

# THE IMPORTANCE OF RODRIGO SORIANO'S MOROS Y CRISTIANOS IN THE CREATION OF MISERICORDIA

Vernon A. Chamberlin

Much has been written and speculation abounds concerning the genesis of the colorful blind beggar Mordejai-Almudena in Galdós's *Misericordia* (1897).<sup>1</sup> One important source, however, appears to have completely escaped the attention of *galdosistas*: Rodrigo Soriano's book *Moros y cristianos / Notas de viaje (1893-1894) / La embajada de Martínez Campos*.<sup>2</sup> This work appeared in its second edition in 1895, only two years before the publication of *Misericordia*, and its author gave Galdós an autographed copy «en prueba de verdadero cariño y de admiración.»<sup>3</sup>

Galdós and Soriano served together in the Cortes. The latter wrote at least two laudatory articles concerning Galdós and also attempted to organize a national tribute to Don Benito.<sup>4</sup> Further evidence of their friendship is preserved at the Casa-Museo Pérez Galdós in three letters by Soriano to Don Benito, and in a photograph of the two men together.<sup>5</sup>

Morocco was a subject of common interest to Don Benito and Rodrigo Soriano. When fighting broke out between Spaniards and Riffs near Melilla late in 1893, Galdós repeatedly wrote about the conflict in his column for *La Prensa* of Buenos Aires.<sup>6</sup> Soriano, however, played a more active role in Moroccan affairs. At the conclusion of the fighting, he was asked by the Spanish government to join General Martínez Campos' delegation seeking to negotiate a new treaty with Morocco. *Moros y cristianos*, a description of that experience, tells of the overland caravan journey made by this large military-diplomatic mission from Casablanca to the Sultan's court at Marrakesh; after the mission arrives in the former Moroccan capital, Soriano devotes a large part of his book to the customs, types, and incidents observed during his stay of several months in Marrakesh.<sup>7</sup>

Although Rodrigo Soriano was a rabid anti-Semite,<sup>8</sup> he was intrigued by the Jews of Morocco from the very beginning of his journey. Marrakesh, in particular, had always had—and still has—a very large Jewish population, and Soriano spent considerable time in the *mellab*.<sup>9</sup> He mentions visiting at least one Jewish home and attending a Jewish wedding, but what most concerns us here is his scurrilous second-hand account of a Marrakesh Jew who allegedly exploited his wife for prostitution, selling her favors «ya al cristiano, ya al moro, o a Lucifer mismo si Lucifer no desconfiara de los judíos» (p. 276).

The following quotation from *Moros y cristianos*, although lengthy, is probably the best and quickest method of demonstrating the richness of elements that are subsequently reflected in Galdós's *Misericordia*.

[Después] de recorrer sinnúmero de retorcidos, incomodísimos y mal olientes callejones de Marrakesh, ... detuviéronse, por fin, en un zaquizami del barrio hebreo. Una vez tendidos en almohadones y apuradas dos copas de *cognac*, díjole, sonriente, el judío en un francés salpicado de giros españoles:

—Yo traer a mi *mujera*...

El cristiano prorrumpió en risa creyendo que se trataba de una broma.

Pero como nuestro buen israelita formalizara la proposición, cayeron sobre él sin fin de improperios.

—¡Yo *traerla!* ¡qué quieres! —respondió. —Mi *mujera ser diamanta fino*. Mira... Yo casarme con una guapa fina, fina. Irme con ella á Francia, yo vender babuchas y *diamantas*. Ir después a Marsella; con dinero tomar café grande, grande, y vivir *bueno, bueno con mujera*. Pero ¡Jheová! ¡Jheová! *mujera* escapar con uno, *io* tirar de los pelos... ¡Pobre judío quedar solo! ¡*Mondieu!* ¡Pasar triste, triste dos años sin *mujera!* Un día ver *mujera* en el puerto; volver ella de América en barco. Pegarla fuerte, fuerte con cuchillo y llevar pobre, pobre judío en cárcel tres meses. Pasar un año y judío querer *bolgarse* y casarse con otra. Pero judío tener miedo y llevarla a Mazagán, casa de otro judío y decirle:

—Yo volver *aluego*, en un año. Tú decirme si ser buena la *mujera*.

