

## RELIGIOUS SPACE AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE IN *UN VOLUNTARIO REALISTA*

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In the Second Series of his widely popular *Episodios nacionales* (1875-1879), Benito Pérez Galdós outlines the trajectory of Spanish history from 1814 to 1834, and traces the transformation of public space that allowed for the rise of Spain's nascent middle class to political dominance. The novels track the changes in the use of public and private spaces through the lives of history's anonymous actors, and explore how such modifications affect the way individual citizens engage one another in a public sphere increasingly defined by representation rather than direct intervention. Written at the time of important debates on the implementation of articles of the 1876 Constitution that insured religious freedom, the ten historical novels are particularly attentive to the obstacles the Church posed for the emergence of the political conditions in which a liberal state might flourish. While Galdós's negative opinion of Catholic institutions is unequivocal, and his recrimination of the power and control they exercise over Spanish society is clear, the novels also reveal that he was aware of the essential part the free and private practice of religion had to play in the construction of a liberal public sphere and the formation of citizens.

James Whiston suggests that the theme of a possible reconciliation between the Church and a liberal state is most explicitly introduced in the Second Series in the eighth novel, *Un voluntario realista* (1878) (129). Framing this argument in spatial terms, in the present essay I explore the way in which Galdós uses this *episodio* as a vehicle to explore the consequences of this tenuous relationship for the emergence and sustenance of a liberal bourgeois public sphere in Spain. I examine the ways in which the practices of religious space, and their projection into the public sphere in the context of the Malcontents Revolt of 1827, are used to question the public role of religion in a proto-democratic society. I argue that, by disqualifying sacred places as potential points of engaging social space in the novel, the author attempts to show how traditional modes of intervening in the political public sphere—represented by the extremist behavior of the novel's two main characters—are rendered obsolete by the irreversible political and social changes that occurred in the first three decades of the nineteenth century.

Article 11 of the 1876 Spanish Constitution declared Roman Catholicism to be the official religion of the new state designed by Antonio Cánovas del Castillo and ushered in by the return of the Bourbon Alfonso XII to the throne in Madrid. The first paragraph of the article secures the position of the Catholic Church within the state apparatus and insures its place as the principal liaison between the individual and God, and the government. In the spirit of nineteenth-century liberalism, the mandate does not prohibit the freedom of religion, and the framers of the new constitution were careful to include in the second paragraph a statement protecting individuals from being persecuted for religious views and/or practices. Nevertheless, the exercise of such freedoms is strictly limited to the private domain, as the third paragraph states very clearly: "No se permitirá [. . .] otras ceremonias ni manifestaciones públicas que las de la religion del Estado" (Tierno Galván 137). As Spain's

leaders attempted to steer the nation on a course towards political stability and moderation, the ambiguity and vagueness of Article 11 reflects the need to pay homage to the concept of religious tolerance in the name of progress, while safeguarding the social authority of the Catholic Church as an indisputable part of Spanish national identity and unity. Along with the monarchy and the Cortes, official recognition of the Church gave the new constitution legitimacy in the eyes of traditionalists and made good on Cánovas's promise to continue Spanish history through a system of government true to the exigencies of the past. At the same time, however, the document reflects the impetus to conciliate the institution within the limits of a constitutional and parliamentary state based on nineteenth-century liberal principles (Callahan 274).

If only formally, then, the inclusion of a clause securing religious freedom in the 1876 Constitution makes a gesture towards distancing the relationship between Church and State, and recognizes the relegation of religion to the private sphere as crucial to the creation of a stable public sphere in Spain (Faulks 25). The displacement of authority from the Church and State to a small, but ever expanding realm of private individuals provides one of the most basic building blocks of the bourgeois public sphere. Jürgen Habermas notes that until this shift begins to become a political reality in the late-eighteenth century, "Church and State authorities had the monopoly on interpretation not just from the pulpit but in philosophy, literature and art . . ." (36). A slow but steady change is registered in the appearance of a series of new spaces that lie on the margins of the traditional public sphere that are produced by their capacities to register and emit the opinion of private individuals. In conjunction with the print media, venues like the café and the parlor of the bourgeois family home cultivate notions of citizenship as individuals become aware of the presence of their equals and of the existence of a set of common concerns that binds them together as a public and as a nation. Religion becomes a question of conscience, a private matter that has no place in the public sphere except as a reaffirmation of one's privacy (Habermas 90). In other words, when conscience comes to be equated with the very notion of opinion, as Thomas Hobbes lays out in chapter IV of *The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic*, the right to hold fast to personal religious views, or any other, secures for the individual a platform from which to engage in the affairs of state and culture (42).

