

A NEW VERSION OF *FORTUNATA Y JACINTA* ON THE SPANISH STAGE: A SESQUICENTENNIAL SALUTE TO PÉREZ GALDÓS

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To celebrate the sesquicentennial of the birth of Santander's famous summer resident, Benito Pérez Galdós,¹ the Festival Internacional de Santander presented from August 4-10, 1993, a new dramatic interpretation of Galdós's famous novel *Fortunata y Jacinta*. Written by the well-known playwright Ricardo López Aranda (the co-author of the ten-part television mini-series *Fortunata y Jacinta*)² and directed by Juan Carlos Pérez de La Fuente, this "tragedia moderna" starred Nuria Gallardo as Fortunata and Carmen Conesa as Jacinta. Juan Gea played the part of Juan Santa Cruz and Manolo Galiano the part of Maximiliano.³

Dramatist Ricardo López Aranda had earlier paid his dues to realism,⁴ first with a play entitled *Fortunata y Jacinta* in 1969 (performed at the Teatro Lara in Madrid) and then in 1980 with his co-authorship of the television interpretation.⁵ Having proven his ability to work closely with the Galdosian text, López Aranda may have felt the next challenge would be to do something strikingly original with the material he now knew so well. Thus the 1993 reincarnation of Galdós's love quadrangle is reminiscent of ancient Greek tragedy. The number of characters has been greatly reduced as the four-volume novel is condensed into a two-act play, while the classical ideal of universality is enhanced by the absence of Madrilenian local color and nineteenth-century historical events. One reviewer comments: "Aparecen varios de los tradicionales elementos trágicos: la hamartía o el error, el pathos o el sufrimiento, la catástrofe o el desenlace trágico, la catársis o la pugnación, amén de la figura del héroe, en este caso una heroína, Fortunata, que lucha denodadamente contra la negra adversidad. Transmitiendo al patio de butacas, como en la más pura tragedia griega, temores, emociones y compasión" (*El Norte*, 9 de agosto de 1993). The drama is interior and psychological and the lighting, sound effects, and stage settings contribute to this end. The interplay of light and darkness and the obsessive beat of a kettledrum also help communicate the tensions and desperation of the principal characters. The only stage prop is a bridal bed (*tálamo*) on and around which occur several of the most memorable scenes.

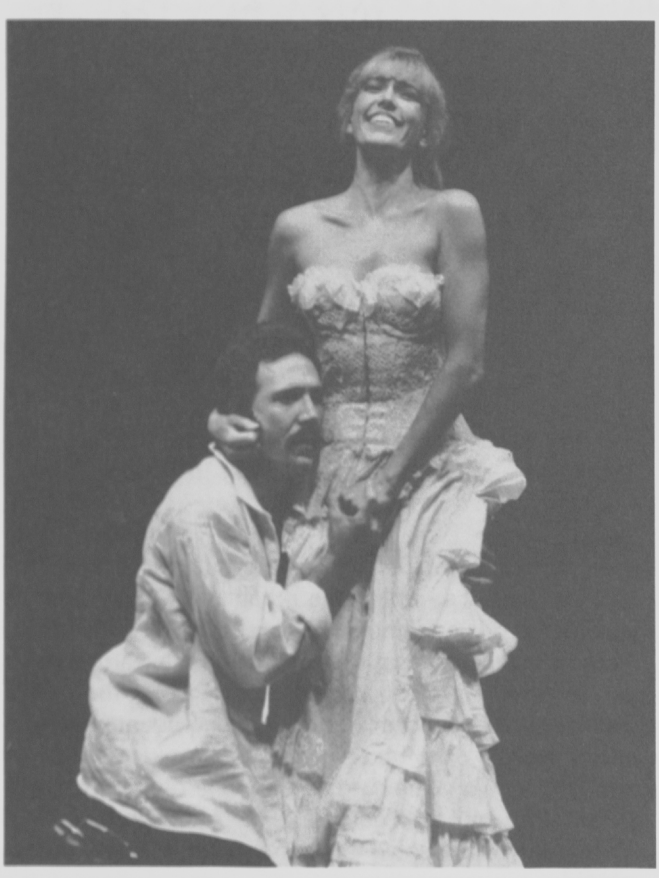
As the play opens in an "atmósfera de sueño y locura," (16) one learns that Fortunata is already dead, but has been introjected by Jacinta. Although the stage directions specify that "Fortunata está muerta pero vive en Jacinta" (16), an actress does represent Fortunata on stage. At first

