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Review of: Galdos Beyond Realism: Reading and the Creation of Magical Worlds

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“genetic approach” to the novel. The revered philologist and literary historian traces the narrative from the ballad and chivalric traditions to the anonymous “entremés de los romances” (c. 1591) and the Avellaneda sequel. Among other topics, he stresses the mixture of the comic and the serious in the heroic modes of the Renaissance, as in Boiardo and Ariosto, and the connection between this blending and the synthesis of madness and the *Romancero* in the *Quixote*. Menéndez Pidal makes a clear (and well-known) distinction between chivalric romance and the “eternal ideals” of chivalry as a social institution.

In “Canons Afire: Libraries, Books, and Bodies in Don Quixote’s Spain,” Georgina Dopico Black studies the phenomenon of libraries, in addition to the association of book and body, in the early modern period. The scrutiny of Alonso Quijano’s library is a key factor, but one of many, in this exciting and ingenious essay. Dopico Black mentions that, in her inquiry, she engages Michel Foucault, “but I do so by way of Borges, Roger Chartier, Walter Benjamin, Tony Bennett, Fernando Bouza Álvarez, Américo Castro, Lucien Febvre, Anthony Grafton, Roberto González Echevarría, and Irving Leonard, to name but a few” (96). E. C. Riley, who in learned fashion conjectures about the contents of Cervantes’s library in *Cervantes’s Theory of the Novel* (1962), is represented here by “Literature and Life in *Don Quixote*” from that book. Riley considers the junctures of art and life, and the ways in which imaginative literature affects the behavior not only of the protagonist but of many characters within the novel. He analyzes Cervantes’s achievement in terms of a historical progression that juxtaposes the real and the fictional. Bruce W. Wardropper’s “Don Quixote: Story or History?” (1965) provides a variation on the themes of life, art, and the blurring of boundaries. Anticipating poststructuralism—by far fewer years than Cervantes—Wardropper examines not only the dual trajectory of the Spanish *historia* but also the writer’s recognition of the existence of deliberately false histories and his implicit demystification, if not deconstruction, of the practice of historiography. In his analysis, Wardropper touches upon the thorny issue of verisimilitude and its role in Cervantes’s conception of narrative.

González Echevarría calls Leo Spitzer’s “Linguistic Perspectivism in the *Don Quijote*” (1948) “the most insightful essay ever written on Cervantes[s] masterpiece” (20). According to Spitzer, the language of the text becomes an analogue of its comprehensive plan, which the scholar outlines with great subtlety and precision. He sees Cervantes as operating within a rhetoric of relativism amid the authoritarian and absolutist policies of the Counter Reformation in Spain. Nonetheless, he excludes the spiritual realm from this practice: “Qua moralist, Cervantes is not at all ‘perspectivist’” (197). González Echevarría’s essay, “*Don Quixote*: Cross-Eyes and Vision,” begins precisely with questions of perspective. The critic contends that perspectivism originates in individual subjects, who must be examined—as in the case of the crossed-eyed Ginés de Pasamonte—through their personal transformations and fragmented, or defective, vision. This leads to the contention that Maese Pedro’s puppet show “is a sort of laboratory for mimesis” (232). More than the exploration of a motif, the essay constitutes a game plan for a survey of the novel as a whole, a novel in which, paradoxically, “Don Quixote’s madness is inscribed in his good eyesight” (236). It is interesting that González Echevarría builds his essay around Ginés de Pasamonte, the title character of George Haley’s “The Narrator in *Don Quijote*: Maese Pedro’s Puppet Show” (1965), which demonstrates that the *retablo* is a synecdoche, of sorts, of Cervantes’s hybrid narrative, as well as a purveyor of meaningful (and pre-Brechtian) distances.

This is a valuable and handy volume. It would be hard to fault the choices, which favor the tried-and-true over the state-of-the-art, seven to two. One could contend, however, that the essays from the twentieth century remain firmly in both categories, and that each is more than worthy of our attention.