Habermas is primarily concerned with the creation and transformation of spaces of sociability as indicators of the consolidation of the bourgeois public sphere. Yet, of equal importance is the contraction of traditional modes of publicity and their corresponding spaces, which disappear or are transformed and emptied of their original political and cultural weight as a consequence of the rise of the middle-class. The public sphere and the spatial practices that shape how individuals interact as private citizens are the result of an increased abstraction of space, and the disappearance of absolute or concrete sites of publicity. Henri LeFebvre defines abstract space as a "mediated mode of spatiality" that is dominated by representations of space and conceptual models rather than real (or physical) practices (Dimendberg 23). The bourgeois public sphere, even in its embryonic form, is based largely on virtual encounters, mediated by various forms of print media that document

and quantify the existence of an anonymous/invisible network of private citizens. Conversely, absolute space is “[a]t once civil and religious”; by preserving and incorporating “bloodlines, family [and] unmediated relationships” it is a pure domain of privilege and ownership that excludes the private realm (Lefebvre 48). Instead of representations of space, absolute space relies on representational spaces (palaces, public squares, cathedrals, etc.) where the publicity and power of traditional elites is affirmed.

The conflicts and revolutionary cycles that characterized Spanish politics throughout the nineteenth century can be understood in spatial terms as a struggle against the increased abstraction of social space that resulted from the advance of liberalism and the transformation of the public sphere from a representational space to a space of representation. By 1876, the progressive dislocation of the Church from its traditional position of authority had created a fundamental rift between Spain’s urban middle class and the rural oligarchy that sought to reaffirm its ascendancy by allying itself with the clergy. For traditionalists, the picturesque Spanish countryside dominated by the ecclesiastical architecture of the past came to be equated with the very essence of the nation. For progressives, this same image represented the single greatest obstacle to the ideals of liberalism and the creation of a modern Spanish state.

Issues of spatial practice and the transformation of social space are recurrent themes throughout the Second Series of *Episodios*; however, as I have elsewhere shown, the seventh and eighth novels offer the most explicit treatment of the tension between absolute and abstract spaces.<sup>1</sup> In *El terror de 1824* (1878), the downfall of the liberal rabble rouser Patricio Sarmiento is due, in part, to his resistance to indirect or mediated forms of political representation; he dies on the gallows nostalgic for the concrete, absolute space of a Rousseauan golden age when citizens met face to face to debate the affairs of society and state. *Un voluntario realista* continues the exploration of this problematic, but from the opposite extreme, by looking at the conservative Apostólico movement and the frustration of its adherents at the laxity of the restored absolutism of Ferdinand VII. In the changed political environment of the 1820s, the reactionary characters of this novel find that the spaces that traditionally afforded them a position of authority in the public sphere are no longer legitimate and are increasingly isolated. The armed uprising of the Royalist Volunteers in 1827, which serves as the historical backdrop for the fictional plot of this novel, makes visible the ideological rift between city and country that would persist and fester throughout the nineteenth century. In light of the political upheavals of the 1870s, this otherwise obscure event takes on the symbolic function of alerting readers to the dangers of retreating into the traditional spaces of the peninsula, represented by the religious architecture that dominates the countryside.

Within the overarching plot that binds the novels of the Second Series into a single historical narrative, José Montesinos refers to *Un voluntario realista* “como una novela aparte” (140). Indeed, as Brian Dendle points out, “[h]istory is reduced to the minimum necessary to provide the backdrop for the intrigue” that drives the fictional plot, centered on the relationship between Sor Teodora de Aransis, a Dominican nun in the Convent of San

Salomó, and the convent's sacristan Pepet Armengol, known to the residents of Solsona as Tilín, in reference to his duty of ringing the convent's decrepit bells (117). The two characters are trapped in various ways by the walls of Solsona and the vestments that confine them to the reduced spaces of the convent. Pepet grows up in San Salomó and is trained to spend his entire life at the service of the sisters. Teodora, several years older than the sacristan, enters the community like many other "señoritas nobles a quienes vocación sincera, desgraciados amores o la imposibilidad de ocupar alta posición arrojaban del mundo" (776). The frustration of both protagonists with life in the convent draws them together and causes them to seek adventures in the outside world and links them to the historical background of the novel. From within San Salomó, Teodora becomes involved in the plotting of the Apostólico movement and the instigation of the Malcontents uprising. Pepet, because of his position and gender, is able to leave the convent to join the Royalist Volunteers and to participate in the rebellion. The relationship between the protagonists becomes more complex when Pepet declares his love for Teodora just as he is preparing to go off to fight. The final third of the novel is given over to the development of this aspect of the plot that reaches its climax when the disenchanted Pepet burns the convent and kidnaps the nun.