Volver judío en un año y *decirle: Mujera* no ser buena. Ir con otros. Preguntarle *io*: —¿Con cuál?

—Con...

—¿Contigo?

—No *conniga*, decirme. Ir con *bajá*, con Chimol, con...

—¡Ser *diamante fino* la mujer! Señor. Pobre judío no saber, no saber. ¡Señor, señor! ¡*Si judío ser honrado y ser marido, y pegarla con cuchillo llevarle cárcel!* *Si no pegarla no llevarle cárcel*. Judío no ser marido y dejarla. ¡Señor, señor! Pobre judío ganar con ella, vender *mujera* cristiano y *no cárcel*...

Oyó el cristiano, avergonzado y confuso, pero no sin cierta compasión, el lógico y abrumador relato del pobre judío, que, con lágrimas en los ojos, seguía exponiendo un caso pasional digno de Dumas o de Bourget. Una vez repuesto el judío, ponderó las gracias y encantos de su mujer, *diamante fino*. Poco después, entraba ésta, traída por su propio marido. La hebrea, vestida con cierto provocativo lujo no hablaba palabra de francés ni de español, por lo cual fue muy difícil al cristiano entenderse con ella. Pero el marido, celoso y bondadosísimo intérprete, se encargaba de esto, pues cuando ya una vez á solas el cristiano y la judía, se ocurría al primero preguntarla, asomaba el esposo á la puerta, y complaciente, recreándose en el edificante cuadro que ante sus ojos se presentaba, satisfacía las preguntas del cristiano y volvía á cerrar la puerta. Y dicen, que en aquel repugnante cuartucho, oyóse este diálogo:

—¿Cómo te llamas?

—Se llama *Rimna*. Ser *diamante fino*, señor! exclamó el marido abriendo la puerta y cerándola muy deprisa.

Psicólogos escudriñadores, novelistas, poetas y cuentistas: ¿habíais soñado nunca con este increíble tipo de marido explotador de su deshonra? Confesad que no; confesad también que el corazon humano es más difícil de descubrir que los tesoros de un judío! (pp. 276-277).

The above quotation shows that in *Moros y cristianos*, as in Galdós's *Misericordia*, we have a vivid description of a Jew from the Marrakesh region of southern Morocco who has dedicated himself to commerce, traveled to Marseille, and been abandoned by his beloved traveling companion.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, this man also speaks a broken Spanish characterized by humorous and colorful mispronunciations and a constant use of the infinitive for all verb forms. Some of his italicized mistakes also appear —still italicized— in the speech of Galdós's Moor in *Misericordia*.<sup>11</sup> His wife's name, like that of Almudena's mother is *Rimna* (p. 277). He tends to be violent with women (as Almudena is with La Pedra, p. 1890 and with Benina, p. 1940) and he likewise has a knife for this purpose (p. 276 and p. 1940). While in France Soriano's Jew was a diamond seller and he repeatedly refers to his wife as «*diamante fino*» (pp. 276-77), Galdós keeps this same expression but makes his own character's speech even more colorful in this respect; he retains the italics but changes the gender. Thus he has *Samdai* («*rey de baixo terra*») show Almudena (among other precious stones), «*diamanta fina* en tal cantidad, que había para llenar de ellos sacos *mochas*» (p. 1913).

Significantly our citation from *Moros y cristianos* ends with a reference to the difficulties of finding hidden Jewish treasure (Benina's great temptation in *Misericordia*) and the challenge: «novelistas... ¿no habíais soñado nunca con este

increíble tipo?» The latter sentence would have delighted Galdós and could easily have stimulated him to creative activity.<sup>12</sup> We have noted in other studies that Galdós continually reversed the usual stereotype of the Jew and frequently refuted his own anti-Semitic source materials. (In *Gloria*, 1876-77, for example, he makes the Jew Daniel Morton, the clean-cut altruistic hero and the Christian mayor, Juan Amarillo, is a villainous money-grubbing usurer stigmatized by the color yellow, as were the Jewish victims of the Inquisition.<sup>13</sup> In *Aitta Tetauen* and *Carlos VI, en la Rápita*—both 1905—, Galdós clearly rejects the anti-Jewish bias of Pedro Antonio de Alarcón's *Diario de un testigo de la guerra de Africa* and writes key passages of these *Episodios nacionales* from the Jewish point of view, utilizing the Hebrew calendar and even inventing his own brand of Judeo-Spanish).<sup>14</sup> Thus in *Misericordia* we see the principal premise of the episode quoted from Soriano's *Moros y cristianos*—that to a Moroccan Jew money is more important than love—completely reversed. King *Samdai* offers Almudena the choice between fabulous wealth and the love of a good, true woman—and Galdós's Jewish character chooses the latter.

