

THE THEATRE OF GALDOS

La loca de la casa (1893)

Benito Pérez Galdós

Edited with an Introduction and Notes

by

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INTRODUCTION

Encouraged by the relatively favourable reception of his dramatic début with *Realidad* in 1892, Galdós was keen to pursue the 'áspero camino'¹ he had previously abandoned in despair. In his *Memorias* he wrote:

El buen éxito de *Realidad* me movió a una nueva tentativa para el año siguiente, cediendo a las instancias de Mario y María Guerrero.²

Indeed, the new dramatist wasted no time and on the 16th of January, 1893, *La loca de la casa* opened at the same *Teatro de la Comedia* in Madrid.

The Creative Process

At first glance, *La loca de la casa* is, like *Realidad*, a contemporary play adapted from a dialogue novel. However, further investigation reveals that a very different creative process was involved. Whilst *Realidad* was novelistic in conception, *La loca de la casa* was, from the beginning, less diverse in its form. Despite the fact that Galdós had listed the first version of *La loca* amongst his *novelas contemporáneas*, it does seem to have been originally conceived as a dramatic work, the first version being shortened rather than adapted for the stage. The writer himself recounted:

La experiencia de *Realidad* no me enseñó a calcular las dimensiones de la obra dramática. *La loca* resultó tan desafortadamente larga, que tardamos dos días en leerla. Desde los primeros días empezamos a dar tajos y

mandobles para que quedara en razonables proporciones.³

Further indication that this play was originally conceived as a dramatic work rather than the 'novela dialogada' or 'hablada' of which he spoke in the Prologue to *El abuelo* can be found in the Prologue to the novel version of *Casandra* (1905), which Galdós links to *Realidad* and *El abuelo* without mention of *La loca*:

Al cuidado de sus hermanas mayores, *Realidad* y *El abuelo*, sale al mundo esta *Casandra*, como aquéllas *novela intensa* o *drama extenso*, que ambos motes pueden aplicársele. No debo ocultar que he tomado cariño a este subgénero, producto del cruzamiento de la novela y el teatro ... (OC, NIII, 906).⁴

It is perhaps also significant that the term 'Acto' is used in both versions of *La loca*, whereas in the other works in this group the term 'Jornada' is used and subsequently changed to 'Acto' for the dramatic version.

Various incomplete manuscripts and *adaptaciones* of *La loca de la casa* are housed in the *Casa-Museo Pérez Galdós* in Las Palmas. Galdós' original manuscript is marked 'Adquirido a D^a María Guerrero' and was clearly subjected to some pruning through the '*adaptación*' stage.⁵ Nevertheless, no substantial changes appear as a result of this exercise, either in terms of content, which will be considered shortly, or structure, both versions consisting of four Acts and having thirteen characters.

In his comparison of the two versions of *La loca*, Hal Carney observes that while in the transition from novel to play *Realidad* is halved in length from 100 to 50 pages in the Aguilar edition, *La loca* is only reduced from 60 to 50 pages. He finally concludes that the latter work was written directly for the stage, the second version being the result of cuts and changes made during rehearsals.⁶ In her doctoral dissertation on Galdós as a dramatist, Hope Goodale similarly observes that 'there is scarcely any difference between the dialogue novel and the drama of *La loca de la casa*',⁷ and Willa Sack Elton further confirms the view that 'la segunda versión es poco más que una corrección de la primera hecha para facilitar la representación'.⁸ It would appear, therefore, that most critics would agree with Manuel Alvar's statement that:

Las versiones novelesca y dramática de *La loca de la casa* no son dos versiones, ni desde los planteamientos teóricos del autor ni desde su inmediata realización práctica, sino una sola obra acortada.⁹

Following his experience with *Realidad*, it seems that the new dramatist was persuaded of the need to simplify the presentation of his ideas on the stage and hence subsequent plays, while remaining unconventional, became increasingly schematic both in form and content. Galdós himself made it very clear that while he was prepared to compromise on form, which according to Menéndez Onrubia seems to have signified little more to him than a means to an end,¹⁰ he was resolute in his resolve to explore on stage the theme of social regeneration, albeit through an increasingly outdated form of liberal idealism.¹¹

From his point of transition in 1892, we find Galdós adopting a more idealised view of social tensions, increasingly focusing on these from a moral angle. Hence in many of his plays depicting problems that are fundamentally social and/or economic in nature, the new dramatist offers a moral or spiritual resolution and the social ramifications are not fully explored. This shift is to some extent in line with contemporary literary and philosophical movements, in Angel del Río's view 'influido por un indefinido idealismo hegeliano que se respira en el ambiente intelectual español del momento'.¹² It is also reflected in Galdós' later novels such as *Misericordia* (1897), where distorted economics are resolved through charity. Other of his works, while still social in character, have individual, moral or spiritual interpretations. Thus solutions tend to be presented in an abstract rather than a concrete form, and the social relevance implied through individuals rather than explored through any system.