The story of Pepet and Teodora is linked to the plot line of the Second Series with the appearances of Jaime Servet and Carlos Navarro. Servet is a suspicious traveling merchant who is eventually taken prisoner by the Royalist Volunteers and accused of being a spy. The true identity of Servet is only revealed to readers with the arrival of Carlos Navarro who immediately recognizes him to be none other than the hero of the Second Series, Salvador Monsalud. The personal and ideological conflict between Navarro and Monsalud is the underlying motor of the fictional plot of the Second Series. The rivalry between the two embodies the conflict between Liberal and reactionary factions that is the leitmotiv of the period studied in these novels. Navarro is obsessed with his estranged half-brother, and in *Un voluntario* he finally sees his chance to do away with his archrival in politics and in love. Monsalud nearly escapes, but he is captured trying to get away from the fire at the convent. He is sentenced to death, accused of the double crime of being a liberal informer and of burning the convent. The final scenes of the novel occur in the remote monastery of Regina Cœli where Monsalud has been taken to be executed and where Teodora, coincidentally, has sought refuge after escaping from Tilín after the axle of his carriage breaks and puts an end to his escapade. The story concludes with Pepet, in a profound state of disillusionment, offering to face the firing squad in place of Monsalud after the nun convinces him that the accused liberal spy is really her long lost brother.

It is notable that *Un voluntario realista* is the only novel in the Second Series that takes place wholly away from the court at Madrid, and seemingly beyond its influence. The main action is limited to the somewhat removed medieval town of Solsona and a cluster of surrounding towns in the northern half of the Catalanian province of Lleida. The location is a function of the historical event that grounds the fictional narrative: the Malcontents or Agraviados Rebellion in Catalonia in August and September of 1827. The uprising against

Ferdinand VII, instigated by the most recalcitrant sectors of Catalan society that opposed all reforms in the name of preserving the principles of the Ancien Régime and the strength of the Catholic Church, was orchestrated by the members of various rural monastic orders and carried out by a renegade faction of the Royalist Volunteers and the peasantry. The name Malcontents reflects the feelings of dissatisfaction and frustration felt by these groups vis-à-vis the restored absolutist government of Ferdinand VII. The rural clergy and the members of the volunteer military forces, who had lent their services to the throne in 1823 to topple the Constitutional regime established in 1820, felt that their services had not been properly recognized or remunerated.<sup>2</sup>

The first chapter of *Un voluntario realista* opens with a topographical description of Solsona and the surrounding countryside, establishing for readers the essential characteristics of the space:

La ciudad de Solsona, que ya no es obispado, ni plaza fuerte, ni cosa que tal valga, [...] era, allá por los turbulentos principios de nuestro siglo, una de las más feas y tristes poblaciones de la cristiandad a pesar de sus formidables muros, de sus nueve esbeltos torreones, de su castillo romano, indicador de gloriosísimo abolengo, y a pesar también de su catedral [...] y la fábrica de cuatro conventos [...] (775)

Solsona is presented to the reader as a negative space as the narrator carefully underscores what the city is not or is no longer. Its past is alluded to by its forgotten coat of arms and through references to the paradox of its ruinous monumentality. The immediate effect of this first encounter is to distance the place from the urban reader by locating the city in the past and by putting in doubt its position or relevance to the present. As the introduction continues, the narrator adopts an ironic tone when he turns his attention to the description of the town's economy:

[Los] setelsinos ocupaban un lugar muy excelso en el mundo industrial con sus ocho fábricas de navajas, tres de candiles y otras de menor importancia. También se dedicaban a criar mulas lechales. ...; cultivaban con esmero las delicadas frutas catalanas, y eran maestros en cebar aves domésticas, así como en cazar [...] (775)