two indistinguishable female figures swirl around Juan but soon they become recognizable as Fortunata and Jacinta. Early on the play emphasizes the terrible bedroom problems Jacinta and Juan are currently experiencing after two years of marriage. Jacinta complains that Juan is always thinking of Fortunata: "ahora mismo está aquí . . . ¡en nuestra propia cama!" (21). The blame for this, replies Juan, is that Jacinta will not help him "borrarla de mí A fuerza de obligarme a hablar de ella, ya no sé cual de las dos estrecho en mis brazos" (22). After angrily recalling the raw egg episode (which she learned about on her wedding night), Jacinta offers to play the part of Fortunata: "Comencemos otra vez, como tantas veces... ¡Yo soy ella!" She bitterly laments, however, that their sex life for two years has had only one objective: "¡revivirla a ella aquí cada noche!" (23). Although the rest of the play does not solve this horrendous problem, it does provide a retrospective detailed understanding of the events and relationships responsible for the situation.

An analepsis (started in scenes III and IV with Juan's premarital adventures) resumes in scenes V.A [sic] and VI, respectively entitled "La compra del niño" and "El hijo falso," and parallels important aspects of the later chapters of Galdós's volume one. The opening act's second half (scenes seven through twelve) presents the Maxi-Fortunata courtship, one of the most important aspects of volume two. The second act of the play (scenes 13-27) reflects the material of Galdós's closing chapter in volume two, as well as all of volumes three and four. López Aranda's final scene brings the spectator back to the unsolvable tension of the drama's opening two scenes.

Critic Carlos Galán, while praising the drama's success, said that its mere undertaking is "una empresa . . . enormemente arriesgada, difícil y complicada, . . . [porque] siempre se corre el peligro de que el espectador tenga presente y haga referencia a la novela que leyó" (*Diario 16*, 5 de agosto de 1993). Another critic, Guillermo Balbona, had similar misgivings when thinking about the television miniseries, yet he wrote, "Pocos minutos después de iniciarse la función, nos olvidamos de la *Fortunata y Jacinta* televisiva para introducirnos en el mundo que daban vida unos actores que poco tenían que ver con nuestros recuerdos" (*El Diario Montañés*, 5 de agosto de 1993).

While the last statement is certainly a tribute to the play's quality, readers of the printed text will have more



Fortunata y Jacinta. Festival Internacional de Santander, 1993. Photo: Roberto Ruiz.

time and emotional freedom to notice and think about its innovations. In addition, many people will want to see the play or read the text precisely because they want to see just how the 1993 *Fortunata y Jacinta* differs from Galdós's original. They may also want to have the emotional experience of vicariously participating in the adventures and conflicts of the twentieth-century "ghosts"⁶ of their beloved Galdosian characters. Thus because Galdós's novel is so well-known—and now considered a masterpiece of world literature—a consideration of some of López de Aranda's innovations is quite appropriate.

The first half of López de Aranda's Act 1—in addition to the previously mentioned abbreviated cast of characters, and a complete lack of family history and *costumbrista* effects—has other significant features at variance with Galdós's volume one. For example, Juan proposes marriage to Fortunata not to seduce her but (in a more 1990s mode) to be able to retain their intimacy, because he is experiencing "miedo de perderla como hembra" (19). And it is Fortunata who subsequently breaks off the relationship (collapsing in a faint) after Segunda and José convince her that Juan is secretly preparing to marry his cousin Jacinta.

In the bargaining for the purchase of "El Pituso," Auro-

ra aids Guillermina, while Segunda vigorously helps José get a good price. (The false "Pituso" is present but never speaks; consequently the viewer/reader is deprived of the novel's humorous scene in which the boy calls Jacinta "putona.") Also noticeably absent is Juan's searching for Fortunata in the brothels of the south Madrid slums at the close of Galdós's volume one.