However, linked to Galdós' ideas for social equality and, indeed, crucial to their realisation, a more modern notion of sexual equality was rapidly emerging. It was to be through the transformation of the traditional female role that Galdós' imagined new society would evolve. This movement towards the creation of a more positive and productive female heroine, initiated through the development of Clotilde's role in *Realidad*, evolves rapidly through the following contemporary plays of 'the first period'¹³ and persists to the writer's last works.

Galdós' proposal for an alternative female role promoting social regeneration is a radical one which, although not worked through in social terms, is far from being without social relevance. For, through the realisation of his new heroine, Galdós presented woman in society in a manner which would not be inconsistent with modern feminist attitudes and aspirations. Movement towards such attitudes was long overdue in European society by the close of the century although the question was being increasingly debated, and progress towards the type of alternative female role suggested through Galdós' contemporary drama was to be slow and is still not fully realised. It is apparent, however, that the writer was acutely aware of the roots of the female dilemma, whether or not he intentionally set out to explore solutions.

Through his novels, Galdós had repeatedly presented the young female protagonist attempting to assert her own will and break out of the mould set for her by her predecessors. Several images recurred persistently in the depiction of her dilemma,¹⁴ notable those of 'ángel', 'alas' and 'muñeca', and these all return to be reworked in *La loca de la casa* and subsequent contemporary plays. In the novels, the heroine's hopes and ambitions are invariably dashed by society, often in the guise of Nature or Destiny, presumably reflecting the impossibility of their realisation in nineteenth-century Spain. Yet with the dawn of a new century approaching, Galdós began to envisage the viability of a fundamental change in the nature of woman's role in society through the assumption of power.

Sources and Influences

Galdós' new heroine, evolving from Concha-Ruth Morell's depiction of Clotilde in *Realidad*, was to become incarnate in his leading lady, María Guerrero. She was invariably to be the carrier of the new dramatist's message and instrumental in effecting the changes leading towards his vision of a new society.¹⁶ According to Menéndez Onrubia, *La loca de la casa* incorporates the original argument of *La de San Quintín* (1894) and she further concludes:

La obra está traspasada de ese optimismo que se apodera de él en estos primeros años del decenio y que

se plasma en el exterior en las intrépidas personalidades de Concha Morell y María Guerrero. Ambas están sustentando los personajes de Rosario y Victoria, así como está comprobado que Clotilde (*Realidad*) es la fiel transposición de Concha Morell.¹⁷

Notwithstanding Menéndez Onrubia's somewhat sweeping statements and whether or not one currently approves of any form of biographical approach, the fact remains that Galdós' work was strongly affected and inspired by the women in his life and this influence can be seen to continue through this later phase of his career, albeit in a different vein. For up to and including the creation of *Realidad*, the writer appears to have been primarily influenced by those women with whom he had a very close familial, emotional or romantic relationship. Most notable among these were his mother, 'Mama Dolores', his childhood sweetheart, 'Sisita', his subsequent unrequited love for Juanita Lund, his affairs with women from many different walks of life (one of whom according to Berkowitz inspired the creation of Fortunata), his affair with Lorenza Cobián and fathering of María, and his relationships with Emilia Pardo Bazan and Concha-Ruth Morell.¹⁸

The evidence indicates that these last two relationships were highly influential in the creation of *Realidad*, which play marks a crucial turning point in Galdós' approach towards the role of women. Just as his subsequent plays were to become more schematic and symbolic, so the influence of women, more particularly now one woman, María Guerrero, becomes simplified and to some extent idealised. *Realidad*, Galdós' work of transition and also his most complex play, involved the three women who, between them, inspired and realised his evolving vision of an alternative female role. María Guerrero belongs solely to Galdós' dramatic portrayal of this vision, for which Concha-Ruth and doña Emilia had sown the seeds. Nevertheless, she was to insist repeatedly: '¡Yo soy la inspiración!!'.¹⁹ Certainly, the actress showed herself to be an exceptionally strong, assertive and determined young woman, quite capable of realising the majority of her ambitions, and in this way highly inspirational to Galdós' developing concept of 'la mujer nueva'.²⁰

In *La loca de la casa*, as in *La de San Quintín* presented the following year, Galdós illustrates women's potential strength as emanating primarily through qualities which are either essentially or traditionally female or