THE *ARCADES* IN MADRID: HISTORICAL AND MESSIANIC VISION IN GALDÓS' *FORTUNATA Y JACINTA*, *MIAU*, AND *MISERICORDIA*

by

LESLIE J. HARKEMA

(Under the Direction of Mihai I. Spariosu)

ABSTRACT

This study examines the depiction of Madrid by Benito Pérez Galdós in his novels *Fortunata y Jacinta*, *Miau*, and *Misericordia*, as illuminated by Walter Benjamin's view of nineteenth-century Paris in the *Arcades Project*. Drawing on Benjamin's concepts of allegory, phantasmagoria, the interior, and "Messianic time," I argue that Galdós' inclusion of both material and spiritual aspects under the aesthetic category of "realism" is best understood as an effort to reflect the interpenetration of religious tradition and narratives of progress in modern society. In the novels studied here, the religious does not function merely as symbolic allusion or anticlerical critique, but rather signals a Benjaminian exposure of the phantasmagoric syncretism of Providence and progress, a gesture which in turn allows the work of art to create new relationships between sacred and secular.

INDEX WORDS: Galdós; Benjamin; Realism; Historical Materialism; Religious Tradition; Progress; Phantasmagoria; Allegory; Messianic Time; Modernity; Modernization

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DEDICATION

For my parents, Jack and Laurie Harkema;

for my grandparents, Leonard Hofman and Beatrice Harkema;

and in loving memory of H. Elaine Hofman and James Harkema.

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GALDÓS, ALLEGORIST AND HISTORICAL MATERIALIST

> La patria de este artista es Madrid [. . . .] Él es el primer novelista de verdad entre los modernos que ha sacado de la corte de España un venero de observación y de materia romancesca, en el sentido propiamente realista, como tantos otros lo han sacado de París, por ejemplo. Es el primero y hasta ahora el único. A Madrid debe Galdós sus mejores cuadros y muchas de sus mejores escenas y aun muchos de sus mejores personajes. Si los novelistas se dividieran como los predios, se podría decir que era nuestro autor novelista *urbano*.
>
> Leopoldo Alas, "Benito Pérez Galdós"

It is perhaps a truism to say that the realist aesthetic of Benito Pérez Galdós is diverse and agile, capable of incorporating any aspect of his contemporary Madrid into its artistic representation. Throughout the twentieth century, critics have asserted and re-asserted the ways that Galdós' novels press the limits of realism, combining scientific, psychological, spiritual, and secular realities into one mimetic work of art. In *El simbolismo religioso en las novelas de Pérez Galdós*, Gustavo Correa writes, "su arte rebasa el aspecto puramente realista y naturalista de su técnica de escritor para adentrarse con ahínco creciente en las

profundidades de los símbolos íntimos que nos revelan aspectos transcendentes de la vida" (16). Delving into such profundities, Arnold M. Penuel has examined the intricate relationships between human psychology, ethics, and religion in Galdós' works, arguing that the novelist goes out of his way to reproduce a complex social context where authentic integration of these influences is a difficult affair (Penuel xi-xiii). Timothy McGovern has gone so far as to suggest that the inclusion of miraculous and supernatural events in some of the novels places them "beyond realism."

While I examine one of these "non-realist" texts (*Misericordia*, 1897) in this study, I want to retain the term "realism" in talking about Galdós' aesthetic, understanding it in the terms James Whiston has used to describe the novelist's approach in writing *Fortunata y Jacinta*: a practice of "creating new links, among others, between house and novel, café and tavern, shops and stalls, theaters and churches" (Whiston, *Practice* 12). As we shall see, these "new links" are central to Galdós' treatment of the relationship between Spain's religious heritage and the secular aspects of the nation's burgeoning modernity in the nineteenth century.

As Galdós himself insists in a much-quoted passage from his discourse delivered in the Real Academia Española, "La sociedad presente como materia novelable," the art of the novel "estriba en reproducir los caracteres humanos, las pasiones, las debilidades, lo grande y lo pequeño, las almas y las fisonomías, todo lo espiritual y lo físico que nos constituye y nos rodea . . ." (*Ensayos* 175-76). This array of immaterial and material elements in modern society lends itself to endless combinations, a few of which the novelist captures in his writing. A *flâneur* maneuvering through the streets and social classes of Madrid, he merges with the crowds yet remains detached enough to observe

them, tracing unforeseen connections between great and small, spiritual and physical. In her entry on Galdós in *The Cambridge History of Spanish Literature*, Harriet Turner describes this *flânerie* as a "heroic project": the scope of its endeavor at artistic representation does not limit itself to the world of things, nor to the world of the mind, but rather focuses on bridging the "gap" between them (Turner, "Benito Pérez Galdós" 392). As the novels oscillate between the lower and upper classes, the public streets and private homes, the waking experiences and the dreams of their characters, they situate themselves in an ambivalent landscape that abounds with narrative possibilities. In Galdós' extensive, fictional portrayal of his contemporary Madrid, there is always another corner to turn, another character to consider, another story yet to be told.

If the diversity of Galdós' writing has been articulated repeatedly, there is still more to be said of the distinctive way of seeing that allows for such variety and possibility. In effect, the Galdosian novelist stitches the various scenes he finds in the city into a story, or perhaps pieces them together like a puzzle. As he traverses the urban streets, his writing lends a narrative structure to reality, and he fills a role that Walter Benjamin identifies in his *Arcades Project* as that of the allegorist: a figure who, "[t]hrough the disorderly fund which his knowledge places at his disposal," "rummages here and there for a particular piece, holds it next to some other piece, and tests to see if they fit together—that meaning with this image or this image with that meaning" (*Arcades* 368). In the last third of the nineteenth century, in the wake of political revolutions and upheavals, and as modernization begins to exert its technological and social forces in the Spanish capital, Madrid abounds with images and meanings in search of coherence. It is not Galdós' ability to fit all of the pieces of the puzzle together, but

rather his perception of them *as* puzzle pieces—each with the potential to interlock with various others—that defines him as a "novelista *urbano*."

This sense of possibility in the unlikely and overlooked corners of the modern city, this wellspring that Galdós' realist aesthetic draws from contemporary urban life, is a recurring motif stressed in the mass of quotations that make up Benjamin's study of nineteenth-century Paris in his *Passagen-Werk*. Like Galdós' novels, this extensive compilation of notes and quotations also takes an interest in gaps and liminal spaces, purposely poising itself between exterior and interior, dream and awakening as it catalogues artifacts from the commercial, cultural, intellectual, and architectural repercussions of industrial modernization in France's capital. In his essay "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," written in 1939 as an introduction to the project, Benjamin describes the aims of the undertaking:

> What is expressed here is a feeling of vertigo characteristic of the nineteenth century's conception of history. It corresponds to the viewpoint according to which the course of the world is an endless series of facts congealed in the form of things. The characteristic residue of this conception is what has been called the "History of Civilization," which makes an inventory, point by point, of humanity's life forms and creations. The riches thus amassed in the aerarium of civilization henceforth appear as though identified for all time. This conception of history minimizes the fact that such riches owe not only their existence but also their transmission to a constant effort of society—an effort, moreover, by which these riches are strangely altered. Our investigation proposes to show how,

> as a consequence of this reifying representation of civilization, the new forms of behavior and the new economically and technologically based creations that we owe to the nineteenth century enter the universe of phantasmagoria. (*Arcades* 14)

Distinguishing between the narrative presented as the "History of Civilization" and his own methodology, his unique interpretation of Marx's "historical materialism," Benjamin seeks to expose the unanticipated and unacknowledged results of the economic and technological advances of the nineteenth century. The products of industrial and social revolutions do not correspond to an easily-identified, linear story of modernity, but rather allow themselves to be "strangely altered" in the collective consciousness of the city dwellers. The "universe of phantasmagoria" is a space where lingering appearances of bygone ways of life meet the contemporary public marketplace[1] to form unforeseen combinations of dreams and realities, spirituality and capital. Across the gap between present and past, new merges with old in an interpenetration of images that reveals itself as the essence of the modern.