The second half of the play's Act 1 will undoubtedly offend some—if not many—who love Galdós's novel or appreciate the subsequent television interpretation. The most striking innovation is Fortunata's now working as a "puta de café cantante" (35)—and for a black pimp.⁷ Maximiliano comes nightly for a month to hear her sing before he makes his declaration of love. As he sees El Negro mistreating Fortunata, Maximiliano (whom Fortunata will later characterize as not at all impotent)⁸ vigorously grabs the pimp by the collar and gives him a real scare. Much impressed by Maximiliano's action, Fortunata is immediately willing to leave her present occupation and goes with Maximiliano to meet Doña Lupe and Nicolás. The latter is presented as a much nicer person than his prototype in Galdós's novel, while Doña Lupe is considerably worse. She remains cruel throughout the interview she and Nicolás conduct, and she insists that Fortunata must know that Maximiliano is a very sick man, that he suffers from attacks which last for days and that he will probably end up in a mental asylum. Fortunata's essential goodness is manifest when she immediately replies, "Y... ¿eso es todo? . . . Yo le cuidaré" (38). Nevertheless, it is decided that Fortunata must undergo education in a convent.

The final two scenes of Act 1 focus upon Fortunata. When the audience sees her in the convent, she has already spent three months there and is only three days away from marriage to Maxi. Mauricia enters the convent and everything changes. As in the novel, Mauricia imparts news concerning Juan, the most colorful being that Juan "anda como gato encelado en febrero, rodando día y noche las tapias de este convento" (43). Such statements, and news that Juan already has an apartment in the building where she and Maxi will live, make it easy for Fortunata to accept drinks from Mauricia's bottle. The final scene of Act 1 (entitled "La borrachera") dramatizes Fortunata on the floor quite drunk; she gets up and staggers to an aggressive encounter with Jacinta, who happens to be visiting in the convent. Fortunata's screaming of her own name in response to an inquiry by Jacinta⁹ provides melodramatic closure to the entire first act, as the stage directions specify a very appropriate "Oscuro y tambor durante el entreacto" (51).

The second act begins as Fortunata and Maxi have returned to their apartment after the wedding. Papitos plays an expanded role as their servant, while she continues in the pay of Lupe and works for Santa Cruz.¹⁰ She even hints that she herself may be intimate with Juan,¹¹ and (also unlike Galdós's novel) it is Papitos who urges

Fortunata toward a renewed relationship with her former lover.

After an effective bit of will-he or will-he-not suspense, Maxi does (as in the novel) have an attack on his wedding night. This occurrence, however, seems more epileptic than migrainal.¹² Papitos cruelly insists on leaving the incapacitated Maxi on the floor as she allows Juan to enter the apartment in order to convince Fortunata to become his mistress again.

Recognizing the dramatic value of the fight between Maxi and Juanito (the climax of Galdós's volume two), López Aranda includes it in his play—with, however, major innovations. Returning early from work one day, Maxi finds Santa Cruz with Fortunata in his very own home. Although Maxi lunges at his rival with a knife, Juan gives him a good thrashing. Juan accuses Fortunata of entrapment, but she denies it, swearing by their unborn child (mentioned for the first time) that she had no knowledge of Maxi's plans. She asks Papitos to testify that Juan was not present and volunteers to assume responsibility for her husband's death.

Fortunately for Maxi, the fight was only a bad dream. He is still very much alive, but his marriage is over: Fortunata tells him that she is not only pregnant but leaving him for Juan. When Maxi speaks of suicide, Fortunata (at complete odds with Galdós's novel) retorts, ". . . te faltan agallas" (74). Maxi is subsequently reported to have been placed in a mental hospital for attempted suicide. Whereas Galdós's novel ends with Maxi's incarceration in the Leganés asylum, in López Aranda's play, Maxi's health improves and he is soon released. This plot development frees the dramatist to concentrate on Fortunata's death.

