. Nevertheless, at two points Méndez-Leite strategically employs exaggerated gestures with Amparo. They occur in fast succession of each other at the beginning of the *Tormento* segment when Rosalía announces that Amparo should become a nun and subsequently decides that Agustín should provide the dowry. Each time that Rosalía says the word "monja," Amparo ostentatiously raises her arm, tilts her head upwards, and places the back of her hand on her forehead. Despite the grand manner in which these gestures are delivered, Rosalía does not see them. Rather, they are aimed at the audience. Following on the heels of

the highly melodramatic performances in the *Doña Perfecta* segment, these excessive gestures elicit laughter, but here Amparo is directing that laughter against Rosalía. Furthermore, these gestures signal Amparo's status as the heroine of this melodrama.

Soon afterwards the 21st-century narrator steps in, and calling herself Amparo's "ángel de la guardia," she encourages Amparo to rebel against Rosalía's despotic treatment of her. In the novel Amparo is alone and friendless in working through her dilemma, hiding her secret from the 19th-century society that would condemn her for it. But in *Galdosiana* the 21st-century narrator is her confidant, listening sympathetically to her problems and advising her to tell Agustín the truth. In keeping with the sexual attitudes of today, the major issue for the 21st-century narrator is not that Amparo has had a sexual relationship, but that she is hiding it from Agustín. So when Amparo does eventually confess her deception to Agustín, the couple can live happily together in a relationship built on truth and forgiveness.

Carrie Hughes has stated that "the predominant form of theater in the nineteenth century, melodrama has survived into the twenty-first, and its newest incarnations retain the energy and depth of emotion of the earlier work, while contributing a grace in writing and complexity often lacking in its ancestors." She also goes on to speak of modern melodrama exhibiting "a more nuanced twenty-first century view of character." Galdós's *Tormento* displays the emotional intensity of the 19th-century melodramas it parodies, but it also contains the complexity and nuanced characterizations of the realistic story it presents as a counterexample. Méndez-Leite draws on all of these qualities for his adaptation. Instead of simply staging Galdós's parody of 19th-century melodrama—which could have failed to resonate with today's social, sexual, and aesthetic values—Méndez-Leite delivers a modern melodrama in step with the attitudes and tastes of 21st-century sensibilities.

Conclusion

Doña Perfecta, *Tomento*, and *Realidad* each marked important gains in Galdós's campaign to reform the novel and theater of Spain. Through the clash between Pepe Rey and *Doña Perfecta*, Galdós gave national identity and ideological substance to a novelistic genre dominated by foreign models. Through the relationship between Amparo and Agustín, Galdós exposed the formulaic nature of serialized romantic fiction. Through the romantic triangle between Augusta, Orozco, and Fedrerico, Galdós redefined the manner in which the theme of adultery could be handled intelligently and realistically. Finally, through the theatricalizations of his own novels, Galdós brought a natural style of acting to the stage that still prevails today. Chronologically these stories display a continuity of purpose in Galdós's Realist agenda, but Méndez-Leite's "juego de tiempo y espacio" removes them from their chronological context, shuffles them together, and treats each one as an independent entity with its own unique relationship to the past and the present. "Yo, con un liberador descaro me enfrenté a los textos de Galdós" Méndez-Leite told Díaz Sande in their interview, and the result is not a three-part adaptation that links together three of those texts, but rather, it is a collection of three separate adaptations, with each story existing in a fluid relationship with *its* versions. In *Galdosiana*

Méndez-Leite creatively revisits each of the stories, bringing the past in contact with the present to provide fresh perspectives on Galdós's characters, language, and legacy for the 21st-century audience.

However, this “espectáculo teatral culto y popular a un mismo tiempo” complicates the concept of Hutcheon's knowing and unknowing audiences because at any point in its multiple text format, a portion of each audience may shift from one category to the other. An individual viewer may be acquainted with all, some, or none of the three novels, and the same applies to Galdós's own theatrical adaptations. To watch *Galdosiana* is to occupy one's own place in the various combinations of audience positions that it offers, accessing its layers for a personalized experience that is both enriching and entertaining.

Galdosiana falls within what Karen E. Klein has called the “transformation paradigm” of adaptation, wherein the novelistic source serves as “raw material” to be significantly reworked into “something new and different” that is “an artistic work in its own right” (72-73). Méndez-Leite has acknowledged the importance of that raw material, telling Díaz Sande that in his play “hay un 98% de Galdós y uno y pico por ciento mío.” Galdós is indeed present throughout *Galdosiana*, not only in the words spoken by the actors and the plots lived by the characters, but also in the historical context to the stories and the reformist agenda with which they are infused. Méndez-Leite's contribution was to make that presence available in a new format for today's stage. “Cuando una novela es buena lo es para siempre,” Méndez-Leite told Liz Perales in an interview, and in *Galdosiana* he allowed 21st-century audiences, both knowing and unknowing, to experience the lasting value of three key novels by one of Spain's greatest writers.

NOTES

¹ I wish to thank Fernando Méndez-Leite for generously giving me a copy of his preliminary script to Galdosiana and allowing me to digitally reproduce his DVD of a performance for my research purposes.

² In the 1970's several studies dealt with this issue. For example, Gustavo Correa examined how Orozco could "sobreponerse a las soluciones tradicionales del honor hispánico" through his approach to his wife's infidelity (237), and Joaquín Casalduero called Orozco "el hombre nuevo" who confronted the traditional honor code of Spain's historical and literary past with "el concepto del honor moderno" (101-02). Furthermore, Peter L. Podol focused on the profound effect that Orozco's non-traditional view of honor had on Spanish theater when Galdós's novel was adapted to the stage. According to Podol, by breaking with "conventional honor" and "violating its most sacred law: vengeance for adultery," Orozco represented "the beginning of a new line of heroes of Spanish honor plays," and as a result, "after the appearance of *Realidad*, it became apparent that a straightforward presentation of traditional honor could no longer constitute an acceptable motive for a play in the Spanish theater" (59).

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⁴ I am grateful to Wayne C. Wentzel, Professor Emeritus of Jordan College of the Arts at Butler University, for his help in identifying these keyboard sonatas.

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