In his theses "On the Concept of History," Benjamin further articulates the relationship between traditional historicism and the work of the historical materialist:

> Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history. But no fact that is a cause is for that very reason historical. It became historical posthumously, as it were, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years. A historian who takes this as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which

> his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the "time of the now" which is shot through with chips of Messianic time. (*Illuminations* 263)

Benjamin's historical materialist breaks with a linear view of history in order to do justice to the "time of the now," which relates to past events not by way of a causal chain but through a constellation of influences.

Such multifaceted concern for verisimilitude in representing the present is what leads Galdós to value all parts of his contemporary society as "novelable" material. By entering the minds of multiple characters, changing perspectives, and questioning received points of view, he finds an abundance of unnoticed stories that illuminate his own age with redemptive glimpses of the way things ought to be—what Benjamin, drawing from his roots in the tradition of the Jewish Kabala, identifies as "Messianic time."

As the imagery of Benjamin's passage suggests, religious tradition is very much a part of the nineteenth-century present and its relationship to history. While historical materialism rejects the reified sequentiality that historicism or any other doctrine imposes on past events—making them "like beads on a rosary"—it also searches out a kind of potential in the current moment that the Judeo-Christian tradition associates with the Messiah. Religious orthodoxy must be critiqued inasmuch as it limits itself to a linear series of causal connections, while at the same time the religious gesture toward further dimensions and possible redemption in reality must be valued.

In this study, I hope to show that this Benjaminian understanding of religious tradition is at work in Galdós' mature novels, explaining why the Spanish novelist, as

Penuel articulates, “attacked much of what passed for religion in nineteenth-century Spain as unethical” even as “the positive ethical values that come through in the novels, however humanistic their emphasis, are often clothed in religious symbolism and thus acquire a quasi-religious status” (xii). In *Fortunata y Jacinta*, *Miau*, and *Misericordia*, the religious does not function merely as symbolic allusion or anticlerical critique, but rather signals the historical materialist’s exposure of new relationships created in modern society between sacred and secular sides of life—as well as the allegorist’s work of assigning meaning to this new, hybrid reality. Galdós’ use of religious imagery and concepts in these novels reflects the prominent role faith traditions play in the phantasmagorias of nineteenth-century Madrid, as they converge with the process of modernization and all of the industrial and scientific changes that process brings.

In the pages that follow, I shall examine Galdosian realism as a practice of Benjamin’s historical materialism, specifically as it investigates the interaction of traditional religion and progress—two forces often associated with a cultural dichotomy especially prevalent in nineteenth-century Spanish society. The revolutions and upheavals that characterize this period in Spain’s history intensify the divide between two different Spains (*las dos Españas*): the old religious order of national Catholicism valued by conservatives, and the burgeoning, secular “modernization” of Spain championed by the liberals. Yet Galdós’ agile realism scales this divide, showing that even such clear distinctions as that between the *progresistas* and the supporters of the Carlist restoration become blurred in the collective consciousness of the last third of the nineteenth century. In both Galdós’ Madrid and Benjamin’s Paris, the pre-Enlightenment worldview of Christian theology and the post-revolution outlook of industrial capitalism do not exist in

clean opposition, but *co*exist as a syncretistic blend of ideas and beliefs visible in the city streets and in bourgeois parlors. By documenting these strange alterations in the riches of society, Benjamin seeks to unlock the potential held in the unstudied refuse of history. Galdós, in turn, with his fictional documentation, uncovers moments of narrative possibility in the corners of Madrid where the traditional sacred and the modern secular intertwine.

This syncretism of religion and industry is a frequently recurring motif in the *Arcades Project*. Among the quotations he amasses there, Benjamin notes that the Parisian arcades—the "ur-shopping malls" of nineteenth-century commercialism whose appearance and decline provide the framework for his project[2]—resemble church naves, while the installation of mirrors in cathedrals lend these gothic buildings the look of fashionable cafés. He quotes advertisements that target the soul in order to sell stockings,[3] and observes a devotional attitude in consumer culture, writing, "Fashion prescribes the ritual according to which the commodity fetish demands to be worshipped" (*Arcades* 18).

The modern marketplace runs on a blending of commercial and spiritual desires, and this interpenetration is not lost on Galdós. In a scene from the first part of *Fortunata y Jacinta*, Barbarita Santa Cruz and Plácido Estupiñá discuss *compras* during mass: "Hoy reciben congrio en la casa de Martínez; me han enseñado los despachos de Loredo…, llena eres de gracia; el Señor es contigo… colifor no hay, porque no han venido los arrieros de Villaviciosa por estar perdidos los caminos… ¡Con estas malditas aguas…!, y bendito es el fruto de tu vientre, Jesús…" (Galdós, *Fortunata* 1.257). While this passage can be read as the author's ironic comment on the faith of the two characters,[4] it is first

and foremost true to the tenets of Galdosian realism, reproducing a quotidian reality of the late nineteenth century: shopping lists and the "Ave María" have come to occupy the same space in the Madrid consciousness.

For Benjamin, this coincidence of religious and commercial mindsets in the space of everyday affairs corresponds to a shift in historical perspective brought on by industrialization, wherein technological and scientific advance meets religious eschatology. The unprecedented capabilities of the industrial age—that is, the ability to satisfy human needs and eliminate want for material goods through mass-production—renders the idea of a heaven on earth conceivable as never before. In the *Arcades Project*, this utopian-positivist vision is exemplified by Charles Fourier, a Parisian social reformer of the early nineteenth century. As Friedrich Engels articulates in a letter to Marx quoted by Benjamin, Fourierism preaches the gospel of technology, bringing a kind of salvation prefigured in earlier philosophy to fruition. Engels writes that its "Messiah" will

> tailor Fourier to accord with Hegel, erect a phalanstery upon the eternal categories, and lay it down as an eternal law of the self-developing idea that capital, talent, and labor all have a definite share in the product. This will be the New Testament of Hegelianism; old Hegel will be the Old Testament; the 'state,' the law, will be a 'taskmaster over Christ'; and the phalanstery [. . .] will be the 'new Heaven' and the 'new Earth' (*Arcades* 638).

With this recognition of utopian potential in machinery and mass production, the narrative of progress becomes interchangeable with the hand of Providence; the resulting approach to history blends positivism with Christian salvation. Benjamin cites Léon

Guillemin: “There are two sorts of providence, . . . God and the Ecole Polytechnique. If one should be found wanting, the other will be there” (711).

Despite their promise, however, the new material conditions fail; instead of creating utopia, technology becomes an object of collective fantasy. “Corresponding to the form of the new means of production,” as Benjamin writes in his exposé of 1935, are “wish images”—images that combine new technology with old beliefs and practices, in which “the collective seeks both to overcome and transfigure the immaturity of the social product and the inadequacies in the social organization of production” (*Arcades* 4). At the beginning of *Fortunata y Jacinta* Galdós exposes this fetishizing activity at work already in social views of a pre-industrial commodity, the *mantón de Manila*: “esta nacional obra de arte, tan nuestra como las panderetas o los toros, no es nuestra en realidad más que por el uso; se la debemos a un artista nacido a la otra parte del mundo” (*Fortunata* 1.128). The garment is not native to Spain; rather it is made so by the collective desire to transfigure it into the quintessential icon of Spanishness. The factory-made shoes that Fortunata flaunts when Juanito first sees her—“Tú sales para que te vea el pie. Buena bota,” he thinks (1.183)—provide a further example from after the inauguration of mass production. Religion, too, becomes involved in these phantasmagoric alterations of the commodity. As Galdós suggests in *Miau*, a child’s dreams about conversing with God can be inspired by looking at commercially reproduced images of the creation story printed on stamps in a shop.