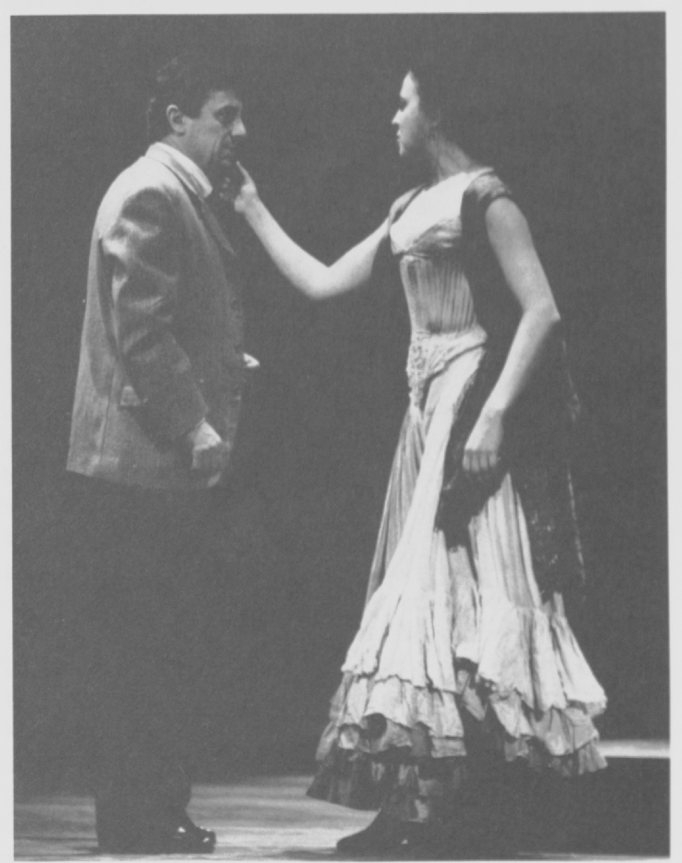
Fortunata's agony and death occur in the play's penultimate scene. She does receive the last rites of the Church, administered by Nicolás, and Jacinta cruelly insists on witnessing her rival's suffering and death. Moreover, Jacinta's theft of Fortunata's baby is the *coup de grace* for the dying woman, once she realizes what is taking place. After Fortunata's death, Jacinta's *schadenfreude*, however, is very brief, for she knows that during the sex act Juan will be forever thinking of her rival, "gritando en lo más profundo de sí mismo '¡Fortunata! ...¡Fortunata!'" (90). A final choral scene returns the spectator to the opening of the play, with Jacinta and Fortunata swirling with equal insistence around Juan and vying for his attention.

The Santander premiere and subsequent seven performances of López Aranda's *Fortunata y Jacinta* were commented upon in at least seventy newspapers almost immediately.¹³ Especially praised was the actress who represented Fortunata. One reviewer said: "Punto y aparte merece la labor excepcional de Nuria Gallardo, una actriz en la que el grito se alía con el susurro, la risa con el llanto y el gesto del desmedido con la contención para componer una Fortunata magistral . . . [Ella] se pasea por los territorios de la emoción y profundiza en los complejos mecanismos de la fuerza expresiva, justifican-

do ella sola la asistencia a una representación de *Fortunata y Jacinta*" (*Alerta*, 6 de agosto de 1993).

The dramatist, the director, and leading members of the cast readily granted interviews concerning their work. For example, the director, Juan Carlos Pérez de La Fuente, told one reporter that "*Fortunata y Jacinta* es una versión arriesgada, una tragedia latente, moderna y apasionante, en la que se ha respetado el espíritu del autor" (*La Provincia*, 6 de agosto de 1993). To another reporter, he described the play: "[Es] . . . una tragedia donde había que crear un espacio y unos figurines que permitieron ahondar en el interior de los personajes. Ellos viven en un círculo cerrado. Están enredados en una espesa tela de araña: ni la muerte los logra separar. Más que luchar contra un recuerdo, les preocupa la mujer. Muriendo Fortunata estará más viva que nunca" (*El Norte*, 8 de agosto de 1993).

Nuria Gallardo, who played Fortunata, said of her character, "[Ella] es una mujer de sentimientos muy profundos que vive la vida por los ovarios. Fortunata es una mujer muy fuerte" (*El Norte*, 8 de agosto de 1993). Carmen Conesa, as Jacinta, commented, "A Jacinta la determina mucho su esterilidad" (*El Norte*, 8 agosto de 1993).



Fortunata y Jacinta. Festival Internacional de Santander, 1993. Photo: Roberto Ruiz.

Further, concerning the play in general, Conesa has said, "Es muy dura y difícil de hacer, pero muy agradable de ver. Es como una radiografía de los personajes y eso le da cierto morbo y mucha verdad, [refleja] el interior, aquello que no se ve de los seres humanos . . . donde se viven y se sufren las pasiones más difíciles" (*Hoy*, 6 de agosto de 1993).