Like its crumbling built environment, the nature of these enterprises casts Solsona as a space that is somehow out of step with liberal ideals of progress. The twentieth-century Catalan essayist Josep Pla reiterates this vision of the place when he writes: “la característica de Solsona es una tranquil·litat i una pau encantadores, deslligades de l'època que vivim” (par. 1). The anachronistic quality of the spaces in and around this small city underscores that the spatial division that separates Solsona from the court in Madrid is not only physical but also temporal. It is a place imprisoned by the past. There is, though, an explanation, as the narrator concludes: “No podían ser tales industrias de las menos lucrativas en tierra tan poblada de canónigos, racioneros y regulares” (775). Industry here is not at the service of an emerging civil society, or the Nation, but rather is still dominated by the ministers of the Church, their interests and their caprices.<sup>3</sup>

Attention is finally fixed on a single element of Solsona's cityscape: the Convent of San Salomó, "en un extremo de la ciudad y en el punto más desierto de ella, por donde partía el camino de Guardiola y Peracamps" (776). That the convent is located at an extreme end of the city, isolated on the edge of town, where two roads begin that only take the traveler deeper into the region that eventually ends in the Pyrenees, is a rich symbolic detail that marks the space within the past and present social and political configurations that are created in this *episodio*. The extreme location of the convent within the city coincides with the extremist political activities that define its practice as a religious space. Like the city of Solsona, the convent's extremity of location and politics causes it to be cast as a restrictive space that controls both the physical and spiritual movements of its inhabitants. Describing the layout of the building and its situation in the city, the narrator notes that "[s]u estructura no permitía a los curiosos ojos monjiles ver la calle. . ." (776). The architectural qualities of San Salomó limit the sisters' access to the public space of the street by denying them the ability to directly engage it with their own eyes. The convent is by definition a space closed off from the public domain and isolated from worldly concerns, designed to facilitate the contemplation of the self in its finitude and of a transcendent infinity. For Dominicans the enclosure of women was not merely an afterthought; rather, it played a key part in the Order's proclaimed pursuit of the *vita apostolica* by providing it with a contemplative base. As Patricia Ranft observes, "[t]he enclosed nun was a partner in the apostolate and the lifeblood of the whole order. Without the presence of the contemplative houses of women, the active houses of men could not thrive" (70-71). The cloister denies the nuns a public existence: upon entry into this space they are stripped of their privacy—hopes, needs, and individual identity—as the contemplative life of the space requires absolute allegiance to the collective order in pursuit of perfection before the eyes of God. By its very nature, the convent's structure makes the direct practice of citizenship for women not only irrelevant but also impossible.

As the narrator further delineates the layout of San Salomó and turns his attention to the nuns who make up the Dominican community and the details of their everyday lives, the space is revealed to be one wrought with contradictions. Whiston notes how the theatricality of the ceremony in which Teodora is received into the convent announces the incongruity between the reality and the appearances of piety and reclusion: "The 'palabras huecas' of the sermon about living a life of humility and penance are not relevant to the convent of San Salomó where, according to the local inhabitants, all is 'bienestar y abundancia'" (134). Indeed, the small luxuries enjoyed by the nuns in private contrast with the solemn vows the novitiates take in public, but the very fact that the townspeople are aware of what goes on inside the cloistered space is even more revealing. In the following chapter, the narrator makes a most telling observation when he notes that despite the apparent isolation of the community, "No se sabe [...] cómo penetran en los conventos las noticias, las novedades y aun las hablillas y picardihuelas del mundo; pero es lo cierto que penetran, sí, en aquellos santuarios de recogimiento y ascetismo [...]" (781). The nuns live "fuera del siglo"—outside of and away from the secular world—yet they are still very much connected to and interested

in what goes on there. The convent space is profaned by the penetration of information that is, moreover, never first-hand. Individual opinion is formed on the basis of hearsay, as the members of the community must depend on others for the latest news and gossip.

From the exterior view of the convent on the edge of the city, the reader is taken to an extremity of the building known as the “Isla” where Teodora lives cut-off from the rest of the community. “A las tres celdas que habían quedado solas al extremo del ala, dieron las Madres un nombre muy propio: las llamaban la *Isla*, y en ellas moraban dos religiosas” (816). This part of the convent bears the most visible vestiges of the destruction wrought by Napoleon’s troops in the region, around 1810, as the narrator notes. The space is literally the result of the profanation of the space by the invading French army. The extent to which this space is not already profaned is captured by the narrator in his ironic description of the Teodora’s cell when he notes that “Perfecto orden reinaba allí, así como la pulcritud más refinada, no siendo la austeridad tan excesiva que convidase al ascetismo, ni tanta la pobreza que inspirase un vivo anhelo de ser santo” (816). The very physical characteristics of the nun’s cell destabilize the practices of asceticism and aspirations to sainthood that are ideally promoted by this space. The accoutrements of Teodora’s cell, which include various articles of silver, a tapestry, several wood carvings, three dozen books and “una alacena de talla que habría honrado a cualquier museo” are a contradiction of the very vows to which the members are supposed to adhere and that, through their reiteration, produce and define the convent as a space (816). The cells of San Salomó serve not simply as a refuge for the soul but also as a safe-haven from the rest of the religious community. In their cells these nuns are able to maintain their true identities and to enjoy, although in a limited manner, the worldly luxuries that they supposedly rejected upon taking their vows.