As Turner notes, part of Galdós’ intent in demonstrating the confusion of religion and capitalism in the minds of his characters is “to unmask the ways that traditional religious morality *oppose[s]* new, positivistic views” (393, my emphasis). This critique

exposes how religious morality functions like Benjamin's "rosary," closing itself off from new elements in the constellation of the modern age. Yet, as in Benjamin, hand in hand with this unmasking of antiquated morality comes a questioning of the idea of progress itself.[5] Galdós often points out the economic difficulties and feelings of alienation experienced in the nineteenth century for which positivism fails to offer a solution. In *Miau*, reason and hard work no longer suffice to secure employment and social acceptance for Ramón Villaamil and his family; in *Misericordia*, the idea of social mobility by any but miraculous means is thrown into doubt by the story's up-close view of extreme poverty at the center and on the outskirts of Madrid. According to Benjamin, the creation of such counter-narratives to that of progress is the work of the historical materialist: "Historical materialism must renounce the epic element in history. It blasts the epoch out of the reified 'continuity of history'" (*Arcades* 474).

Many quotations in the *Arcades Project* are taken from the writings and correspondence of Balzac and Dickens, both of whom Galdós notably admired and cited as influences. Like these writers, the novelist of Madrid seeks to engage developing modernity in his own city, yet he does so with his own rigorous, gap-bridging aesthetic. This requires the novelist to become a syncretist himself, attesting faithfully to opposing worldviews and contradictory beliefs embedded in the intricacies of social life. Though realist narratives often claim to be a game of chance, insisting that the narrator has stumbled upon a story merely by accident,[6] the novel is always a construction, a production of the author's direction. While taking a historical-materialist interest in the minute details of urban reality, Galdós continues to hold a certain guiding, providential

control over the events of his story,[7] arranging them to create meaningful narratives of modernity—new allegories in which art points beyond itself to a greater, richer reality.

The nineteenth century as exemplified by Galdós' Madrid and Benjamin's Paris is characterized by scenes of exchange and synthesis over which two figures preside: the iron frame of technology and the gothic arch of religious tradition. They are opponents, vying for narrative territory in the landscape of modernity, yet their struggle also causes them to meet in a phantasmagoric embrace. From the dialectical union of these two figures, a hybrid species of ontology is born, which inhabits the artistic space of the realist novel. In a sense, then, the Galdosian novelist embodies the nineteenth-century syncretism of mechanized and religious worldviews. As he represents and orchestrates the new links that arise between progressive advances and Spain's deep-seated Catholic heritage, he engineers his own, novelistic form of Providence.

Krausist Idealism and Fourier

While the purpose of this study is not to suggest that the "Capital of the Nineteenth Century" be moved from Paris to Madrid, there are unique aspects of Galdós' Spanish situation that make him an apt critic and analyst of the modern situation—one akin to the "allegorist" that Benjamin sees in Charles Baudelaire.[8] This advantage is found in the way the Spanish literary tradition deals with the dialectic relationship between the sacred and the secular, both historically and in Galdós' present. In the nineteenth century, it is the influence of Krausism on the intellectual atmosphere of Spain—and on Galdós as an individual—that allows for an engagement with this dialectic, if in an idealistic manner that the novelist will ultimately reject.

Based on the thought of the German philosopher Karl Christian Friedrich Krause, whose writings were introduced in Spain through Julián Sanz del Río's translations of his *Ideal of Humanity for Life* (*Ideal de la humanidad para la vida*, 1860) and other works, Krausism asserts the perfectibility of humankind and the possibility of reconciling science with religion. Its idealism in this regard is reminiscent of Fourier's utopian vision of the future. At the heart of Krausist thought is the concept of harmonic rationalism ("racionalismo armónico"), which implies that all aspects of life can be rationally reconciled into a coherent synthesis. As Krause (in Sanz del Río's translation) states in the first of the preliminary comments of *Ideal de la humanidad*,

> El hombre, imagen viva de Dios, y capaz de progresiva perfección, debe vivir en la religión unido con Dios, y subordinado a Dios; debe realizar en su lugar y esfera limitada la armonía de la vida universal, y mostrar esta armonía en bella forma exterior; debe conocer en la ciencia a Dios y el mundo; debe en el claro conocimiento de su destino educarse a sí mismo. (Krause, "Ideas preliminares" 1)

As Juan López Morillas comments in his critical introduction to a collection of Krausist writings on aesthetics and literature, Krause's philosophy proposes an explicit program of action toward the end-goal of future perfection, "una puesta en marcha del hombre hacia la perfección individual y de la humanidad hacia su plenitud final" (López Morillas 10). Krausism requires one not only to perfect oneself, but to contribute to the grand, enlightened, progressive harmonization of the universe.

This effort to synthesize and unify disparate aspects of life contributes to Galdós' realist aesthetic. Noting this influence, Eamonn Rodgers has argued that Krausism

functions in the novelist's works not merely as theme, but as a worldview that supports his understanding of all society as "materia novelable." *Racionalismo armónico*, Rodgers points out, rejects "cualquier visión parcial del mundo, sea el materialismo escéptico, sea el idealismo puramente teórico y especulativo" ("El Krausismo" 247). Such resistence to partiality leads Krausism to attempt reconciliation between science and religion. In his study, "Galdós y el krausismo español," José Luís Gómez-Martínez affirms that the Spanish *krausista*, "lejos de separar o ver como contrarios la ciencia y la religión, tratará de establecer una relación de armonía entre ellas" (70). *El krausismo* insists on the interconnection of all aspects of life, spiritual and material, and thus provides a foundation for Galdosian realism's consideration of the relationships between religion and modern advances in science and technology.

In the Krausist view, an individual's vocation extends to all areas of life, including, as López Morillas' collection demonstrates, aesthetic creation. Krause insists that the beauty of worldly forms reflects divine concepts ("concepciones divinas"), and that art actualizes this beauty: "estas formas son reproducidas y realizadas inmediatamente por las artes de perspectiva. Belleza es la semejanza a Dios en lo finito dentro de su límite" (Krause VI.124). Not only does art reflect or resemble the divine; it also denotes a particular moment in "la Historia Universal, que contiene toda historia particular y la de cada individuo humano" (Krause, "Introducciones" III). While this "Historia Universal" contains echoes of what Benjamin depreciatively calls the "History of Civilization," and while its teleological progression toward perfection is at odds with the historical-materialist critique of progress, Krausism's value of art's ability to reveal historical particulars does coincide with Galdós' and Benjamin's interest in salvaging

unnoticed aspects of the past. In the Krausist view, each work of art contributes to this overall development by illuminating a particular historical situation.