In addition to the episode of the *mellah* Jew we have been discussing, Galdós also used many other aspects of *Moros y cristianos*. For example, he identifies Almudena as being from «Sus, tres días de jornada más allá de Marrakesh» (p. 1882); in *Moros y cristianos* a group of people are seen arriving in Marrakesh from Sus just after Soriano has been speaking of local «judíos... y las sinagogas ocultas en casuchas blanquecidas» (p. 181). We know from Galdós's creation of *Aitta Tetauen* and *Carlos VI, en la rápita* that he frequently combined very disparate items of this nature simply because they happened to be on the same page of his Jewish reference sources.<sup>15</sup>

Galdós has Almudena correctly describe the region around Marrakesh as a rich, verdant agricultural oasis, and there are similar references in Soriano's book (pp. 170-71, 244, 264). We have already noted that Soriano's *mellah* Jew, like Almudena, has traveled to Marseille. In addition to the latter city, Galdós's Almudena has also traveled to Argelia, Fez, Mequinez, Tlemcén, Constantina, and Oran (p. 1914). All these are mentioned in *Moros y cristianos*, except Constantina, which Galdós may have substituted for Constantinople (p. 118).<sup>16</sup> Beggars abound (pp. 245, 270, 377), there is repeated talk of hidden Jewish treasure (pp. 141, 277), thieves are punished by having their sight taken away (p. 404; compare with Almudena, p. 1912), and people play two-stringed guitars (pp. 110, 412; as does Almudena, pp. 1952, 1953).

In addition to Jews, Soriano found hashish one of the more exotic aspects of Morocco and repeatedly observed people smoking this narcotic (pp. 45, 168, 330, 350). Galdós's Almudena is also a smoker of hashish, and, most importantly, he has his vision of Rey *Samdai* (Hebrew, *Asmadai*; Spanish, *Asmodeo*) only after he has smoked several pipefuls (p. 1913). This fact (plus Galdós' earlier description of Almudena's vision as «su oriental leyenda,» (p. 1910) seems to establish Almudena as a most unreliable narrator. Thus it is not surprising that Almudena's descriptions of *Samdai* (the latter correctly identified as the king of the Jewish underworld),<sup>17</sup> are certainly not in the Jewish tradition,<sup>18</sup> but seem more typically Arabic—and with specific echoes of material from *Moros y cristianos*.<sup>19</sup>

Other examples could be cited, but the above clearly demonstrate that *Moros y cristianos* was an important source for *Misericordia*.<sup>20</sup> Moreover the friendship

of Galdós and Rodrigo Soriano (attested to by the photograph and letters preserved by the Casa-Museo Pérez Galdós) also leaves open the possibility that Soriano could have supplied additional material after returning from Morocco. This new evidence, when considered along with previously identified printed reference sources (including the Hebrew prayerbook *Orden de Rosh Asbanah y Kypur* and the novel *Doña Francisca, el portento de la caridad*),<sup>21</sup> seems at last definitive proof that Galdós cannot be taken at his word when he says that the character Almudena derives faithfully and almost exclusively from a blind beggar who told him his life story in a series of Madrid taverns.<sup>22</sup>

Further work remains to be done concerning reference sources and their utilization by Galdós in the writing of *Misericordia*. However there is now no doubt that the character Mordejai-Almudena must (more than ever before) be seen not primarily as an example of Galdós's use of realistic observation and precise documentation, but rather a manifestation of the powerful creativity that allowed Galdós to combine and imaginatively transform material from very disparate inspirational sources.<sup>23</sup>