Already on the evening of the *estreno*, at which all 650 seats were filled, the Festival Internacional de Santander made available a very attractive book containing the complete text of the 1993 *Fortunata y Jacinta*. This book also contains 16 photographs of important scenes, 22 water color paintings of the costumes, and 6 illustrated diagrams of the stage setting and lighting. In addition, there are informative comments by both the playwright and the director.¹⁴

After a week of successful performances in Santander, enthusiasm for *Fortunata y Jacinta* was still so strong that it was necessary to add an additional one. Director Juan Carlos Pérez de La Fuente had earlier announced that the play now had received offers to tour the country. On August 13 the newspaper *La Nueva España* reported the play's success in Avilés, along with a photo of early risers standing in a long line to purchase tickets (16). Only time will tell, of course, whether or not the 1993 *Fortunata y Jacinta* will endure in the canon of late-twentieth-century Spanish dramas, but certainly it has enjoyed a spectacular inauguration.

NOTES

1. Galdós owned a home in Santander and wrote several of his plays there. He also participated in the city's intellectual life and was a personal friend of novelist José María de Pereda and other Santander notables. (*Fortunata y Jacinta* was presented in the Palacio de Festivales's Sala de Pereda.)
2. During his thirty-six-year career as a playwright, López Aranda has had twenty plays produced, including other adaptations of famous novels: *La Celestina*, *El sombrero de tres picos*, *El buscón*, and *Don Quijote de la Mancha*. With *Fortunata y Jacinta* this Cantabrian dramatist has finally achieved his goal of having one of his works premiered in the capital city of his home province, "en el pasillo de mi casa" (*Alerta*, 4 Aug. 1993).
3. The other actors and their roles were Rafael San Martín (José), Isa Escartin (Segunda), Charo Soriano (Doña Guillermina), Ruth Díaz (Aurora), Jerónimo Arenal (El Negro), Vicky Lagos (Doña Lupe), Fernando Chinarro (Don Nicolás), Sara Mora (Mauricia), Angela San Martín (Sor Natividad), María Vidal (Manolita), Isabel Tapia (Sor Antonia), and Lidia Ruiz (Papitos).
4. "Ricardo López de Aranda: Obras de teatro estrenadas," 98. This play included *costumbrista* types and forms of popular speech that were dropped for 1993 adaptation (*El Norte*, 11 de agosto de 1994).
5. For an excellent study of the television version, see Mercedes

López-Baralt.

6. For a detailed discussion of "ghosting," see Blau (195-247).
7. In Galdós's novel, Fortunata's first protector after she had been abandoned by Juanito was "Juárez el Negro, por tener la color muy morena" (175). In López de Aranda's play, this prototype has been converted into a pimp, usually called El Negro, with only one incidental reference to his surname Juárez (34).
8. Fortunata corrects Juan's opinion about what he has heard, saying that Maxi is indeed potent: "Sí es. Tanto como tú" (80). Earlier Maxi had thought he was responsible for Fortunata's pregnancy, but she said that it had occurred during a time when he was in the hospital (73).
9. One of the nuns tries to excuse Fortunata's behavior as a case of nerves, three days before marriage vows. Jacinta says that this is understandable and, to Fortunata, she adds: "Te deseo que seas tan feliz con tu marido, como yo lo soy con el mío. ¿Cómo te llamas? Yo Jacinta; Jacinta Santa Cruz: ¿y tú?" (51).
10. This expanded role for Papitos eliminates any need for the novel's servant Patricia.
11. When Fortunata asks Papitos how much Santa Cruz is paying her, the text reads: "Papitos: (Putá) Un hombre como él, cuando quiere algo, no paga; lo toma" (57).
12. The customary treatment is to put a handkerchief in Maxi's mouth and later take him to a hospital (60). The word *jaqueca* is never used.
13. José Luis Ocejo, Director, Festival Internacional de Santander graciously and promptly provided me with photocopies of the play's many reviews. (*El Diario Vasco* reports a preliminary performance of *Fortunata y Jacinta* at the Casa Cantabria in Madrid on 26 July.)
14. It is a pleasure to thank my former student, Isidora Rubio (University of Kansas), not only for calling this play to my attention but also for giving me a copy of the Festival's book containing the play's text.

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