According to López Morillas, the *krausistas* view literature as particularly suited for this task:

> [F]ieles a su creencia en la dimensión utilitaria del arte, los krausistas ven en la literatura una *magistra historiae*, cuyo menester, cardinal si no exclusivo, consiste en rellenar de sustancia humana el hueco cascarón de la historiografía consueta. [. . .] estudiar esa literatura equivale en cierto sentido a buscar el germen de los sucesos históricos, a indagar sus oscuros motivos, a esclarecer en lo posible el ritmo vital de una colectividad del que la historia convencional nos da sólo momentos discontinuos y, por ende, difícilmente inteligibles. (López Morillas 19-20)

There is a resonance between this *magistra historiae* and Benjamin's "angel of history," who watches the "wreckage" of the past and longs "to make whole what has been smashed" (*Illuminations* 257). Like the historical materialist, the *krausista* artist fills out a view of the past which has been narrowed by historiography; the tradition provides only an empty shell of what has happened, while each individual artwork recovers a piece of history that would otherwise be lost. Still, historical materialism does not follow the Krausist assumption that all of these pieces will neatly cohere. It instead searches out the anomalies and strange mutations that occur when they are combined in new ways. Galdós' approach to literary creation, while drawing on Krausism, also exhibits this interest in not merely filling out, but questioning and even possibly shattering "el hueco cascarón de la historiografía."

If *krausismo* and historical materialism coincide at times, the latter cannot wholly ascribe to the faith in progress upon which the former grounds itself. Benjamin points out the flaw in such optimism when he comments on Fourier's enthusiasm for technology: "One of the most remarkable features of the Fourierist utopia is that it never advocated the exploitation of nature by man, and idea that became widespread in the following period. Instead, in Fourier, technology appears as the spark that ignites the powder of nature" (*Arcades* 17). Fourierism assumes that assimilation will be unproblematic and does not anticipate the ways new advances might be exploited. This sets Fourier's utopianism at odds with the reality of the later nineteenth century, and a similar lack of verisimilitude makes Krausism problematic for Galdós. While the Krausist view of nature, humanity, science, and religion posits the viability of their synthesis into a harmonious utopia, and thus provides a basis for valuing the inclusivity of Galdosian realism, it fails to address the reality of conflict in nineteenth-century Spanish society.

Galdós' resistence to some points of Krausist thought can be explained by the timing of his involvement with the philosophy, during what López Morillas refers to as the "tercera etapa" of Krausism in the nineteenth century. In this third period, beginning in 1875 after the restoration of the Spanish monarchy, *krausista* writers incorporate other intellectual influences in their work and view literature as an autonomous creation in its own right. Literature is no longer merely a didactic demonstration of harmonic rationalism, but an artform capable of generating new harmonies in its representation of the world (López Morillas 26-27). This shift uncovers, as López Morillas puts it, "las posibilidades y promesas de la novela" (27). As we have seen, Galdós' approach to contemporary society as "materia novelable" takes this promise of harmonization through

creative work to heart. The psychology of marriage and adultery in *Fortunata y Jacinta*, the epileptic visions of a child in *Miau*, and the mysticism of the blind beggar Almudena in *Misericordia* are all evidence of the Krausist desire to avoid a partial view of the world; in each instance the novelist combines immaterial elements with physical situations in order to flesh out the verisimilitude of his narrative. Still, as a third-wave *krausista*, Galdós adopts this holistic outlook while remaining critical of Krause's belief in progressive reconciliation and perfection.

With the failure of the *progresistas*' Revolución de 1868 present in mind, Galdós cannot conform wholeheartedly to Krausist positivism: "Sus simpatías están con los intelectuales institucionistas, o sea los krausistas españoles, pero como agudo observador ve la incompatibilidad entre el ideal teórico y la aplicación inmediata en su sociedad actual" (Gómez-Martínez 57). If a reconciliation of spirit and matter, science and religion, progress and tradition is conceivable, it is also conceivable that an attempt at such reconciliation will fail, as it does in the case of Galdós' *krausista* characters León Roch and Máximo Manso.[9] While Fourierism and Krausism believe in a vision of modern society that fuses technology, science, art, and religion into one ideal synthesis, Galdós' novels—like Benjamin's annotations in the *Arcades*—attest to a divergent syncretism, by which these forces combine in unforeseen and unforeseeable ways.

Allegory: From the Baroque to the Modern

The second aspect of Galdós' position that makes his work amenable to comparison with Benjamin, and which defines his unique *flânerie*, is the legacy of the Spanish baroque. It is to this period, as represented by the drama of Calderón, that Benjamin turns in his

study of the German *Trauerspiel* or mourning-play, where he also formulates the theory of allegory that reemerges with his reading of Baudelaire in the *Arcades Project*.

In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin presents the emergence of baroque allegory as a philosophical response to a world on the brink of secularization, at a point in history when it has become difficult to reconcile the medieval, emblematic understanding of Christian theology with the rationality of Renaissance humanism.[10] In the wake of the Protestant Reformation and its stress on the fallenness of creation and all worldly things (including artistic representation), allegory—a system based on emblems taken from nature—loses its ability to signify transcendent theological concepts. Thus, since it continues to employ a demonstrably faulty mode of representation, in which the relationship between emblem and meaning has been exposed as arbitrary, the *Trauerspiel* becomes a self-secularizing artform. Benjamin suggests that, as they struggle to retain aesthetic meaning yet recognize their inability to signal the transcendent, these plays depict "the allegorical way of seeing, [. . .] the Baroque, secular explanation of history as the Passion [suffering] of the world" (*Origin* 166). The emblems of religious tradition remain, but are put to secular use.

Benjamin's "allegorical way of seeing" resurfaces in the *Arcades Project* in the Baudelairian allegorist, whose view of a present urban landscape juxtaposes it with the ruins of the past to reveal a dialectical interdependence between old and new.[11] This perspective is also to some extent that of the historical materialist, for as Benjamin writes in Convolute N, "On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress," historical materialism "explodes the homogeneity of the epoch, interspersing it with ruins—that is, with the present" (*Arcades* 474). Allegory in the industrial age is made up of the

remnants of bygone eras, past beliefs and traditions—including those of the baroque. Baudelaire, like the allegorists of the seventeenth century, responds to what Matthew Wilkens calls a "crisis of representation" (292): a failure this time not of Christian theology, but of the capitalist system of the commodity (Wilkens 294).

While mass production and the regularization of exchange seem to resolve difficulties of representation by assigning set commercial values to all goods and services, Benjamin and Baudelaire find gaps in this system, foreseeing that capitalism will prove to be an inadequate source of meaning for modern society. As Susan Buck-Morss observes in *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, "Commodities relate to their value in the market-place just as arbitrarily as things relate to their meanings within Baroque emblematics" (179-81):

> Dialectical images are a modern form of emblematics. But whereas the Baroque dramas were melancholy reflections on the inevitability of decay and disintegration, in the *Passagen-Werk* the devaluation of (new) nature and its status as ruin becomes instructive politically. The debris of industrial culture teaches us not the necessity of submitting to historical catastrophe, but the fragility of the social order that tells us this catastrophe is necessary. (170)

While arbitrariness presents grave difficulties for the *Trauerspiel*, artists like Baudelaire (and, I argue, Galdós) view it not as a point of despair, but one of possibility, where the juxtaposition of new and old can reveal truly innovative insight into modern life.

Like Baudelaire's poetics, Galdós' novels generate a dialectic between past and present, particularly as they contrast progressive Spain in the nineteenth century with

traditions rooted in the seventeenth. The world of the *Siglo de Oro* is very much present as a Benjaminian ruin in Galdós' view of modern Madrid. In a study of Galdós' early writings on Calderón and Lope de Vega, Peter A. Bly has shown that Golden Age theatre appealed to the novelist and his aesthetic of inclusive realism, "faithfully mirror[ing] both the daily reality and the spiritual aspirations of the society in which it was composed" (43). In addition to spanning the gap between material and immaterial aspects of life, baroque art also supplies Galdós with a method of social critique. Eamonn Rodgers ranks Quevedo among those seventeenth-century artists—namely, Cervantes and Velázquez—whose "critical stance . . . towards received views of reality" inform Galdós' realist project ("Galdós" 473). Rodgers argues that Quevedo's *Sueños* provide a basis for Galdós' social critique, particularly in the satirist's relationship to allegory:

> Whereas in Virgil and Dante the main thrust of the supernatural journey has an ulterior allegorical purpose (the exaltation of imperial Rome, the construction of a large theological framework), Quevedo, while using some elements of allegory, is much more concerned with the concrete circumstances of the here and now. (473)

In his own epoch, Galdós applies allegory to the "here and now," arranging the fragments of the past and the present in a manner that—in accordance with the tenets of historical materialism—questions "received views of reality" like the narrative proposed by Benjamin's "History of Civilization."

