Literary and Ideological Projects in Galdós: The Torquemada Series

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All of Galdós's novels reveal a preoccupation with the historical development of Spanish society. This is true not only of the episodios nacionales with their attempt to recapture the historical past, but the novelas españolas contemporáneas which portray the present as ongoing historical process. Even the most psychological and spiritual problems are always clearly linked to the historical situation. Thus both the episodios and the novelas served to mediate Galdós's concern with the development of society by probing the nature of social problems through their fictional representation. That is, the novels are not mere social documents which expose the flaws of society. Rather, social problems are present only as they are filtered through the form of the novel; how to probe the social problems is incorporated into the literary problematic.

In his frequently cited “Observaciones sobre la novela contemporánea en España” written in 1870, Galdós explained the necessity of directing novelistic attention to the “clase media” as the best way of representing the development of contemporary Spanish society: “La novela moderna de costumbres ha de ser la expresión de cuanto bueno y malo existe en el fondo de esta clase, de la incesante agitación que la elabora, de ese empeño que manifiesta por encontrar ciertos ideales que preocupan a todos, y conocer el origen y el remedio de ciertos males que turban las familias.” For Galdós at this moment the middle class was filled
with vitality and would be the protagonist of social progress. By the time of *La desheredada* however, things had changed. The revolutionary dynamic of the 1868–1871 period had failed to lead to the completion of the tasks of the bourgeois revolution, and Restoration society was stagnating.

Nevertheless, in the *contemporáneas* dealing with the middle class remains at the center of Galdós’s nonelastico concern, but now the question he poses is how can that society dominated by the middle class be renovated. In these novels he sought to represent society with all its imperfections and to explore alternatives to its stagnation. There are, then, two projects proposed in these works: 1. the literary project of the fictional representation of society, with a concentration on the middle class; 2. the ideological project of a search for a way to renovate that society. Hence the novels are not content with a static representation of society as it is. Rather they seek to provide a fictional presentation of social process, and try to see how this process can lead to a *new totality* which would be a vital alternative status quo.

In the tradition of classical bourgeois realism, Galdós carried on these fictional experiments through an examination of the opposition between society and the problematic individual. This opposition is worked out within a constellation of individually-typical characters which present a social space homologous to the real world. That is, there are characters who represent different social classes, groups, institutions and values. In general the problematic individual is presented as an outsider who seeks to realize some goal in a quest for personal fulfillment. At the same time society is portrayed as lacking the values or qualities involved in this enterprise, such that its realization would lead to social transformation as well as personal fulfillment.

Such is the case, for example, in *Tormento* where the major opposition is between the stagnant world of Madrid society represented by the Brugas family and the hardworking figure of Agustín Caballero; Agustín provides the possibility of a capitalist alternative to “una capital burocrática donde las personas que han hecho carreras por saber hacerse el lazo de la corbata.” A more striking example is found in *Fortunata y Jacinta* where the vitality and naturalness of the *pueblo*, represented by Fortunata, provides a possible source for regenerating the improductive, superficial world typified by the *señoritismo* of Juanito Santa Cruz. And in *Misericordia* Benita represents the possibility of spiritual renewal to a society interested only in commodities and appearances.

In the novels of the Torquemada series the structural problematic individual-society relation is similar. Rather than the articulation of a positive alternative, however, the interaction of Torquemada and society suggests total decay. Written between 1890–1895, these novels correspond to a period of crisis in Restoration society. Following the collapse of the *fiebre de oro* in 1886, the economy was continually worsening (crisis in 1892). A series of factors contributed to the falling apart of the political structure based on the *turno pacífico*. At the same time the workers movement was not yet able to offer an alternative to this decay. Galdós’s novels of this period reveal an increasing pessimism about the possibility of the formulation of a historical alternative to Restoration society. Thus, in the Torquemada series we find a gloomy vision of future developments.