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McGovern, Timothy. *Galdós Beyond Realism: Reading and the Creation of Magical Worlds*. Newark, DE: Juan de la Cuesta, 2004. Pp. 227. ISBN 1-58871-063-7.

Timothy McGovern's latest offering, *Galdós Beyond Realism: Reading and the Creation of Magical Worlds*, may prove surprising, if not a bit unsettling, for the die-hard, skeptical fan of Spanish High Realism who can not imagine the words "Galdós" and "magical worlds" in the same sentence. Nonetheless, McGovern presents a fascinating examination of what he terms Don Benito's "magical fictions" (7). He jostles us out of our comfort zone, examining "post-realist, non-realist, or magical" Galdosian works that push the limits of traditional realism through the employment of metafictional and magical frames, supernatural interventions, and a very conscious lack of verisimilitude (29). Understandably, McGovern examines Galdós's lesser-studied later production, *La incógnita* (1888–89); the dialogue novels, *Realidad* (1889) and *Cassandra* (1905); the final series of the *Episodios nacionales*, including *Amadeo I* (1910), *La primera república* (1911), *De Cartago a Sagunto* (1911), and *Cánovas* (1912); and his final two novels, which break entirely with rationalist writing, *El caballero encantado: Cuento real... inverosímil* (1909) and *La razón de la sinrazón: Fábula teatral absolutamente inverosímil* (1915). Interestingly, as well, McGovern finds such experimentation throughout Galdós's production, as early as his first novel, *La sombra* (1870); in the framed narrative of *El amigo Manso* (1882); and in *Misericordia* (1897).

McGovern accomplishes many things with this well-researched study. He argues for "the existence of multiple possibilities for interpretation for Galdosian texts" (64). Thus, he offers a re-reading of some of Galdós's most well-known works—such as *El amigo Manso*—whose magical or metafictional moments, McGovern contends, historically have been explained away, glossed over, or completely ignored. Additionally, he calls for further examination and re-evaluation of Galdós's lesser-known later works, historically viewed as minor, even flawed, offerings from a great author in decline, precisely because they stray from the tenets and requirements of realism.

The most important contribution of McGovern's study, perhaps, is his call for a reassessment of Galdós as Realist author and of his place within the canon and within the international literary world. McGovern wishes to update Don Benito as it were, "to study Galdós's production as it suggests modern readings" (219), to envision the author as more than the most important Spanish Realist. McGovern argues that Galdós became bored with the ontological limitations imposed by Realism, that many of his works are experiments in undermining Realism, and that "many of his techniques predict postmodern experimentation" (141). Indeed, in a statement that may seem radical, the author asserts that "Instead of attempting to establish Galdós as a literary master with *Fortunata y Jacinta*, we might well attempt to do so with *El amigo Manso*" (54). This author of *Dickens in Galdós* (2000) here declares that Galdosian realism pales in comparison to dickensian realism. Perhaps, then, McGovern suggests, we are mistaken in finding Galdós's worth only in terms of High Realism; maybe his legacy is better served if he is understood as an experimenter, a precursor of the Modernists and Postmodernists. McGovern advises that "it is important to read the 'Galdós moderno' or Galdós as an innovator to discover the manner in which he far surpassed many of his more famous contemporaries" (53–54). Maybe his later works are not flawed; perhaps Galdós was just ahead of his time.

As if to prove his point, McGovern offers up a veritable pantheon of more famous nineteenth- and twentieth-century international artistic and literary luminaries; he invites his reader to envision Galdós as the creative forebear of a host of unexpected figures who excel at anti-rational, anti-realist, experimental production. Thus, Don Benito's name is discussed in connection to not only Charles Dickens and Henry James, but also the likes of Luigi Pirandello, Jules Verne, Lewis Carroll, Miguel de Unamuno, Virginia Woolf, Federico Fellini, L. Frank Baum, Julio Cortázar, Ramón Sender, Carlos Fuentes, and Kurt Vonnegut.