Through the early exchanges between the novel’s two main protagonists, the reader learns how the nuns intervene in the public sphere from within the walls of San Salomó to participate in the machinations behind the Apostolic movement and the planning of the Malcontents uprising. This happens first through the introduction of the friendship between Tilín and Sor Teodora, and later in the secret comings and goings of doña Josefina Comerford.<sup>4</sup> This connectedness to the outside world introduces an element of ambiguity that puts into question the position of the convent and its community vis-à-vis the affairs of state and the possibilities this space offers for the practice of citizenship.

The ambiguous and contradictory nature of the space of the convent of San Salomó materializes in the figure of Tilín. As a product of this space, he is crucial to understanding how the convent operates in spite of his ability to move beyond its walls and to participate in the armed conflict that eventually erupts in the region around Solsona. Over the course of the tale, Tilín is shown to be the monstrous result of the involvement of Teodora and the other nuns with the Apostolic cause. When the eighteen-year-old sacristan reveals his frustrated desires to pursue a career in the military, instead of dissuading him from his taste for violence, Teodora eggs him on by providing him with a cause for which he may fight. From this moment forward, the young man becomes completely distracted from the everyday duties of his retired existence within the convent walls, and awaits the chance to

abandon this space and satiate his “afán de revolver y alborotar en el mundo” with “el objeto de hacer justicia y castigar a los bribones, y poner sobre todas las cosas la religión, y sobre todos los hombres al mismo Dios” (783). What is more, time and again he is troubled by his conscience and the idea that his aspirations in some way profane the absolute space of the convent, providing him with more reason to leave it. However, this also has its reversal, as Tilín also remarks that his vestments profane his militaristic thirst for glory and recognition on the battlefield as well as vengeance on those who question the traditional pillars of Spanish society.

As the novel’s plot unfolds, Pepet’s internal conflict makes visible his mental instability and his ultimate lack of conscience. Teodora’s conscience, on the other hand, increasingly undermines her ability to hold onto her extremist position and reveals the contradiction of her life in the convent as well as the very ambiguities that mark this space. For her, San Salomó is a space that is vastly different from one of absolute religious contemplation, removed from the mundane preoccupations of everyday life. Her interventions in the public sphere disrupt these traditional limits by redrawing the lines that define the private domain of the convent. The reader soon learns that Teodora entered the convent, not to escape the world, but rather to engage it more fully. The walls of the convent that limit her vision are symbolic of the blinding effects of her ultra-conservative, reactionary ideology and her unwavering support of the Apostólico movement. Yet, from Teodora’s perspective, the strength of her convictions makes it unnecessary for her to see. For her the world is black and white, divided into good and evil, legitimate and illegitimate. When Pepet laments that the fact that his heroic military aspirations will remain unrealized because he was born during a time of peace, Teodora is quick to respond with her alternative vision of the grave political situation facing the nation: “Yo no veo sino guerra—dijo después de una pausa, durante la cual miraba delante de sí como se mira a un espejo” (784). The nun has no need to see in order to interpret the events that have put into question the historical integrity of the Spanish monarchy.

The concrete links between San Salomó and the public sphere are presented when Josefina Comerford appears in the novel for the first time. The narration begins with a description of the convent’s public space: an interior room connected to the locutorio (visiting room) where Comerford meets with Sor Teodora, the Mother Superior and Mother Montserrat to discuss preparations for the revolt. The whiteness of the unadorned walls of this space is eerily rendered red by the vermilion curtains that cover the windows of the room. The very grave and secretive nature of the colloquium is reflected in this red half-light that blankets the room and gives the nuns and their visitor a diabolical appearance. The narrator comments that Comerford looks like “una llamarada en figura humana” and her interlocutors appear to be “sanguinosos espectros” (786). Through the description of their conversation the reader discovers how the space of the convent is profaned by the activities of certain members of the community who are motivated by their fanaticism. Comerford’s vehemence and verbosity is ultimately compared to “la atropellada expresión de los clubs” (788). With this allusion, the spatial practice of the convent is likened to that of the clubs and

cafes of Madrid and Barcelona, placing the nuns and their extremist views on the same level as the very group they seek to defeat.