University of Kansas  
Lawrence

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See, among others, Vernon A. Chamberlin, «The Significance of the Name Almudena in Galdós' *Misericordia*, *Hispania*, 58 (1964), 491-96; Sara E. Cohen, «Almudena and the Jewish Theme in *Misericordia*, *Anales galdosianos*, 8 (1973), 51-61; Gustavo Correa, *El simbolismo religioso en las novelas de Pérez Galdós* (Madrid: Gredos, 1962), 207-13; Marcel Crespil, «La fe religiosa de Almudena en *Misericordia*,» *Romance Notes*, 13 (1972), 463-67; Denah Lida, «De Almudena y su lenguaje,» *Nueva revista de filología hispánica*, 15 (1961), 297-308; and Robert Ricard, «Sur le personnage d'Almudena dans *Misericordia*,» *Bulletin Hispanique*, 61 (1959), 12-25 (reprinted in *Galdós et ses romans* [Paris: L'Institut de'Etudes Hispaniques, 1961, pp. 51-62]).

<sup>2</sup> (Madrid: Librería de Fernando Fe, 1895). All references in text and footnotes are to this edition.

<sup>3</sup> Photocopy in my possession, thanks to the generosity of the Casa-Museo Pérez Galdós, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria.

<sup>4</sup> These articles were «Galdós en la Academia,» *El Imparcial*, Feb. 8, 1897; and «El buen Don Benito,» *España Nueva*, May 27, 1909, according to H. Chonon Berkowitz, *Pérez Galdós: Spanish Liberal Crusader* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1948), pp. 446, 480. For details concerning the tribute, see Berkowitz, p. 388.

<sup>5</sup> I am indebted to the Casa-Museo Pérez Galdós for copies of this material.

<sup>6</sup> See William H. Shoemaker, *Las cartas desconocidas de Galdós en La Prensa de Buenos Aires* (Madrid: Cultura Hispánica, 1973), pp. 497-503, 511-518.

<sup>7</sup> As had occurred during the 1859-60 war, Spanish periodicals gave considerable coverage to events in Morocco. *La Ilustración Española y Americana*, for example, published descriptions, drawings, and photographs of battles, Martínez Campos' journey to Marrakesh, views of the Moroccan capital itself, and once again also focused on the Jews of Morocco (January-April, 1894, passim).

<sup>8</sup> These feelings become especially intense on Christmas Eve (when the Jews are not celebrating, p. 47), when Soriano has to buy supplies from Jewish merchants (pp. 117-18), and when he can obtain Moroccan currency only from a Jewish money-changer (pp. 141-48). Soriano is also shocked when he learns the Italian ambassador considers the Jews «una raza de respeto» (p. 392) and in his last sentimental tour around Marrakesh before leaving, Soriano is reminded of medieval Spain. («Creemos que va a salir pronto, de obscura calleja, un rey de Castilla; que en la Judería se han de repetir las tremendas matanzas de Toledo y Sevilla» (p. 399).

<sup>9</sup> Soriano usually uses this Arabic word: «*Melag* o barrio judío,» but on occasion the Spanish *Judería*.

I am indebted to the University of Kansas's General Research Fund and also to its Endowment Association for the opportunity to conduct research both in Las Palmas and Marrakesh.

<sup>10</sup> La Nicolasa abandons Almudena, «*Misericordia*,» *Obras completas* (Madrid: Aguilar, 1950), 2.<sup>a</sup> edición, ed. F. C. Sainz de Robles, V, p. 1972. All references in text and footnotes are to this edition.

<sup>11</sup> Soriano: *diamante fino*, *diamanta fino* (pp. 276-77); *Ispania* (pp. 197, 198). Galdós: *diamanta fina* (p. 1913), *Ispania* (p. 1913). Although spelling differently both authors italicize errors with the word *mujer* (Soriano: *mujera*, pp. 276-77; Galdós: *muquier*, p. 1912 et passim) and *conmigo* (Soriano: *conmiga*, wrong gender, p. 277; Galdós: *migo*, pp. 1911, et passim).

<sup>12</sup> It has been repeatedly shown that Galdós usually read widely and collected material from various sources before starting to create Jewish characters. (See especially Walter T. Pattison, *Benito Pérez Galdós and the Creative*

*Process* [Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1954], pp. 88-102; and Vernon A. Chamberlin, «Galdós' Sephardic Types,» *Symposium*, 17 [1963], 85-100.