If the four novels are dealt with as a whole, the social space covers most of Madrid society, from the aristocracy to the desperately poor. The beginning of *Torquemada en la cueva* marks a separation of two spaces. In *Torquemada en la hoguera* petty bourgeois and lower class types predominate. In this world Torquemada is at the top of the social hierarchy. But after Torquemada meets the Aguilas, the world becomes basically bourgeois-aristocratic, and the lower class types are virtually eliminated. Attention shifts away from the activities (like collecting rents and acquaintances (e.g. Dofia Lupe, Bailon, his tenants) of the previous period and focuses on the world of high finance and high society. This shift corresponds to Torquemada’s desire “ponerse a la altura que corresponde” (913). Here Torquemada is at the bottom of the social hierarchy. This social space is composed of types who represent different components of the new ruling class: Torquemada — the *pueblo enmascarado*; Morentín and Zárate — different versions of the bourgeois *señorited*: Gamborena — the church at the service of capital, and the Aguilas — the impoverished aristocracy. We will see later the importance of this shift. The basic duality is constituted by the opposition of Torquemada, a perfect example of that bourgeois hero, the *self-made man*, on one hand, and the Aguilas...
family, the representatives of the ancien régime, on the other.

Torquemada is Galdós’s most in-depth study of a capitalist. As such he is portrayed as greedy and avaricious. He is also differentiated from his predecessor, the miser:

Torquemada no era de esos usureros que se pasan la vida multiplicando caudales por el gusto platónico de procurar... No: don Francisco habría sido así en otra época; pero no pudo eximirse de la influencia de esta segunda mitad del siglo XIX que casi he hecho una religión de las materialidades decorativas de la existencia. Aquellos avaros de antiguo cuño, que alimentaban riquezas y vivían como mendigos, eran los místicos o metafísicos de la usura... Viviendo el Peor en una época que arrastra de la desamortización, sufrió sin comprenderlo, la metamorfosis que ha desnaturalizado la usura metafísica, convirtiéndola en positivista (908).

Through the portrayal of the protagonist, the nature of the period is also revealed. Although Torquemada possesses all the characteristics of a miser, the historical situation will not allow him to be one. His development as a character is a result of the interaction between his personal desires and the demands of capitalist society.

This interaction produces a series of changes in Torquemada’s life, the most important of which is effected by his marriage to Fidela del Aguila, a typical coming together of the rising bourgeoisie and the impoverished aristocracy. This marriage is arranged by José Donoso who makes Torquemada realize the need to accept the responsibility of the “clases directoras” (959) to insure the continual flourishing of bourgeois society by providing “una fuerza resistente contra los embates del proletariado envidioso” (958). Torquemada takes this advice, realizing that “los santos cuartos son también aristocracia” (971).

This new situation represents an important change, for here Torquemada begins to understand the relation between his personal greed and the interests of a social class. That is, to maintain and increase his fortune it will be necessary for him to participate in the collective enterprise of strengthening the position of the bourgeoisie. And this means accepting the necessity of social refinement. Thus Torquemada moves into a more luxurious house, dresses better, and expands his vocabulary.

The demands made by society are most clearly articulated by Cruz del Aguila. Cruz is primarily motivated by her vain desire to restore the family to what she considers to be its appropriate social position. The only way she can do this is with money, and the only way she can obtain money is by selling the family name; to “recover” the glories of the aristocratic past, she must accept the necessities of the bourgeois future. Torquemada. She too, then, is a product of personal desires and the demands of the historical situation.

Although she succeeds in this restoration plan, the new house of Aguila is quite other than the old; for it is dependent on Torquemada’s capacity to earn money. Its difference from the past is exposed by Rafael, who continually opposes Cruz’s designs. As he explains: “la casa de Gravelinas ha venido a ser un Rastro decente, donde se amontonan, hacidas por la usura, los despojos de la nobleza hereditaria. ¡Triste fin de una raza!” (1110). He compares this present to a vision of the “puré” aristocratic past. Rafael reveals that although the apparent glories of the family are the same as before, they are the product of a completely different reality. Hence the furnishings of the house, although as elegant as ever, are the spoils of what they were before.