The profanation of the religious space by the news and gossip that penetrates and circulates through the cloister around which the nun's cells are grouped merely compounds the contradictory nature of the community's connections with the outside world. As the historical and fictional plots of the novel are further entangled, Teodora loses interest in the revolt, but the effects of her illicit involvement in the uprising, as Whiston notes, "cannot be so easily laid aside" (136). The violence unleashed by her crisis of conscience materializes inside the sacred space of San Salomó when Pepet returns to Solsona after he is relieved of his command of a company of Royalist Volunteers for allowing a suspected liberal spy to escape. Defying orders to await the arrival of troops from Aragon and Navarra and turn over control of the city to them, the dejected soldier attempts to restore his reputation by taking matters into his own hands. Tilín's actions, motivated by fanaticism, produce a situation of anarchy and chaos: he releases the political prisoners being held in the city jail and then abandons his post and disappears from the streets and the public eye. Late one evening, he enters the convent and makes his way to Teodora's cell, bursting in just as she finishes her nightly prayers and is about to remove her habit:

El sacristán-guerrero mantúvose en la puerta con una especie de timidez feroz, como si ni aun su colosal osadía tuviese fuerza suficiente para traspasar aquel umbral sagrado. Había atropellado la ley de Dios, abolido su propia conciencia, y, no obstante, se detenía tembloroso ante el pudor y la hermosura, cuyo imponente prestigio llenaba de confusión al miserable. (817)

The moment of hesitation at the door gives the impression that the ex-sacristan is aware of the gravity of his actions. Yet, the reader soon learns that it is not the fear of God or his own conscience that detain him, but rather the unattainable physical beauty of Teodora. He no longer respects the space of the convent or its religious order and the vows that uphold it. His frustration however is the result of his own discovery that the sanctity of this space is merely an impediment to the realization of his desires. What drove Pepet earlier in the novel to seek adventure and make a name for himself in history is shown to be merely mirages of the past, denied to him by virtue of simply having been born too late.

Unable to possess the body of Teodora, Tilín resorts to kissing the floor and then states his desire to kiss the bricks of the walls of her cell: "¡Besar estos ladrillos! Es lo único que puedo alcanzar. Con poco se contenta el malvado aborrecido" (817). He disdains the physical as well as spiritual boundaries that restrict the space of the convent and society, making a union between the two impossible, "¡Que el mundo sea así y no de otro modo! ¡Que existan estas paredes, y estos votos, y estas rejas horribles!" (818). Taking on the characteristic ways of the self-destructive romantic anti-hero, Tilín commits the ultimate act of sacrilege by violating the nun's sacred space; however, his actions are only the materialization of the violence that resulted from Teodora's use of the religious space as a platform to enter the public domain she supposedly rejected upon taking her religious vows.

The excess produced by Teodora's actions is further materialized by a second intruder: Salvador Monsalud. Monsalud happens to be among the liberal spies freed by Tilín upon his return to Solsona, and he seeks refuge in San Salomó when his archrival Carlos Navarro recognizes him as he attempts to flee to the French border. Unlike Tilín, who no longer respects the sanctity of San Salomó and its most private space, Monsalud is overwhelmed by its sanctity even as he proceeds to seek refuge there: "La extraordinaria santidad de aquel lugar hacía, ¡cosa horrible!, casi tan inhospitalario como el Infierno" (831). Spying Teodora reading silently in her cell, he is taken aback by her beauty. Instead of bursting in, the second intruder pushes the cell door open very softly. When he closes it behind him she looks up from her reading, only to be grabbed and held at knifepoint.