The presence of the baroque in Galdós' novels also suggests a specific handling of the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular. According to Benjamin, in the case

of seventeenth-century Spain the Counter-reformation creates a unique situation in which theological concepts are transferred to the secular realm of the monarchy:

> For in the supreme form of this European theatre, the drama of Spain, a land of Catholic culture in which the Baroque features unfold much more brilliantly, clearly, and successfully, the conflicts of a state of creation without grace are resolved, by a kind of playful reduction, within the sphere of the court, whose king proves to be a secularized redemptive power. (*Origin* 81)

Here the court and the Calderonian *código de honor* provide an ideal worldly setting for the portrayal of a symbolic order thrown into question by the Reformation: "The Spanish drama [finds] in honour the creaturely spirituality appropriate to the creaturely body, and in doing so discovered a cosmos of the profane" (87). Since the *comedia de capa y espada* limits its subject matter to the courtly world, moral and chivalric codes arise as "profane" semblances of a divine truth that can no longer be invoked directly. The baroque sets up its own proto-phantasmagoria, a dream world that allows space for transcendence within secular reality:

> Nowhere is this clearer than in *La vida es sueño*, where we have a totality worthy of the mystery-play, in which the dream stands over waking life like the vault of heaven. Morality is valid within it: 'But, waking or sleeping, one thing only / Matters: to act rightly; If awake, because acts are real, / If dreaming, to win friends for the time of awaking.' (81)

As I argue especially in the analysis of *Miau* in chapter 2, Galdós retains what Benjamin identifies as Calderón's "playful" use of the dream to represent the ruins of the transcendent in modernity's secular landscape.

While Galdós gleans the ability to span dream and waking experience and balance sacred and secular from the art of the baroque, he does not place the *Siglo de Oro* at the heart of a grand narrative about Spain's glorious past. In fact, his novels often exhibit a sharp critique of Calderón and his time. While Calderón's drama may function as a viable source of meaning for imperial Spain in the seventeenth century, from Galdós' post-Enlightenment perspective, as Spain approaches the loss of its last colonies, the *código de honor* is a myth that no longer applies to modernity. As Gustavo Correa has demonstrated, Galdós rejects the romanticized view of the *Siglo de Oro* propagated in the works of early nineteenth-century writers (Correa, "Calderón" 16-17). The vision of history and Spanish society that these authors promote impedes the critical examination of reality that the Galdosian novelist—like the historical materialist—pursues. Like Cervantes, he exposes the old system's unsuitability for modern life by creating characters whose antiquated views of reality place them at odds with contemporary society and make them unable to live in it. Correa singles out *Fortunata y Jacinta*'s José Ido de Sagrario as an example of this anachronistic figure; in this study we will see it in the quixotism of Maximiliano Rubín and *Misericordia*'s Frasquito Ponte.

Galdós' realism values the "here and now" above all else, yet the novelist recognizes that an essential part of the modern present is its relationship to the past—the "constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one." In order to surpass the antiquated Calderonian code of honor, he puts forth, as Correa notes, "una

fórmula de novela en la cual predomina la dialéctica entre lo antiguo y lo nuevo, lo estacionario y lo dinámico, lo falso y lo auténtico. Nuevas instituciones y un nuevo sistema espiritual han de surgir de las ruinas del antiguo" ("Calderón" 17). In each of the novels we will examine here, Calderón's art and his age appear in dialectic relation to the nineteenth century, at times signaling an antiquated way of thinking that is at odds with modernity, at others illuminating modern experience by blurring the lines between dream and reality.

Through dialectic presence of the baroque in Galdós' work, his realism engages the theological worldview of the past in a historical-materialist manner, resisting romanticized *historiografía*. As Irving Wohlfarth comments in an essay written in response to the initial German publication of Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk*, "Historicism is thus definable as a *false*, and historical materialism as a *true*, secularization of theology" (14). In Galdós' stories, the narrative that links the *código de honor* to the glory of Spain appears as a reductive view that counts historical events "like the beads of a rosary," while the novelist's incorporation of various elements from seventeenth-century art creates a constellation between his age and the baroque. As they show Spain's artistic heritage to influence contemporary life in multiple and even contradicting ways, the novels also suggest that the baroque conflict between sacred and secular is far from resolved in the nineteenth century. In witnessing to and offering new interpretations of this complicated situation, realism and historical materialism emulate the "allegorical way of seeing."

In the chapters that follow, I turn to three of Galdós' mature novels (*Fortunata y Jacinta*, 1887; *Miau*, 1888; and *Misericordia*, 1897), employing concepts drawn from the *Arcades Project* to illuminate the novelist's treatment of the relationship between religious tradition and industrial modernization in nineteenth-century Spanish life. In my analysis of *Fortunata y Jacinta*, I focus on two characters: Fortunata and her legal husband, Maximiliano Rubín. While Galdós presents Maxi's enthusiasm for chemistry and mysticism as a delusional utopianism reminiscent of Fourier, Fortunata maintains a strictly material, worldly view of life. Where Maxi's idealism fails to bring the salvation it envisions, Fortunata's ideas about how things ought to be constitute a modern allegory, culminating in the story's final resolution as she gives her illegitimate son to the childless Jacinta. With *Miau*, the realm of dreams that Galdós invokes already in *Fortunata y Jacinta* becomes more clearly the domain of phantasmagoria. Setting up a contrast between the bleak exterior world and the interior of the Villaamil home, the novel attests to the breakdown of reason and meaning in a bureaucratic and thoroughly secular modern society. Still, through the play of the child Luisito's creativity and dreamed conversations with God, the story is able to preserve transcendence in a deterministic world. Finally, in *Misericordia* the imaginative potential of Luisito's dreams in *Miau* is realized as narrative potential, as a fictitious priest invented by the protagonist materializes in the flesh to bring the story to a "Messianic" resolution. The fact that the saintly Benina and her fellow beggar, Almudena, do not benefit from the miraculous appearance, however, confirms Galdós' critique of his century's enthusiasm for progress.

Like Baudelaire in Paris, Galdós becomes a modern allegorist in Madrid, combining representation of the material world with new meanings to counter those

assigned by both reified tradition and commercial culture, and thus also adhering to the Krausist call to instruct society, if he remains skeptical about its ability to reach perfection. And like Benjamin, he sees potential for illuminating an alternate reality—a reality suggested by the "chips of Messianic time" scattered through the ruins of the present, where things are glimpsed as they "ought to be." As Galdós remarks in the closing line of "La sociedad presente como materia novelable," "Sea lo que quiera, el ingenio humano vive en todos los ambientes, y lo mismo da sus flores en los pórticos alegres de flamante arquitectura, que en las tristes y desoladas ruinas" (*Ensayos* 182). This allegorical, realist, and historical-materialist aesthetic consists in the interpenetration of old—the premodern theology still present in the Catholicism of traditional Spain—with new—the economic and social conditions of modernization.