The new society, then, is articulated as the coming together of two types, Torquemada and Cruz. These types are socially distinct. Torquemada is a self-made man who, starting from nothing, is able to become rich by hard work and an acute knowledge of how money works. He knows nothing about culture and social amenities. He is differentiated from the miser, many of whose characteristics he shares, by his understanding of the need to keep money in circulation. On the other hand, Cruz represents the values of the old landed aristocracy. She knows a lot about culture (or at least a certain definition of culture) and social amenities. She is concerned that the family be able to keep up appearances and have its name associated with the highest society. She is differentiated from the previous position of this class because she has come to understand the value of money. This differentiation is emphasized by Rafael’s continued adherence to the old, anti-bourgeois, values.

We see, then, that what permits these two different types to come together is their mutual dedication, although for different
reasons, to exchange value. Exchange value is the vehicle which allows the avaricious miser and the vain aristocrat to make common cause, although not without considerable friction. This similar preoccupation on the part of two otherwise socially distinct types, provides the basis of the vision of the development of society revealed in these novels, what Rafael calls “la dinastía de los Torquemadas” (1110). Here everything becomes a commodity. For example, Torquemada thinks of works of art only in monetary terms: “Veas los cuadros como acciones u obligaciones de poderosas y bien administradas sociedades, de fácil y ventajosa contracción en todos los mercados del mundo” (1121). “Good” paintings are those which prove to be good investments. There is then an ongoing process of leveling as all values become reduced to exchange value.

This leveling process is perhaps demonstrated best in Torquemada’s linguistic evolution, the culmination of which is his speech at the banquet held in his honor (Torquemada en el purgatorio, parte III, capítulo VIII). Here Torquemada praises those attributes which have led to his success: action (“La acción es la vida, la acción es... lo que se hace, señores, y lo que se hace... dice más que lo que se dice”), work (“Trabajar siempre, de consumo con nuestras necesidades”), and practicality (“yo soy hijo de mi siglo, del siglo eminentemente práctico”). The speech is filled with hypocrisy. Torquemada repeatedly pleads inadequacy as a speaker even though the speech is filled with oratorical flowers and other manifestations of confidence. He also expresses his extreme devotion to God and Catholicism (“Porque a buen católico no me gana nadie, bien lo sabe Dios, ni en lo de defender las venerandas creencias”), the nation (“no acerté más idea que el bien de mi patria”), and his family (“Pero mi familia, o sea el círculo del hogar doméstico es lo primero en mi corazón”). The formulaic nature of this devotion is underlined by the very language he uses to express it. Like elegant language, devotion to God, country, and family are merely manifestations of ideological conformity. Finally, in this speech we see how everything is incorporated into the economic dimension under the “dinastía de los Torquemadas.” Aside from his formulaic considerations of God, country, family, and his fellow men, Torquemada also talks of “el Meecenas de la holgazanería,” the “teja de Penélope” of an unpractical life, the “espada de Aristóteles” (erronously substituted for Damocles) which hangs over the head of the spendthrift, and Aristotle as the “filósofo... más práctico de todos.” Torquemada appeals to these classical sources for support for his devotion to practicality, and he reduces the totality of their thinking to an expression of the importance of maintaining a balanced budget. The most striking example of this kind of reduction is the comment, “de suerte que si os pasáis el tiempo en diversiones, no tendréis pan, y cuando el hambre os haga salir de corona, en busca de él, os veréis más listos lo habrían cogido. . . . los [read “como yo”] que supieron madrugador, los que supieron emplear todas las horas del día en el clásico trabajo, los que supieron renunciar todas sus diligencias en tiempo oportuno, no dejan nada para mañana, los que plantaron la cuestión de comer o no comer, como el otro, que vosotros conocéis mejor que yo, y no necesito nombrarle: como el otro, digo, plantó la cuestión de se o no se...”. Within the framework of this kind of thinking, the entire problem of existence is reduced to strictly material terms. For the Torquemadas there can be no other values. The elimination of transcendent values can also be seen in the role played by religion. It is the church that opposes Torquemada’s avarice, and Gamborena threatens that Torquemada will not enter heaven unless he overcomes this sin. But throughout these novels we have seen the development of finance as its own religion. For example, in the passage cited above, usury was described as having its own mysticism, metaphysics, sacraments, and sacrifices. Moreover, Francisco de Torquemada is clearly a reincarnation of the Grand Inquisitor Tomás de Torquemada, the difference being that Francisco punishes the “sinner” who violate the laws of capitalism. Finally, even Gamborena’s situation is contradictory. Although he defends traditional religious ideas against Torquemada’s, at the same time he serves consistently the interests of capitalism. He served for years as a missionary since, as the narrator points out, “nuestra precavida civilización trata de amansar las hordas hordas africanas y asiáticas, antes de dezeigenar la espada contra ellas” (1112). He was sent back to Europe “formando parte de una comisión, entre religiosa y mercantil, que viendo a gestionar un importísimo arreglo colonial con el rey de los belgas, y tan
sabidamente desempeñó su cometido diplomático el buen padrino, que allá y acá se hacían lenguas de la generalidad de sus talentos. El comercio —decían— le deberá tanto como la fé” (1121). Although it may still formally oppose avarice, clearly the church is also at the service of capital; the religion of finance has incorporated traditional religion.

