

Review

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The Jew in the Novels of Benito Pérez Galdós

by Sara E. Schyfter

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Spanish Jesuits of the eighteenth century, they are either dispersed or currently out of print. This compilation comes at an opportune time.

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The Jew in the Novels of Benito Pérez Galdós. By Sara E. Schyfter. London: Tamesis, 1978. 127 pages.

This book brings together three previously published studies (*Hispania*, 59 [1976], 24–33; *AGald*, 8 [1973], 51–61; and *Symposium*, 29 [1975], 84–102) and adds two new chapters, an excellent introduction, and a conclusion. The resulting five main chapters are entitled “The Jew in *Gloria*”; “Maxi Rubín as ‘Schlemiel’”; “Torquemada as ‘Converso’”; “Almudena and the Jewish Theme in *Misericordia*”; and “Christians, Jews, and Moors: Galdós’ Search for Values in *Aita Tettauén* and *Carlos VI, en la Rápita*.”

In her discussion of *Gloria*, Schyfter carefully supplements Pattison’s *Pérez Galdós and the Creative Process* and his more recent “The Manuscript of *Gloria*” (*AGald*, 4 [1969], 55–61), the latter showing that in Galdós’s first manuscript version the male protagonist was to have been a Protestant clergyman. While sharpening the dramatic conflicts by substituting Daniel Morton for the earlier character, Schyfter notes, Galdós also succeeded in creating what is perhaps the first positive and dignified image of the Jew in Spanish literature. Indeed, says Schyfter, his ultimate purpose was to rehabilitate the Jew by presenting an admirable portrait of a Jewish individual—in this instance, one who is morally and intellectually far superior to nearly all the Christian characters. Because Jewish Daniel Morton (like Canary Islander Galdós) is an outsider, he is able to see the defects of Spanish society and thus also serves as an effective social and moral critic.

In Chapters iii and iv, Schyfter turns her attention to Maxi Rubín, and Torquemada, two characters whose identity as Jews serves a quite different novelistic purpose from that of Daniel Morton. Here, Schyfter says, Galdós “reaches for the mythic and psychic identity of the Jew within Spanish culture; here the Jew appears as the outsider, the misfit, the stranger. Both Maxi and Torquemada represent different extremes of the same identity crisis” (p. 40). Further, their Jewishness is a metaphor for an existential alienation that displaces and isolates them from the society at large, particularly in their search for social and spiritual identity. Poor Maxi, for example, never knows, that in addition to all his other difficulties, he is Jewish—and, according to Schyfter, a *schlemiel*. After a mock denial that the Rubíns are ethnically Jewish, Galdós gives

Maxi an aunt who is a moneylender and devotes considerable attention to Maxi's nose. The latter is "hundido y chafado," causing him considerable chagrin, and making him imagine "que se arreglaba la nariz" in order to have, without knowing why, a more (Jewish) "nariz aguileña" (p. 44). There are also other playful inversions of stereotyped Jewishness. However, Maxi's identity as a *schlemiel* is really only a point of departure for Galdós's development of this character into a Quijote-Christ figure, which, in turn, becomes the main thrust of Schyfter's chapter.

Torquemada, on the other hand, is more consistently portrayed as being of Jewish origin, and the ambiguous final word of the novel—"conversión"—still leaves open the question of whether or not he has become a Christian. Schyfter points out that Galdós's protagonist is an incurable usurer, with a "cara de los judíos de los pasos de Semana Santa" (p. 70). He aggressively collects rent from his tenants on Sunday and (as the Inquisition accused his ancestors of doing) parodies Christian religious ceremonies, and he even insults Tía Roma (who, of course, recalls the established Church) with a blasphemy of the Hail Mary.

His surname, Torquemada, has "orígenes tan antiguos como los de Jerusalén" (p. 70), and both the narrator and the protagonist himself use the label "judío" (pp. 63, 65). Galdós also characterizes Torquemada by means of porcine references, which not only help establish his *marrano* identity, but also provide a bit of humor as Torquemada reacts variously to the restrictions of the Judaic dietary code.

More important, the four volumes of the Torquemada series recreate in the nineteenth century a phenomenon of the sixteenth century and detail the protagonist's upward social mobility and assimilation, while at the same time allowing Galdós once again to use the Jew as an instrument of moral and social criticism.

In Chapter v (concerning *Misericordia*), Schyfter convincingly presents Almudena in a more positive light than that afforded by some critics. This correction is probably overdue, but Schyfter's enthusiasm tends to overemphasize Almudena's importance, making him (at least to this reader) too nearly equal to the protagonist, Benina. Thus a great deal of Galdós's playfulness, humorous tone, and narrator-reader distancing regarding Almudena is lost in Schyfter's analysis. There is no mention, for example, of the fact that Almudena's vision of Rey *Samdai* is induced by pipeful after pipeful of *cannabis*, or that his last scheme for securing treasure is but to rob a bank. Notwithstanding these human foibles (which Galdós clearly wishes his reader to enjoy), Almudena does indeed, as Schyfter points out, grow spiritually as the novel progresses. Nevertheless, I believe that, in spite of Benina and Almudena's talk of going together to Jerusalem, Galdós means us to see Benina's relationship to Almudena as similar to those which she has with Doña Paca, Francisco

Ponte, and other characters. Benina is not, as Schyfter states, "his Christian lover" (p. 117).

In Chapter vi ("Christians, Jews and Moors: Galdós' Search for Values . . ."), Schyfter shows how, in the context of Spain's tortured historical experience, Don Benito emphasizes the Sephardim's charitable-ness, their love of peace, and their great affection for Spain. Regarding the latter, Schyfter is undoubtedly correct in saying that Galdós sought to awaken within his readers "feelings of embarrassment and guilt at the treatment of the Jews in . . . [Spain], and in this way redress, in part, the mistakes of the past" (p. 113). In addition, Galdós succeeds in making clear to his readers how similar Judaism, Christianity, and Islam really are, and how all three should contribute to peace, tolerance, human brotherhood, love, and individual fulfillment.

The Jew in the Novels of Benito Pérez Galdós is, in sum, an interesting and very readable contribution to our understanding of an important theme in Galdós's novels. It offers new information, many sensitive insights, valuable bibliographical entries, and it considerably advances our knowledge of the subject.

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Juan Ramón Jiménez, Leyenda (1896–1956). Libro inédito. Ed. Antonio Sánchez Romeralo. Madrid: CUPSA, 1978. 796 pages.

Anthologies are closely associated with Juan Ramón Jiménez. He treated them as an art form in their own right, painstakingly selected and organized their contents, and used them to provide two generations of readers with a gratifying introduction to his vast poetic works.

The first anthology, often overlooked, was underwritten by Archer Huntington and published in an *edición de lujo* on August 22, 1917, as *Poesías escojidas* (1899–1917). In preparing the famous *Segunda antología poética* (1898–1918), published in 1922 and hereafter cited as SA, Juan Ramón began to yield to one of his major obsessions: the correction of juvenilia, that eventually became a mania to rewrite a portion of everything already printed. This paradoxical task of "reliving," as he called it, what for many readers had achieved the status of a canon would hamper the preparation of future anthologies and create serious problems for editors attempting to establish the text. In the last active period of his life (1953–1954), Juan Ramón set about planning the publication of his work by genres, but the inevitable depression brought the project to a close. When Zenobia saw that none of their desires was to be realized, she proposed an anthology that would combine SA with a florilegium of subsequent verse. The result was the *Tercera antología poética* (1898–