

**A TRANSLATION OF *ANGEL GUERRA*  
BY BENITO PÉREZ GALDÓS**

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## Introduction

The substantial oeuvre of the Spanish novelist, Benito Pérez Galdós, is still little known outside the Hispanic world, an ignorance attributable more to the decline in Spain's political and cultural prestige than to any shortcomings on the part of the author himself. Those who are acquainted with his work often refer to him as the Spanish Dickens or Balzac, a comparison which, however flattering it may appear, is rather misleading. Galdós belongs to a later generation than they, and his works are consequently rather different. Moreover, neither Dickens nor Balzac is quite as towering a figure within their own cultures as Galdós is in his, for it would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that without Galdós there would hardly be a realist novel worthy of the name in nineteenth-century Spain.

Though his work is very much identified with Madrid, Galdós was born not there, but in Las Palmas, in the Canary Islands, in 1843. He did not come to the capital that he was to make so much his own until 1862, when he arrived to study law at Madrid University. He was far from a model student, however, and soon forsook the lecture halls for the streets of Madrid (which he explored insatiably) and his legal studies for journalism. Much of his early fictional work is heavily colored by the political and ideological turmoil of his early years in Madrid. Indeed, his first full-length works were historical novels, written with the serious purpose of seeking the roots of present conflicts in Spain's past--an interest which soon developed into several series of historical novels (the *Episodios Nacionales*, numbering some 47 novels in all) which followed the history of nineteenth-century Spain from the battle of Trafalgar to Galdós' own day and which he continued to write off and on for the rest of his life. He made his first major impact

as a novelist, however, with a trilogy of rather combative and ideologically flavored novels (*Doña Perfecta*, *Gloria*, and *The Family of León Roch*) written during the 1870's. These novels earned for their author a somewhat unjustified reputation as a rabid, anti-clerical liberal and freethinker, a reputation which has tended to cling to him ever since. Certainly anyone approaching *Angel Guerra* with the expectation of encountering an anti-clerical stance would be immediately disappointed, for the priests who walk its pages in such profusion--Mancebo, Casado, Don Tomé, Virones, Palomeque--are all moral and benevolent individuals. Indeed, of all the Galdosian novels, only one--*El Audaz* (1871)--presents the reader with a truly despicable priest, for even the relative culpability of Don Inocencio in *Doña Perfecta* is arguable, and was further minimized by Galdós himself when he later converted the novel to a stage drama.

After the publication of the ideological trilogy, Galdós' life settled into what was, for the Spain of that time, a rather unusual pattern, that of the fully professional novelist. Virtually the only interruptions to his steady progression of novels (at the rate of one or two a year) were his foreign travels and his seemingly rather numerous love affairs (he never married), details of which are only now beginning to filter through the veil of discretion which tends to characterize the Spanish biographical tradition. Until, that is, the turn of the century, when a process of radicalization brought on by his increasing sense of the inadequacy of the existing political and social system--and doubtless fostered by the national climate of critical self-examination which followed Spain's disastrous war with the United States in 1839--led him to take an active role in politics. He was twice elected to the Spanish parliament and sought to use his undoubted influence and prestige to procure the union of the republican and socialist parties. His political activism, however, was cut short by the blindness which overtook him after an unsuccessful cataract operation in 1912. He died, very much the Grand Old Man of Spanish letters, on January 4, 1920.

With more than 70 novels to his credit, as well as a number of plays and a host of journalistic essays, Galdós was by any standards a reasonably prolific writer. In Spain he is probably still best known for the *Episodios* and the aforementioned trilogy. With the current availability of popular paperback editions of his work, and film and television versions of some of them, this has

begun to change in recent years. Buñuel himself was quite taken with Galdós, and produced two films, *Tristana* and *Nazarín*, based on the novels of the same name--all too loosely based, as it happens, and while the films themselves may be excellent, they can only be viewed, from the standpoint of the novels whose names they carry, as distortions which bear little resemblance to the original. It is therefore perhaps more a matter for rejoicing than otherwise that Buñuel should have died before realizing his desire to bring *Angel Guerra* to the screen in like manner. An early film version of *Marianela* did little to enhance the reputation of the author himself, and a film version of *Fortunata and Jacinta* was only a marginal improvement, though a subsequent televised mini-series of the same novel fared rather better; and it is most probably that series which has had the greatest impact over the last decade or so in shifting the appreciation of the Spanish public at large from the *Episodios* and the early trilogy to those works which Galdós himself called his '*contemporary novels*', written between 1881 and 1897. And it is in this latter group, long the focus of most critical attention, that his in many ways rather distinct contribution to the great tradition of nineteenth-century realism is to be found.