<sup>13</sup> Vernon A. Chamberlin, «Galdós' Use of Yellow in Character Delineation,» *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 79 (1964), 158-63.

<sup>14</sup> Chamberlin, «Galdós' Sephardic Types,» pp. 85-100.

<sup>15</sup> Chamberlin, «Galdós' Sephardic Types,» p. 92.

<sup>16</sup> Pp. 46, 48, 72, 76, 78, 80, 82, 84.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Sara E. Cohen, «The Jewish Theme in *Misericordia*,» *Anales galdosianos*, 8 (1973), 55.

<sup>18</sup> Over a period of several years I have shown these passages of *Misericordia* to Israeli exchange students and professors. Several have said that these passages sound as if they were inspired by the *Arabian Nights*. Galdós, as is well known, had his own four-volume set of *The Arabian Nights Entertainment* (London: 1838) (H. Chonon Berkowitz, *La biblioteca de Pérez Galdós* [Las Palmas: El Museo Canario, 1951] p. 174); and he speaks of *Samdai* as «el subterráneo genio» (p. 1950) and Almudena's account of his appearance as «leyenda oriental» (p. 1910). (I am especially indebted to Mrs. Sellina Maschiach Sapoznik for writing on my behalf to scholars in Israel, and for checking Hebrew-language encyclopedias and literary selections.)

In modern and contemporary fiction, *Asmadai* seems always to be a most fearsome demon who is to be avoided at all costs. For example, in the very long Yiddish-language poem *Der Asmadai*, he has his castle «far from Lithuania, far from Poland/Behind all the mountains of darkness/Hard by the road that leads to Hell.» There he tortures his victims mercilessly. (Solomon Rappoport [pseud. S. A. Anski], *Gesamelte Schriften* [Warsaw-New York, 1924], Vol. 8, p. 7, et passim.)

Isaac Bashevis Singer reflects a similar idea of *Asmadai* and his castle in such works as «The Black Wedding,» *The Spinoza of Market Street and Other Stories* (New York: Avon, 1974), p. 35; «The Mirror,» *Gimpel the Fool and Other Stories* (New York: Noonday, 1957), pp. 83, 86; and «On the Road to the Poor House,» *Playboy*, 16, No. 10 (October 1969), 271. (I am indebted to Mr. Singer for sharing with me his knowledge, conception, and fictional utilization of *Asmadai* [Lawrence, Kansas, April 8, 1975].)

<sup>19</sup> White camels, dogs, horsemen firing rifles, *Asmadai* in green robes (as is every important dignitary in Soriano's book) accompanied by followers in long white robes and a veiled woman seem completely Arabic, and are all very prominent in *Moros y cristianos* (passim).

<sup>20</sup> Other conceivable stimuli (passim) to the creative process and their possible reflection in *Misericordia*: «cantos hebreos» > Almudena's song when he thinks he is on Mount Sinai (p. 1954), veiled woman with Sultan > veiled woman shown Almudena by *Samdai* (p. 1913), «un rey mágico» > *Rey Samdai* with power to deliver hidden treasure (pp. 1908-09, et passim), Christian missionaries active in Morocco > Almudena's baptism and change of name by two Christian women (p. 1954), father-son conflict (between the Sultan and his son) > Almudena's rebellion against his father, taking the latter's money, and going into business for himself (p. 1912), caravans > Almudena's business caravan (p. 1912), «llegar a Jerusalén» > Almudena's idea to go there with Benina (p. 1984), and «terribles males» including leprosy > Almudena's skin affliction which some fear is leprosy (pp. 1984-85).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Sara E. Cohen, «Almudena,» pp. 56-57; and José Fradejas Lebrero, «Para las fuentes de Galdós,» *Revista de Literatura*, 4 (1953), 319-344.

<sup>22</sup> See William H. Shoemaker, *Los prólogos de Galdós* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press and Mexico: D. F.: Andrea, 1965), p. 109.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Vernon A. Chamberlin, «More Light on Galdós' Sephardic Source Materials: A Reply to A. F. Lambert,» *Anales galdosianos*, 9 (1974), 167-68.