As Galdós depicts the syncretism of Providence and progress, juxtaposing traditional and modern Spain, he brings new dimensions of reality to light. The resulting stories testify to what Benjamin would call a "weak Messianic power"[12] held by the novel and the novelist—a power to fit the pieces of fragmented modernity together in narrative form. Reading these texts in the twenty-first century, we count Galdós' nineteenth among the "long-vanishing epochs whose 'ought to be,'" as Benjamin puts it, is "presented—not in reference to the next stage of development, but in its own right and as preformation of the final goal of history" (*Arcades* 466). His novels, like Jacinta's "juegos de la fantasía traviesa" at the end of her story, make us consider "lo desarregladas que andan las cosas del mundo" in our own present, and his historical-materialist brand of realism invites us to imagine how things might be different. Says Jacinta, "¡Ah!, el mundo entonces sería como debía ser" (*Fortunata* 2.534).

[1] As Henrik Stampe Lund explains, "'Phantasma' means appearance or vision, and 'agora' means the public place, e.g. the market-place" (Lund 98). See also Margaret Cohen's study, "Walter Benjamin's Phantasmagoria."

[2] For a further description of the arcades and the inception of the *Passagen-Werk*, see Buck-Morss, 3.

[3] Benjamin quotes an 1830s handbill advertising textiles: "Ladies and Gentlemen: / I ask you to cast an indulgent eye on the following observations; my desire to contribute to your eternal salvation impels me to address you. Allow me to direct your attention to the study of the Holy Scriptures, as well as to the extremely moderate prices which I have been the first to introduce into the field of hosiery, cotton goods, and related products." (*Arcades* 172)

[4] Such is Whiston's reading. He interprets this linking of religion and commerce as one of many incidents in *Fortunata y Jacinta* that point to "the materialism of life that lies beneath . . . religious profession" (Whiston, "Materialism" 78).

[5] Michael Löwy explains that Benjamin's critique of progress is aimed not against the increase of human knowledge or abilities, but against the myth that humanity itself will improve by way of new technological discoveries, developments in production, and the domination of nature (Löwy 631).

[6] As an example of this Benjamin cites a passage from Alexandre Dumas' *Les Mohicans de Paris*; Galdós similarly proclaims, near the end of the third chapter of *Fortunata y Jacinta*: "si Juanito Santa Cruz no hubiera hecho aquella visita, esta historia no se habría escrito" (1.181).

[7] While Galdós' novels in some ways anticipate the author-as-demiurge idea that Miguel de Unamuno makes the focus of his novel *Niebla*, as Turner comments, "Galdós continuously retains control of his story, guiding the reader through the perceptions of both character and narrator via monologue, dialogue, and that effervescent, polyphonic mixture known as the free indirect style" (403).

[8] Benjamin writes in his exposé of 1935, "Baudelaire's genius, which is nourished on melancholy, is an allegorical genius" (*Arcades* 10).

[9] See Gómez-Martínez, as well as López Morillas, "Galdós y el krausismo: *La familia de León Roch*."

[10] For more detailed explications of Benjamin's theory of baroque allegory, see Wilkens 286-91 and Weber 493-98.

[11] Cf. Baudelaire, "Le Cygne": "Paris change! Mais rien dans ma mélancolie / N'a bougé ! palais neufs, échafaudages, blocs, / Vieux faubourgs, tout pour moi devient allégorie."

[12] Benjamin writes in the second of his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," "Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply. Historical materialists are aware of that" (*Illuminations* 254).

CHAPTER 1

FORTUNATA Y JACINTA: SYSTEMS OF REPRESENTATION

In his study, *Espacio urbano y novela: Madrid en* Fortunata y Jacinta, Farris Anderson argues that Madrid is not merely the setting, but also the structuring principle of Galdós' longest and most complex novel. As the author moves his "Dos historias de casadas" through the varied landscape of the Spanish capital, the city becomes a system: "Madrid no es simplemente objeto de meditación sociológica o fuente de inspiración sentimental. Es también un *sistema* que Galdós explota para la fabricación de sus novelas" (Anderson 10).

Yet Madrid is not only one single system for novelistic production; it is also made up of multiple systems of representation that characterize the modern age. In *Gender and Modernization in the Spanish Realist Novel,* Jo Labanyi signals two of these systems as fundamental to modernity as we see it in *Fortunata y Jacinta*: monetary value and political representation (166). Both replace reality with arbitrary forms of mediation, be they currency or *caciques*, conforming the complexity of urban life to a series of signs that must be interpreted. As Benjamin shows in his analysis of the commodity fetish in the *Arcades Project*,[1] modern systems of representation such as capitalist exchange value, while ostensibly regulating and fixing meaning, actually break down—just as, according to Benjamin, the emblematic understanding of theology breaks down in the baroque

period. When this happens, the emblems of modern representation become subject to new interpretations in the realm of phantasmagoria.

As in the *Arcades Project*, in *Fortunata y Jacinta* commercial and political systems merge with religious signs that pervade everyday life in a predominantly Catholic nation. The prominence of ecclesiastical figures like Nicolás Rubín and Guillermina Pacheco, Fortunata's "reformation" at the convent Las Micaelas, and frequent references to Providence attest to the fact that the nineteenth-century society continues to utilize religious methods of structuring reality even as industry and political change also shape the urban landscape of Madrid. In *Fortunata y Jacinta*, Galdós' characters succeed or fail depending on their response to the "crises of representation" that arise in the gaps and conflicts between the emblems of these competing systems. Many—and above all, Maximiliano Rubín—respond with an idealistic effort to impose their own schema onto reality, but only succeed in separating themselves from it. By contrast, Fortunata demonstrates an ability to engage modern life in all its contradiction and construct new meaning by combining elements from the material and immaterial realities of Madrid.

Maximiliano Rubín: God from the Machine

From among the tools upon which individuals draw in order to interpret modern life in *Fortunata y Jacinta*, the most prevalent is the religious concept of Providence. Early in the novel, Galdós' narrator invokes this idea to describe the birth of one of the story's central characters, Juanito Santa Cruz: "Por fin le mandó en carne mortal, cuando los esposos empezaron a quejarse de la Providencia y a decir que les había engañado"

(*Fortunata* 1.143). Later on, when Juanito's wife Jacinta laments her own lack of children, her mother-in-law advises resignation to the workings of Providence: "Dios, que les diera tantos bienes, habíales privado de aquél. No había más remedio que resignarse, alabando la mano del que lo mismo muestra su omnipotencia dando que quitando" (1.239). The idea of God's sovereignty is used to explain why things are as they are.

Yet when events unfold differently than expected, the characters of *Fortunata y Jacinta* are usually more quick to question Providence than to conform themselves to it. Even the narrator, in relating that the well-to-do, bourgeois Don Baldomero Santa Cruz has won the lottery, comments, "La Providencia no había andado en aquello muy lista que digamos, porque ellos no necesitaban de la lotería para nada, y aun parecía que les estorbaba un premio que, en buena lógica, debía de ser para los infelices que juegan por mejorar de fortuna" (1.379). When the divine will runs against the logic of a character's own understanding of how things ought to be, the assumption is that God has slipped up. Jacinta complains of Providence's irrationality in not giving her a child, comparing herself to a less wealthy friend: "Para mayor contrasentido, Candelaria, que estaba casada con un pobre, había tenido dos de un vientre. ¡Y ella, que era rica, no tenía ni siquiera medio!... Dios estaba ya chocho sin duda" (1.240).

That Providence seems to fail and God appears "chocho" in these situations is due to the nineteenth century's conflation of divine guidance with the narratives of progress that dominate the period—the equation of Providence and the Ecole Polytechnique that Benjamin cites in the *Arcades Project*. As industrialization, advances in science and technology, Darwinism, and even Krausist idealism cast the future as a time of

guaranteed improvement for the human race, one is less inclined to resign him- or herself to God's will than to expect God to better his or her situation. This attitude is especially apparent in Maximiliano Rubín, husband to the other titular *casada*, Fortunata.