Galdós' style, with its characteristically conversational tone, its humor and gentle irony, is readily recognizable. For all that, however, the precise nature of his realism is not easy to define. In its social concern, combined with its strong moral interest, it recalls to some extent the English tradition; its underlying (though unobtrusive) philosophical interest is perhaps somewhat more French in flavor; in the breadth and scale which it achieves in some of his best works (*Fortunata and Jacinta*, for example, or *Angel Guerra* itself), it calls to mind Tolstoy; its interest in the deeper recesses of the human mind, on the other hand, has something of Dostoievski about it. Such diverse impressions are not, perhaps, too surprising. Galdós was widely read in the European literature of his day and receptive to its influence. Indeed, a record of the influences discernible in his work would read like a who's who of the nineteenth-century novel. In the case of *Angel Guerra*, these influences are perhaps most obviously Russian (who could read about the Babels, for example, without being instantly reminded of the Marmeladov family in Dostoievski's *Crime and Punishment*?). And in the instance of Doña Catalina herself, one can certainly see reminders of Dicken's *The Pickwick Papers*, which Galdós himself had translated into Spanish.

Yet there is rather more to the work of Galdós than a mere pot pourri of miscellaneous influences. His receptivity to the latter is more a question of his discerning in other writers grist to his own particular mill. The influences, in other words, are very much filtered through Galdós' own preoccupations. For the wellsprings of the latter it is as well to cast an eye, not across the literary map of Europe, but at the formative elements which shaped the young Galdós.

\* \* \*

One important source has already been mentioned, namely, Spanish history and politics. *Angel Guerra*, for instance, draws on contemporary history both for the abortive uprising from which we see Angel return in Chapter 1, and which follows closely the real-life republican uprising led by General Villacampa in September, 1886 (the last of the nineteenth century's many *pronunciamientos*, begun in 1820 with Riego's), and for the execution scene which haunts Angel in his recurrent nightmare. The latter is clearly based on Galdós' own memories of the sergeants' revolt of 1867 and its gruesome aftermath, and is yet another example of the indelible impression left on him by the political turmoil of his early years in Madrid. This was the period of the 'Glorious' Revolution of 1868, the attempt to establish a constitutional monarchy in Spain under an imported king, Amadeo de Savoy, the anarchy and chaos of the First Republic which came in the wake of that attempt, and, finally, the Bourbon Restoration under Alfonso XII in 1874. Turbulent years in truth, and a period which, with the collapse into anarchy of the ideals of 1868, saw the dashing of the hopes of a whole generation of liberally minded intellectuals, among whom we may certainly number Galdós. As has already been observed, the failures of those years had much to do with Galdós' cultivation of the historical novel, and even in the contemporary novels the period 1868-74 recurs time and time again in the chronological backdrop, with Galdós often drawing more or less explicit parallels between the private lives of his characters and the events of national history.

Those hopes which died with the failure of the Revolution of 1868 were born in a climate subject to another important, if rather idiosyncratic influence--that of the fairly obscure German philosopher, Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781-

1832), whose thought had been introduced to Spain in the 1850's and was a major influence on the generation of 1868. On the face of it, Krausism was perhaps a rather unlikely philosophy for the inspiration of a revolution. In a Spain which had long been starved of all contact with European philosophical currents, however, the impact of Krausism is somewhat less surprising. There were, moreover, elements within which made Spain a particularly fertile soil for its propagation. Krause's 'harmonic rationalism', which sought to bridge reason and faith, had an obvious appeal, in a country where more atheistic doctrines would have been too strong a draught to swallow. Krausism met a need in furnishing a basis for religious idealism for those liberal intellectuals who were critical of the institutional Church and the society of which it was a part. Still, the significant, if rather diffuse, influence of the Krausists was not simply, or even primarily, a matter of the precise philosophical system which gave them their name: more than anything else, perhaps, Krausism became identified with an attitude of mind, an ethical and intellectual stance whose moral seriousness and emphasis on the role of the individual conscience brought a taste of something like northern Protestantism to Spain.

Galdós himself cannot really be called a Krausist. In fact, often in his early novels, while clearly sympathetic to their moral idealism, he is implicitly critical of their naive faith in the power of human reason. He was nonetheless a friend of Francisco Giner de los Ríos, one of the leading Krausists, and there can be little doubt that there was much in the Krausist outlook which he shared. In truth, many of the traits so often attributed to English influences (and Galdós was certainly something of an anglophile) may well equally derive from Krausist attitudes imbibed in his youth. One characteristic he obviously does share with Krausism--the desire to accommodate the ideal within the framework of the real, a desire which accounts for the tendency to perceive reality as ill-defined and problematical, one of the distinguishing features of his realism.

It is in this area of the conflict between the ideal and the real, which is so central a preoccupation of Galdós, that one discerns an influence which is arguably more potent than any other--that of Cervantes and *Don Quixote*. It is said of Galdós that he was so steeped in the *Quixote* that he could quote entire pages of it from memory and there are few pages of his own where some Cervantine echo or