The nun's initial attitude toward her second assailant is also different: her fear of Tilín results from her knowledge of his delicate mental state. At no time during their encounter does she lose her composure or the confidence that she can dissuade him and even continue to dominate him. On the second occasion, by contrast, "Su sorpresa y terror fueron mayores al ver que no era *Tilín* el que entraba: era un desconocido" (832). She is disconcerted and startled to find herself face to face with an unknown man in her cell. Her terror only begins to subside as she gains further knowledge about the mysterious figure is, the pretenses under which he has come to Solsona, and why he has entered the convent. Monsalud is decisive in his actions and explains very clearly his situation to Teodora in hopes of appealing to her sense of compassion as a nun and servant of God,

Mi brusca entrada en esta casa de paz y santidad, la audacia con que he profanado esta celda honesta y venerable, presentaránme a los ojos de usted como un ser aborrecible, espantoso [. . .] Pero [. . .]yo intentaré convencer a usted de que no soy un criminal, sino un desgraciado, el más desgraciado de los hombres. (832)

Despite the connections between the regional Church and the leaders of the Malcontents movement, Monsalud seems not to doubt that there is a higher cause, a greater degree of morality that marks the space of the convent and that will move the nun to aid him. Through his pleas he repeatedly creates a distance between Teodora's cell and the political machinations of the outside world, placing her in a transcendent position. Monsalud maintains his respect for the cell and attempts to recast his entry into this space as playing into the most essential part of its most basic mission: to carry out God's work on earth. He describes his arrival at the convent as if it were a miracle: "A punto de caer en manos de mis verdugos, un milagro me ha salvado; la mano de Dios me ha levantado y me ha puesto aquí" (832). She responds to his pleas in anger, "No puedo tolerar esta profanación horrible. Salga usted y ocúltese...; no diré nada" (833). Following these revelations, the dichotomy between inside/outside the religious space and the holy causes for which it stands seems to begin to shift. Monsalud identifies himself with the devil, disconcerting to Teodora, who for much of the novel seems certain that she knows where good and evil reside: "De modo que tiene usted de rodillas a sus pies al mismo Demonio" (833). Disguised as Servet, Monsalud's

status as an intruder is doubled by the fact that his penetration of the sacred space of the convent is only an extension of his intrusion into the larger space of the province and indeed the Nation. The liberal hero has re-entered Spain after a period of exile in England and France. He is on a reconnaissance mission to sound out the political situation in Spain and the potential support the liberal cause might be able to muster. One of the essential points of conflict between moderate and extremist factions in Spain was the question of the exiles. In a manner very similar to Teodora's reaction to Monsalud's surprise entry, the Apostolics justified the continued exile of Spanish liberals by employing a quasi-religious discourse that cast them as individuals whose very presence inside the national borders profanes the sanctity of the Nation.

The novel reaches a climax when San Salomó is destroyed by fire and the nuns are forced into the street. As if by spontaneous combustion, the flames that engulf the convent are the product of the unholy relationship between Teodora and Tilín that mediates the contacts that both maintain with the outside world. In the chaos and confusion that overtakes the religious space, the disaffected soldier kidnaps Teodora from her cell and flees to the countryside. Tilín plans to take her deeper into the province, further away from the world, with the hope that there he will be able to possess her completely. The journey is cut short by a broken axle and a re-encounter with Monsalud in the remote monastery of Regina Cœli.

At the end of the novel Sor Teodora finds herself forced to confront these contradictions through an exploration of her conscience that results from a face-to-face meeting with the worldly consequences of her spatial practice. This happens in chapter 31, when Teodora, removed from the walls of San Salomó, engages in a hallucinatory dialogue with her conscience, which appears to her in the form of an eerie specter on the wall of her room at the nearly-abandoned monastery. The moral dilemma of asking Pepet to take Monsalud's place before the firing squad causes her to reflect on her monastic life and to question her involvement in the political uprising of the Malcontents. At the heart of this interchange are the effects of her contacts with Pepet and Monsalud on her practice of space in the convent. Her conscience accuses her of being in love with Monsalud and for this reason, and no other, she decided to help him when he sought refuge from his persecutors in San Salomó and now when he is to be executed. The specter does this by revealing how the gravity of her actions is a function of the spaces in which they materialize as practice:

Ninguna mujer que vive en el siglo, en comercio con los demás seres humanos, podría concebir esa inclinación inesperada y vehemente hacia un desconocido, que se entra como los ladrones en su habitación y con el cual apenas habla media hora [. . .] Esto que es absurdo en el mundo libre y activo, deja de serlo en la solitaria estrechura y en el aislamiento holgazán de una celda [. . .] Ese absurdo del siglo es natural y humano en ti, monja indigna, que has vivido doce años en ese sepulcro, ocupándote en profanidades y alimentando sin cesar en tu imaginación las ansias de tu pecho, honradas y nobles fuera de aquella casa [. . .] En el siglo hubieras sido una doncella honesta, esposa amante, una madre ejemplar; enclaustrada sin vocación, has podido perder tu alma en un instante. (869-70)

The acceptability of her actions depends on the spatial and temporal context that frames them. The use of the term “siglo” in this dialogue is very powerful as it connotes both the temporal and spatial separateness of the convent. When used in relation to monastic orders, as it is here, the word simply refers to the world outside of the convent or the monastery. However, the more common usage of the word, meaning “century,” is also relevant to this discussion as it introduces a temporal aspect to the practices of this space.