As James Whiston observes, "Maxi is one of several characters in the book who are prepared to accept religion as long as things go well" ("Materialism" 68). Maxi is naturally small, sickly, and lethargic, but upon meeting Fortunata he acquires the energetic zeal of a revolutionary.[2] When he succeeds in convincing her to marry him, Maxi firmly believes in Providence: "ya no podía dudar de que la Providencia le favorecía, abriéndole camino" (*Fortunata* 1.500). He becomes convinced that he has been given a moral mission to reform Fortunata from her past life—which includes her seduction by Juanito Santa Cruz in the first part of the novel—and turn her into a respectable woman, "una honrada." As he explains to his aunt, Doña Lupe, Maxi is sure that his mission is God's will: "Lo que yo hago ahora [. . .] es [. . .] una acción noble, y mi conciencia me la aprueba, y estoy tan satisfecho de ella como si tuviera a Dios dentro de mí diciéndome: *bien*, *bien*" (1.536).

Despite this assurance, however, Maxi's plans are founded not on observations of the real world, but on a quixotic idealism that proves incapable of changing the social realities around him. Like Charles Fourier in Paris, Maxi constructs a utopian vision without considering real conditions—specifically, the difficulties of bringing a woman from a low-class background into nineteenth-century Spain's bourgeoisie. In the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin quotes a complaint voiced by Fourier in his *Ouevres* to demonstrate that utopianism imposes certain expectations on Providence: "List of charges to be brought against God, on the hypothesis of a gap in the social code" (*Arcades* 632).When

reality does not conform to a revolutionary's ideals, he finds fault with the divine order. Similarly Maxi, when Fortunata leaves him and resumes her affair with Juanito at the end of part 2, also responds by questioning God and the moral code, saying to her, "Me estás haciendo creer que no hay Dios, que portarse bien y portarse mal todo es lo mismo" (*Fortunata* 1.701). Maxi's view of Providence only works when events conform to his own plans.

As he tries to force the world to match his ideals, Maxi draws from systems of representation that consistently fall into crisis. His whole family, in fact, from the time it is introduced into the novel at the beginning of part 2, is associated with the breakdown of both commercial and political systems. The narrator tells us that Maxi's father's goldsmith shop is forced to close during the first days of the Revolución Gloriosa: "En una misma fecha cayeron, pues, dos cosas seculares, el trono aquel y la tienda aquella, que si no era tan antigua como la monarquía española, éralo más que los Borbones, pues su fundación databa de 1640" (1.447). These "two secular things," the monarchy and the Rubíns' commercial establishment, correspond to the systems that Labanyi associates with modernity in *Fortunata y Jacinta*, and also link Maxi's family to the Benjaminian baroque, recalling the seventeenth-century turn to the court as a secular replacement for the emblematics of Christian theology. In the nineteenth century, however, after the French revolution and a series of civil wars in Spain, political upheaval attests to the fact that the monarchy no longer functions as a source of meaning for modern society. For the Rubíns, this political failure accompanies a breakdown of commerce, suggesting that capitalism, too, will fail as a secular system of representation.

In this initial characterization of the family and through the idiosyncrasies of its members, the Rubíns serve as a microcosm of the ideological landscape of *Fortunata y Jacinta*, where a wide range of belief systems converge, conflict, and overlap. Maxi's aunt, Doña Lupe, is a nominal Catholic who orders her world according to finance, using the Biblical call to give to God what is God's and to Caesar what is Caesar's ("dar *a Dios lo que es de Dios y a César*, etc..." [1.548]) as justification for her miserly materialism. Of Maxi's two brothers, Nicolás is a priest of particularly dogmatic convictions, while Juan Pablo dabbles in Carlism and positivism, picking up various ideas in the cafés of the city.[3]

Maxi also experiments with and conflates multiple ideologies and philosophies over the course of the novel; Galdós' narrator tells us that he seems "moralmente [. . .] hecho de sobras" (1.457). He consumes these "leftovers"—or ruins—of various systems of thought with unrelenting idealism, blending them to create a fantasy world. His proclivity for illusion is already apparent in his early chemistry studies, where science lessons become a lens that tints his view of the world. During class he gazes out the window at military trainees practicing outside:

> En la clase misma, que por la placidez del local y la monotonía de la lección convidaba a la somnolencia, se ponía a jugar con la fantasía y a provocar y encender la ilusión. El resultado era un completo éxtasis, y al través de la explicación sobre las propiedades terapéuticas de las tinturas madres, veía a los alumnos militares en su estudio táctico de campo, como se puede ver un paisaje al través de una vidriera de colores. (1.458)

Maxi's coloring of reality by filtering it through the lens of science exemplifies his approach to life throughout the novel. He repeatedly superimposes systematic frameworks—taken from science, technology, and even the *código de honor*—onto the world around him in order to imagine an ideal existence, represented in this case by the robust soldiers whose physical stature his feeble body can never attain.

As Galdós develops Maxi's character, it becomes clear that his idealism is rooted in the Spanish baroque. In addition to the quixotic fluctuations that dominate the young chemist's personality—as the narrator remarks, "Vivía dos existencias, la del pan y la de las quimeras" (1.461)—he experiences a confusion of dreams and real life that recalls Calderón's Segismundo:

> Al despertar, en ese momento en que los juicios de la realidad se confunden con las imágenes mentirosas del sueño y hay en el cerebro un crepúsculo, una discusión vaga entre lo que es verdad y lo que no lo es, el engaño persistía un rato, y Maximiliano hacía por retenerlo, volviendo a cerrar los ojos y atrayendo las imágenes que se dispersaban. Verdaderamente—decía él—, ¿por qué ha de ser una cosa más real que la otra? ¿Por qué no ha de ser sueño lo del día y vida efectiva lo de la noche? [. . .] ¿Qué razón hay para que no diga yo ahora mientras me visto: 'Maximiliano, ahora te estás echando a dormir. Vas a pasar mala noche, con pesadilla y todo, o sea con clase de *Materia farmacéutica animal*...'? (1.461-62)

The opening of this passage seems to invoke a Benjaminian interest in the liminal space between dream and awakening, where the mind is in a vague argument with its

phantasmagorias over what is real and what is not. In the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin values dreams for their ability to illuminate the material conditions of real life. They provide a "teleological moment" that leads to a social "awakening" (*Arcades* 390), a new awareness of and engagement with modern reality. As the passage continues, however, we see that Maxi would prefer never to awake. He does not look to dreams as a source of insight into reality, but as an escape from it. Rather than engaging difficulties, he prefers to construct his own version of Segismundo's tower,[4] distancing himself from the external world with his series of superimposed theories.