The leveling process resulting from the dedication to money on the part of all the social sectors constituted in the world of these novels suggests the development of a “one-dimensional society.” Commenting on this phenomenon in advanced industrial societies, Herbert Marcuse has observed:

“Today’s novel feature is the flattening out of the antagonism between culture and social reality through the obliteration of the oppositional, alien, and transcendent elements in the higher culture by virtue of which it constituted another dimension of reality. This liquidation of two-dimensional culture takes place both through the denial and rejection of the “cultural values,” but through their wholesale incorporation into the established order, through their reproduction and display on a massive scale. If mass communications blend together harmoniously and often unnoticed, art, politics, religion, and philosophy with commercials, they bring these realms of culture to their common denominator—the commodity form. The music of the soul is also the music of salesmanship. Exchange value, not truth value counts. On it centers the truth of the status quo, and all alien rationality is bent to it.”

Although the Spain of the 1890’s was far from being an advanced industrial society, in this series Galdós clearly points to the consequences of the dynamic of capitalist “progress” as outlined by Marcuse. We have seen that all values — politicians, art, the family, religion — are portrayed as ultimately dependent upon the law of exchange value.

Within this one-dimensional world, the achievement of material well-being does not lead to happiness. Quite the contrary. As Torquemada becomes progressively richer and assimilated into the world of high society, he loses contact with his origin and control over his destiny; as he becomes a staunch defender of bourgeois society and its values, he falls completely under Cruz’s domination. As he explains to Gambórena: “Hago caso omiso de sus tendencias a la ostentación, y me fijo tan sólo en su afán de contrariar mi prerrogativa, de no permitir que se haga en la casa nada de lo que yo mando, como si cuanto yo mandara fuera una deficiencia” (1155). The interaction of Torquemada’s desires and the demands of society has led to his enrichment and to the strengthening of the ruling class, but at the same time it has brought about alienation in so far as Torquemada is no longer free to carry out his desires. Consequently he views his past nostalgically: “Llama buenos tiempos aquellos en que tenía menos conquistas que ahora, en que sudaba hiel y vinagre para ganarlo… Alli pensaba también, pero tenía ratos de estar convencido en mi…” (116). And as Torquemada experiences the pressure of his alienation and the fear of death, he makes an effort to recover the past; he returns to his barrio and visits an old friend, Matías Vallejo. But this effort to reestablish contact with his origins fails, for Torquemada is unable to forget that he is now a “puñetero” (1167). The hypocrisy of his protestations to the contrary is evident in his use of a language that is alien to the experience of the pueblo (e.g. “yo agradezco mucho esas manifestaciones, y tengo una verdadera satisfacción en sentarme en medio de vosotros y en compartir estos manjarazos suculentos y gastronómicos” [1169]). Torquemada has been definitively separated from his origins and from the relative freedom he experienced at the beginning of his career. He is now completely subject to the needs of bourgeois society.

