

Studies in Honor of
Vernon Chamberlin

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Table of Contents

<i>Misericordia</i> de Benito Pérez Galdós a través del prisma de John Rawls LIEVE BEHIELS	11
Galdós's 'Astronomical' Novels PETER BLY	23
Galdós's 'Locas aventuras' and the madness of Spanish colonialism MARY COFFEY	37
Civilization and Barbarity in the <i>Torquemada</i> Novels RHIANN DAVIES	49
Costumbrismo, pueblo y nación en la Primera Serie de <i>Episodios nacionales</i> TONI DORCA	65
Isidora Rufete: Galdós's Inverted 'Cinderella' THOMAS FRANZ	81
Being There: The Documentary Impulse from Ayguales de Izco to Galdós JO LABANYI	95
Hysterical Aphonia in <i>La Gaviota</i> and <i>Su único hijo</i> KEVIN S. LARSEN	111
Galdós, personaje galdosiano MERCEDES LÓPEZ-BARALT	129

History and Interpretation in War of Independence Narratives: Three <i>Episodios</i> by Galdós, Two Novels by Pérez-Reverte, and Garci's <i>Sangre de mayo</i> STEPHEN MILLER.....	145
Forbidden Transactions: The Economic Realism of Benito Pérez Galdós's <i>Lo prohibido</i> WADDA RÍOS-FONT.....	165
Artist to Artist: Galdosian Sketches from the Galley Proofs and Original Manuscript of <i>Tristana</i> MICHAEL SCHNEPF	189
Postergación y gradación: Galdós y la estética realista ALAN E. SMITH	201
'Why the Face of the Voice is in the Hand': On the Poetics of Realist Fiction HARRIET TURNER	215
Ascent and Descent, Honor and Dominion in the Conclusion to Galdós's First Series of <i>Episodios nacionales</i> DIANE F. UREY.....	231
The Aggression of Stereotype in Clarín's <i>La Regenta</i> NOËL VALIS.....	245
Creación y recepción literaria en <i>La fantasía de un delegado de Hacienda</i> de Leopoldo Alas MARGOT VERSTEEG.....	261
High Fidelity: Scoring the Text in TV's <i>La Regenta</i> LINDA M. WILLEM.....	277

Preface

FEW CAN BOAST OF a career that has spanned six decades now. Beginning in the early 1960s, Vernon Chamberlin's career has been marked by a long list of illuminating scholarly publications that are accessible to the novice and seasoned *galdosista* alike. As a tribute to Vernon for his many contributions to the field of nineteenth-century literary studies, this volume includes essays by several of his colleagues whose work he especially admires.

Over the years, Vernon's work has covered a great deal of terrain. His many studies on Sephardic source materials for Galdós's novels during his earlier years in the profession stand out just as much as his more recent work on *Fortunata y Jacinta*, which stirred a polemic that, I believe, Vernon rather enjoyed. Additionally, Vernon's interest in the use of colors and animal imagery in Galdós's novels, and especially his exploration of erotic equine imagery, have helped us interpret scenes and characters in more than a few novels, while his work on classical music, with particular emphasis on the sonata form structure, in several novels has shed light on the manner in which Galdós structured his works.

It is no secret that Vernon's work has always shied away from the popular theoretical trends of the day; one will not find evidence of the semiotician or the deconstructionist at work in his essays. As one colleague introduced him at a conference, "And Professor Chamberlin was post-theory before post-theory was fashionable" (Chamberlin, *The Perils of Interpreting Fortunata's Dream*). This should not be interpreted as a flaw, for Vernon's research engages us precisely because of its lack of literary-based theory. In contrast, a common denominator of Vernon's work is his knack for performing enlightening 'close read-

ings' of texts. His careful reading of texts has allowed him to uncover what is not obvious to most readers of nineteenth-century texts. His readings of *Tristana* and *La desheredada*, for example, map out the parallels between classical music structures and plot, and his comparative study of *Doña Perfecta* and *Pepita Jiménez* led him to discover the unique relationship between the novels; Vernon, point by point, explores the many ways in which Galdós's early realist novel is a reply to the idealism that characterizes Valera's work.

Perhaps it is Vernon's flair for finding meaning in details—Pepita Jiménez's green eyes, or the significance of many names and nicknames, for example—that made him popular among graduate students, including me, at the University of Kansas. While he was still teaching, it was common knowledge among graduate students in the department that one *had* to take Professor Chamberlin's course on the realist novel before sitting for the master's exam. While his courses certainly prepared students for the master's exam, they left a lasting impression on those who continued on in literary studies: Vernon taught his students how to critically approach a text.

Just as Vernon's interests have been many and varied, as the long list of his scholarly publications shows us, the essays included in this volume approach nineteenth-century literature from different critical perspectives. They range from studies on Galdós's most well-known works to studies on lesser-known works by understudied writers. Collectively, however, they all increase our understanding of the literature and culture of Spain during the nineteenth-century.

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