

A MEXICAN *LA DE BRINGAS*: CARLOS GONZÁLEZ PEÑA'S *LA FUGA DE LA QUIMERA* (1919)

Vernon A. Chamberlin

It is generally assumed that Pérez Galdós had considerable influence on Mexican writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, but it has been difficult to point out individual works which show an intertextual relationship with any specific novels of Don Benito.

However one such work, which shows obvious Galdosian influence, has recently come to my attention.¹ It is González Peña's *La fuga de la quimera*, and it contains unmistakable echos of Galdós' *La de Bringas*. First of all, the family surname is Bringas and the wife is even referred to on one occasion as «la de Bringas.»² The marital problems of this family, including the wife's infidelity with a politician, are presented against the backdrop of a developing national revolution — one which also climactically destroys the upper-middle-class world of the Bringas' at the end of the novel.

«La señora de Bringas» (p. 235) (Sofía Lavín de Bringas) has a great figure, loves to show off new clothing, is socially ambitious, addicted to *lujo*, and is resentful of her husband's *tacañez* (p. 182). She secretly contracts «pequeñas deudas» behind her husband's back (p. 171) and is sexually intimate with the politician (Jorge Bazán) in the latter's house. Her husband, Miguel Bringas, is passive vis-à-vis his wife and he also has trouble with his eyesight. Just before discovering his wife's affair, he is described as having «ojos míopes» (p. 181) and a bit earlier the narrator has characterized Bringas as «ciego... y no tuvo ojos» (p. 180). Similar to Galdós' protagonist of 1884, the Mexican Bringas also fails to see the approaching revolution; and once it has started, he believes it can easily be suppressed.

There are many more similarities,³ but also important differences as well, which help to make this interest-holding, emotion-packed novel a success in its own right. «La señora de Bringas» is not the title protagonist and consequently she does not receive the degree of emphasis in the novel which Galdós had accorded his Rosalía de Bringas. Moreover, González Peña, with consummate skill, sets his work convincingly in the upper-class Mexico City society *ambiente* during the unsettled presidency of Francisco Madero. Mrs. Bringas enjoys her *paseos*, not while strolling on the grounds of the royal palace in Madrid, but in a carriage along the boulevards of Mexico City and on the park grounds of the Chapultepec Castle. In fact, her second instance of infidelity occurs in the «pavilloncito de Chapultepec» (p. 151). Eventually the reader is treated (as in Galdós' novel) to seeing this proud beauty receive a climatic comeuppance, but now not from a former servant girl, but from the politician — with whom she has fallen in love. (And he even calls her *cursi!*)⁴

Clearly González Peña admired Galdós' novel, considered it a fine pattern for depicting revolutionary change, and was quite willing to acknowledge his

debt to Don Benito by leaving ample and repeated testimony to his source of inspiration. Only time will tell whether or not there will be further literary incarnations of Galdós' memorable «la de Bringas.» Certainly she is an interesting figure open to all kinds of future interpretations. For the present, we are indebted to González Peña for giving us a passionate reincarnation of «la de Bringas» — in love, caught talking to her lover on the telephone, showing off her new clothes in Mexican high society, and under fire during the Huerta revolution of February, 1913.

University of Kansas

NOTES

¹ It is a pleasure to thank my colleague John S. Brushwood for telling me about this novel and lending me his personal copy.

² Carlos González Peña, *La fuga de la quimera* (Mexico: Ediciones México Moderno, 1919), p. 84. Subsequent citations are from this edition and will be noted in the text.

³ For example, Bringas' health disintegrates at the end of the novel, «la de Bringas» complains of having sold herself to the politician (p. 223), and the latter cites «cierta fogosa disertación de Thiers» (p. 164).

⁴ p. 221. Very early in the novel another character had commented, «Bonita sí es, pero lo cursi nadie se lo quita a la pobre» (p. 13).