By asking his reader to imagine the words "Galdós" and "magical worlds" in the same sentence, Timothy McGovern requires that we expand our view of the author and his works. My one criticism of this study is that in his short conclusion suggesting topics for further study, the author seems to take his experimental zeal a bit too far, looking for possible magic in *La desheredada*, *Torquemada*, *La de Bringas*, and *El doctor Centeno*. McGovern's conclusions may surely be unsettling for some as they carry with them significant implications for the canon and for

how we understand, study, and teach literature. Nonetheless, he well succeeds in his argument that Galdós's works deserve a second look through a modern eye and that Galdós is an important if overlooked part of a larger literary world who is worthy of being better-known beyond Spanish borders.

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McGrath, Leticia. *Joaquín Dicenta: Spain's Forgotten Dramatist*. Newark, DE: Juan de la Cuesta, 2004. Pp. 249. ISBN 1-58871-062-9.

The literary canon has developed into a freely-moving, unpredictable body of texts. New works that are popular upon release often fall into oblivion, and there are few certainties about which will survive the scrutiny of time. Looking into the past, we can be sure that texts that were notable in their day do not figure in prominent histories that we presume to be authoritative.

Leticia McGrath provides an excellent example of an author important in his day whom we do not frequently read or study in our present. Her title, *Joaquín Dicenta: Spain's Forgotten Dramatist* clearly explains the fate of a playwright who was among the most prominent theatrical figures in Spain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Few scholarly treatments of Dicenta's work have been published since his death in 1917—only six journal or book articles (two of which date to the 1940s and 50s) appear in the MLA bibliography prior to McGrath's doctoral dissertation. Therefore, this exhaustive study of the life and work of Joaquín Dicenta provides an entirely new focus on Spanish drama for today's scholars of the nineteenth century.

McGrath places Dicenta directly in the tradition of European realism and naturalism that influenced Spanish literature of the time. The initial chapter reviews the principal creators of these movements across the continent. Brief and concise discussions on Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg explain their theories and practices and focus on the first appearances of their texts and the performances of their plays in Spain. She calls Dicenta the "Spanish Ibsen," speculating on how the Scandinavian dramatist inspired the Spaniard to write plays that emphasized social themes. McGrath also aligns Dicenta with leading (and better-known) playwrights in his country, charting the progression from the neo-romanticism of José Echegaray to the realism and naturalism of Benito Pérez Galdós, Leopoldo Cano y Masas, and Enrique Gaspar. The discussion refers to key plays by these authors and to the social issues that concerned them, but it also shows that Dicenta was unique in his portrayal of the poorest of social classes on the stage.

Social justice becomes the most important theme in Dicenta's work, and McGrath attempts to establish a link between his personal background and professional interest with a biographical chapter on her subject. She lays out Dicenta's childhood, wading through conflicting documentation about his early years. This section tends to draw close associations between experiences in Dicenta's life and his literary work. Statements such as, "As a result of the loss of a father figure at such an early age, Dicenta grew very close to his mother and developed a sensitivity that is evident in his plays" (24), and accounts of his childhood mischievousness which serve as a "testimony of Dicenta's early tendency towards rebellion that characterized his entire life and is evident in his plays" may err on the side of overly broad speculation (26). Nonetheless, McGrath backs up her assertions about Dicenta's care for the lower classes with numerous citations of his newspaper articles and other publications of social criticism. Her dramatic account of the writer's bohemian life and struggle to break into the literary world in Madrid provide an entertaining glimpse into customs and practices in the last half of the 1800s. Additional stories about the financial support that his widowed mother provided for him, his failed marriage to an aristocratic wife, and a subsequent relationship outside of marriage remind us that the experience of an author can indeed affect his approach to writing.

McGrath continues with a methodical cataloguing of each of the thirty plays that Dicenta produced. The systematic presentation of plots, techniques, and ideologies charts the development of his varied array of plays, which include drama, legends, and even *zarzuela*. Dicenta's