We can see, then, the decayed state of the new totality referred to before. In this series there is a fictional presentation of the coming together of elements of two social classes previously regarded as opposites to form a new ruling class. This coming together is based on the one thing the two groups have in common, an adherence to the law of exchange value. But by coming together on this basis, all other values and social institutions are transformed into servants of the commodity form. The resulting atmosphere proves to be alienating for all. The new totality is therefore portrayed as being materially rich but, because of the overwhelming preoccupation with money, spiritually sterile. As such it is condemned. This “judgment” can be seen in the evident hypocrisy and alienation it produces and in its legacy.
Torquemada and Fidel's macrocephalic idiot son, Valentin.

When I spoke before about Galión's ideological project of seeking a new vital totality, I was referring to the project as carried out throughout all of the contemporaneas. Within that framework there is clearly room for novels with a vision of potential social renovation, and for a Torquemada series with its portrayal of further decay. For in the Torquemada series the interaction of the problematic individual and society produces a vision of a new totality which is seen as the one-dimensional society we have examined.

Simultaneously to this ideological project is the literary project of the representation of social process, of 'reality.' This is realized, as we have seen, through the use of characters typical of specific strata. The articulation of the novel's ruling class is primarily carried out by the coming together of the distinct social types, Torquemada and Cruz, surrounded by other components of the developing bourgeois social world such as Gambóterra, Mototán, and Donoso. The vision of a new totality is achieved through the representation of the overcoming of the differences separating the radically different types.

But to be able to overcome the differences, those differences first had to be portrayed. In the case of Torquemada this meant an examination of his origins. That role was fulfilled by Torquemada en la hoguera. In that novel we saw Torquemada hard at work laying the basis for his immense fortune. This involved the sad task of taking money directly from the poor. Consequently the social space of Torquemada en la hoguera was composed of many of the desperately poor, among others. These poor, who recent and rebel against Torquemada, do not appear in the following works. In fact, it is almost as if they were intentionally ignored. For when Torquemada tries to recover his past, he encounters none of them. Rather, he lives sumptuously with Matías Vallejo and friends, all of whom, though certainly not rich, are equally certain not suffering the poverty that the inhabitants of Torquemada's casa de corredor experienced. Since the poor are excluded from the social space of the last three works, they do not participate in the articulation of the new totality. In fact, this new totality could not include them, for it provides no means of resolving their very real material problems.

The new totality is, then, doubtfully condemned, once in terms of the ideological project, and again in terms of the literary project. Ideologically it is condemned as so stagnant and sterile as to alienate even those who most benefit from it materially. As such it constitutes a condemnation of the one-dimensionality of bourgeois society and a call for a radical alternative. Perhaps even more important, however, is the condemnation implicit in the literary project, for here the concept of totality is put into question. For the mass of the pueblo was represented as different from the aristocracy and Torquemada, and this difference is never overcome. The lack of an incorporation of the poor in the new totality therefore suggests that it is more than just decadent, it is a false totality.

Galdós was not ignorant of the need to incorporate the lower classes in the articulation of a vital alternative to a stagnating society. Fortunata and Benvita, the characters who present the clearest challenges to bourgeois society, are both uncorrupted representatives of the pueblo. Fortunata y Jacinta's Galdós's most developed presentation of a historical alternative. Both achieve, although in different ways, a certain vision of a new totality. But even in these cases, the totalities are revealed to be false. Fortunata develops the strength to defy and overcome the social barriers which tried to 'keep her in her place.' She even succeeds in instilling a new consciousness in Jacinta. But in the end she gives up her son to be reared by the bourgeoisie. Thus the union of the señorita and the daughter of the pueblo has produced an offspring who, unlike Valentin de Torquemada y Agüero, may serve a renovating function. Nevertheless, this renovation ultimately can benefit only the bourgeoisie. For, in spite of Jacinta's new consciousness, the postulated new totality will still be unable to resolve the problems of the miserable multitude of the cuarteto estado which stem from 'principios económicos' described as 'tan inmutables como las leyes fiscales.' That is, it will not be able to remove the misery inherent in capitalism.