As becomes readily evident from this lengthy passage, the critique of Teodora’s spatial practice is framed within the conventions of what is expected of women in the past vs. the present, and inside and outside of the convent. Gender is used, effectively, to close the convent off as a place from which women may intervene in the public sphere. On one level this is because the convent prevents them from realizing their “natural” roles as spouses and mothers. More importantly, however, it is most destructive in the way that it isolates the individual from the “comercio con los demás seres humanos” that is a vital part of the practice of citizenship in a liberal society. Despite her contacts with Josefina Comerford, Teodora and the other nuns are prevented from truly and directly engaging in the discussions of political affairs. Alone in her cell, Teodora’s imagination is her only connection to the outside world, and as she discovers towards the end of the novel, her reliance on this platform as a place from which to engage with the outside world is essentially flawed and ultimately destructive. In doing so, Galdós presents his 1870s readers not simply with a negative vision of religious fanaticism, but more pertinently, with the inviability of modes of citizenship that might emanate from the practices of religious space.

While it may be true that Galdós selected the rather obscure Malcontents rebellion as a vehicle to develop a more deeply fictional plot, as Dendle argues, it seems also true that against the backdrop of 1870s politics, the event’s recreation would have resonated with readers poised to witness the political transition brought about by the return of the Bourbon monarchy and the promulgation of a new constitution. The 1827 revolt in Catalonia, while not directly connected to the Carlist movement, does prefigure, both ideologically and geographically, the civil conflict that would erupt in the 1830s. It should be recalled that two events threatened the stability of Cánovas’s regime between 1875 and 1879: the third Carlist War and the first Cuban uprising for independence. Both of these events are intimately tied to the individual’s perception of the spatial limits of the imagined community to which they were to belong. More importantly, however, the event provides a way for Galdós to approach the very serious problems that religion posed for the practice of citizenship in a Catholic country like Spain. In the 1870s, the issue of religion would become increasingly divisive, as Progressive leaders sought to put into practice the religious freedoms guaranteed by the 1876 constitution. *Un voluntario realista* exposes the limited scope of the spatial perceptions that informed the views of the most reactionary religious factions in Spanish society in order to show how they are contrary to the foundational mission of the Restoration: the continuation of Spanish History. With this *episodio* Galdós opens a discussion of the public and private ramifications of the practice of religion that would be further developed, as Whiston suggests, in *La familia de León Roch* (129). Progress and the expansion of the

public sphere and citizenship are stifled by practices reproduced in the spaces of convents and churches which have as their unstated goal the placement of the institutional interests of the Church before the private interests of individuals. By contrast, the destruction of the convent in the novel gives force to the argument that religion should be a private matter, only to be included in the public sphere in as much as it provides further evidence of the individual's claim to privacy.

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**NOTES**

1 See George.

2 For its part, the Catholic Church in the interior of the provinces of Lleida and Girona had seen its power seriously undermined by the liberal government's program of disentailment of church lands. Their appeals to recover their rural landholdings went unanswered by the restored monarch, causing them to question the veracity of the absolutist convictions of the crown (Artola 708-709).

3 Solsona and the surrounding region, known as El Solsonès, are moreover isolated on the extremity of what by 1878 had become the center of Spain's limited industrial revolution, Barcelona, and the core of Catalonian nationalism. The details, in spite of the narrator's ironic tone, present the region as a natural, absolute space, untouched by progress. The region described in the novel is the same one that had come to be idealized by the Catalan nationalists of the late 1870s. The medieval cities of Catalonia's rural interior, the Monastery of Montserrat, Manresa, and Girona, untouched by industrialization, and depopulated by migrations to Barcelona, provided the essential symbols of Catalan identity utilized by both liberals and conservatives (Riquer i Permanyer 226).

4 Federico Sainz Robles identifies Josefina Comerford as a "gran intrigante catalana," but supplies no further reference to whether or not she is a composite or was a real person (740). Pio Baroja, in an article entitled "Fantasmas de Tarifa," writes of a Josefina de Comerford who died in the late 1820s/early 1830s in Tarifa, describing her as an "amazona realista" (cited in García León 2002).

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