Benvita represents the culmination of Galdós's effort, to understand the role of a Christ figure in modern society. Benvita is 'successful' in so far as she is able to separate herself morally and spiritually above the other inhabitants of her world. In doing so, she poses a charitable alternative to the bourgeois norm.
Moreover, like Fortunata, she finds another character to continue the values she represents: her “opposite,” Julianna, becomes her witness. Yet, in spite of having achieved her apotheosis and the “redemption” of Julianna, she is unable to offer a solution to the other — material — problems which are a necessary component of the novel. In Misericordia there is an extensive presentation of the harsh economic reality of a modern urban center, and the relation between this reality and the actions of the characters is clear. The duality, individual, spiritual transformation — material, social continuity, is unresolved; social reality remains estranged from the postulated spiritual totality.

In Fortunata y Jacinta and Misericordia we see again the duality of the ideological and literary projects. In the former the ideological project involved an effort to find in the pueblo a social force capable of renovating society, renovation would come about through the union of the pueblo and the bourgeoisie. In the latter it involved the formulation of a spiritual alternative to the bourgeois norm. This alternative would be based on an understanding of the role of an evangelical charity in the terms of the modern world. As we have seen, however, in both cases the nature of the literary project produced contradictions which frustrate the fulfillment of the ideological goals. For as Galdós understood realism, it involved the articulation of a social space through the use of individual characters who were also types. And in Fortunata y Jacinta, Misericordia, and the Torquemada series, this meant the portrayal of the urban poor whose material problems cannot be solved by any of the idealist solutions offered. Consequently the search for a new totality is continually contradicted by the representation of “reality.” Rather than a totality, the simultaneous presence of the two projects creates a continual tension that points to the social and literary conditions which allow for the production of these texts.

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is merely a capitalist gone mad. The capitalist is a rational miser. The never-ending augmentation of exchange-value, which the miser strives after, is seeking to save his money from circulation is attained by the more acute-capitalist by constantly throwing it fresh into circulation' (Capital, trans. S. Moore and E. Aveling, Chicago, 1915, p. 174). (p. 725).

9. In fact, Torquemada's role is described quite well by an early analysis made by Marx of the "all-revolutionizing power of money": What is available to me through money, what I can buy, that is what money can buy, that am I, the possessor of the money. My power is as great as is the power of money. The qualities of money are my —the possessor— qualities and potentialities. What I am and can do, therefore, is by no means determined by my individuality. I am ugly, but I can buy the most beautiful woman. So I am not ugly, for the effect of ugliness, its repulsive power, is eliminated by money. I—according to my individual nature—am lame; but money supplies me with twenty-four feet; so I am not lame. I am an evil, dishonest, unscrupulous, dull-witted man, but money is held in honor—hence so is its possessor. Money is the highest good, hence its possessor is good; money saves the trouble of being dishonest, so I am assumed to be honest. I am dull-witted, but since money is the real spirit of all things, how can its possessor be lacking in spirit? Moreover, he can buy the cleverest people, and if a man has power over the level-minded, he is not cleverer than they. I who, through money, can do anything the human heart desires—do I not possess all human virtues? Does not my money therefore transform all my inabilities into their opposite?" (Found in Marx and Engels on Literature and Art [New York: International, 1947], pp. 33, 34.) Although at first the Aguilas sisters find Torquemada repulsive and laughable, his fortune is so attractive that they put aside their initial reactions. In spite of his humble origins and uncivilized manner, Torquemada is accepted by the aristocracy. In spite of his total lack of education, he becomes "cultured." And, perhaps most ironically, in spite of his greed and avarice, he becomes "generous." As far as society is concerned, Torquemada is all these things he is able to buy.

10. Torquemada's thinking is, therefore, in line with the ideas of the advocates of free trade in Madrid during the second half of the century who considered that "art was an industry which, like other industries, must survive on legitimate profits" (Raymond Carr, Spain: 1808-1939, [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966], p. 277).


13. Thus the all-revolutionizing power of money described by Marx is portrayed