When Fortunata enters the picture, then, it is to be expected that Maxi does not relate to her directly, but only through the mediation of his quixotic idealism, favoring the version of her that he carries stamped in his mind over her real person, "de carne y hueso." A nineteenth-century Dulcinea del Toboso, Fortunata serves as the centerpiece of and catalyst for a new but no less idealistic view of the world than that of Cervantes' Alonso Quijano. While Maxi imagines the novelty of his changed perspective with revolutionary grandeur ("los antiguos moldes estaban rotos. Todo el mundo y toda la existencia anteriores a aquel estado novísimo se hundían o se disipaban como las tinieblas al salir el sol" [1.470]), the inspiration that he perceives as "novísimo" is merely a recapitulation of the illusions of Don Quijote. The reformation of Fortunata becomes the adventure and "misión moral" (1.493) of a knight-errant, bound to save his lady's honor: "Considerábase como si hubiera estado durmiendo hasta el momento en que su destino le puso delante la mujer aquella y el problema de la redención" (1.494).[5]

What is unique to Maxi's nineteenth-century idealism is the promise of science. After falling for Fortunata, he returns eagerly to his chemistry studies, in search of a

method for his modern *hazaña*: “cuando fue metodizando su amor, la conciencia de la misión moral que se proponía cumplir le estimuló al estudio, para hacerse pronto hombre de carrera. Y era muy particular lo que le ocurría. Se notaba más despierto, más perspicaz para comprender, más curioso de los secretos de la ciencia” (1.493). These “secrets of science” stem from the idea of progress that Maxi absorbs from the modern world around him, and prove to fit well with his own, syncretistic understanding of Providence. As he applies scientific methods to analyze not only chemical reactions but also his own life, Maxi assumes that the divine will must correspond to a mechanized system. By the time it has been decided that Fortunata will go to the convent Las Micaelas to be reformed from her past life and prepare for marriage, Maxi has begun to reflect on “las causas que ordenan el universo e imprimen al mundo físico como al mundo moral movimiento solemne, regular y matemático”: “Le había entrado fe ciega en la acción directa de la Providencia sobre el mecanismo funcionante de la vida menuda. (1.586)

As part 2 of *Fortunata y Jacinta* comes to a close, Maxi imposes this conflation of Providence, his own idealism, and industrial modernity onto a physical object: the windmill that pumps water near the Chamberí church, in the vicinity of his home in northern Madrid. Vernon Chamberlin has focused on this piece of machinery as a symbolic gage for the advances and setbacks of Maxi’s relationship with Fortunata in the novel. While Chamberlin interprets the water pump specifically in terms of sexual frustration and impotence, it is an object that Maxi identifies with the state of his life in general.[6] Notably, the windmill is an emblem of industrial and technological progress; as Chamberlin notes, the availability of water was a “revolutionary development” at the time of *Fortunata y Jacinta*’s composition (Chamberlin, “Poor Maxi’s” 427-28). Maxi

has his first encounter with the mechanism while Fortunata is at Las Micaelas, and its movement relates to the advancement of his plans for her:

> Desde que pasaba de la iglesia de Chamberí veía el disco de la noria, y ya no le quitaba los ojos hasta llegar próximo a él. Cuando el motor daba sus vueltas con celeridad, el enamorado, sin saber por qué y obedeciendo a un impulso de su sangre, avivaba el paso. No sabía explicarse por qué oculta relación de las cosas la velocidad de la máquina le decía: 'Apresúrate, ven, que hay novedades.' Pero luego llegaba y no había novedad alguna, como no fuera que aquel día soplaba el viento con más fuerza. [. . .] El estar parado el motor parecíale señal de desventura" (*Fortunata* 1.602).

Though he cannot explain why, Maxi associates the speed of the machine's motion with the proper functioning of his own method for solving "el problema de la redención."

Furthermore, he assigns religious significance to the windmill. We discover this through Maxi's reaction when Fortunata, on their wedding night, resumes her dishonorable affair with Juanito. The cuckolded newlywed directs his anger and disillusionment at this technological idol:

> Maldición sacrílega escapóse de sus labios, y renegó de que hubieran venido a estar tan cerca su deshonra y el santuario donde le habían dorado la infame píldora de su ilusión. En otros términos: él había ido allí en busca de una hostia, y le habían dado una rueda de molino… y lo peor era que se la había tragado. (1.705)

Maximiliano turns to the technology of the windmill in a sacramental fashion, hoping that it will function as a source of meaning comparable to Holy Communion. Despite his

enthusiasm for the developments of nineteenth-century industrial progress, this failed effort to represent the transcendent denotes a baroque sensibility—not only because it recalls the crisis Benjamin identifies with the *Trauerspiel*, but also because it arises from an antiquated worldview. Maxi's quixotic fixation on the windmill—an attempt to perform a *deus ex machina*, drawing Providence from technology—only distances him further from modernity.

Like Machado's *noria*, moreover, the example of the windmill confirms Benjamin's historical-materialist insistence that the linear narrative of progress upon which modern society depends continually breaks down. As Geoffrey Ribbans has noted, Maxi's "extreme idealism" is "coupled with innate, insoluble frustration" (*Conflicts* 167), for his enthusiastic quest to redeem Fortunata only leads him back to the sorry state in which he enters the novel. From the baroque code of honor to his deification of technology, Maxi's systems fail to bring coherence to modern reality, and he in turn fails both as Fortunata's redeemer and as her husband.

In part 3 of the novel, as he succumbs further and further to the insanity of his quixotic nature, Maxi comes to believe that he is a prophet, announcing to Fortunata, "Nacerá de ti el verdadero Mesías" (2.382). Though his madness makes his vision as unrealistic as the utopia envisioned by Fourier, this annunciation does anticipate the role that the baby Fortunata later conceives by Juanito will play in the novel's finale. The force that enacts this resolution, however, is not Maxi's idealism, but the evolution of an idea that Galdós constructs in Fortunata's mind to create what Benjamin would identify as a modern allegory.

Fortunata: The Allegory of the Idea

While Maxi responds to the multiplicity of systems of representation in the modern city by using them to impose idealistic frameworks onto reality, Fortunata engages and embodies urban realities dialectically. Fortunata is both a lower-class woman and a potential "honrada"; she is perceived at times as a mechanism, at times as a saint; and in bearing Juanito's child she is at once adulteress and true wife, the mother of "el único *hijo de la casa*" (2.455) in the Santa Cruz family. During the period between her first romance with Juanito and her discovery by Maximiliano, she travels to Paris and works as a prostitute—a figure that Benjamin views as the ultimate dialectical image of capitalism, "commodity and seller in one."[7]

In Galdós' novel, Fortunata's character functions as an artifact that illuminates modern culture, not only in her corporeal existence but also as she reflects the psychological realities of an age dominated by phantasmagoria. Like Maxi, she is influenced by a variety of discourses, among them her religious training in Las Micaelas and the preaching of the philanthropist Guillermina Pachecho; the rebelliousness of her companion at Las Micaelas, Mauricia *la Dura*; and the "filosofía práctica" of Evaristo Feijóo. Yet rather than accepting these discourses as complete interpretations of reality, Fortunata treats them as fragments, pairing the various meanings and ideas they present with the physical conditions of her life. Through the unanticipated connections between religion, social status, and commerce that occupy her mind and develop over the course of the novel, Galdós creates a new system of representation that structures the narrative of *Fortunata y Jacinta*.

In a chapter entitled “La idea… la pícara idea” in part 3 of the novel, Fortunata has a dream that particularly illustrates the way Galdós illuminates modern culture through her. By contrast with Maxi’s oneiric escapism, this vision engages urban life in realistic detail, and in so doing calls attention to aspects of society that would otherwise go unnoticed. In an extensive reading of this dream that has sparked much critical debate, Paul Ilie argues, “Rather than a pre-Freudian dream, the passage may be interpreted as a proto-Proustian recapitulation of past time, a condensation of the narrator’s own consciousness beyond that of the dreamer” (35). Against a view of the dream as the expression of Fortunata’s repressed sexual desires, Ilie understands the episode as a moment of insight into the collective consciousness. As such, the scenes through which Fortunata passes reflect intersections and collisions of industry, commerce, progress, and religion.[8]

In the dream, Fortunata strolls through Madrid and takes note of various peculiarities in the urban scene—unnoticed and illuminating details that Galdós, like Benjamin’s historical materialist, aims to uncover. Her *flânerie* begins with a look into the window of a plumbing shop, full of “multitud de cosas para llevar y traer el agua.” Recalling the well and windmill that hold so much significance for Maxi, the plumbing mechanisms denote recent developments in technology. The advancement suggested by these industrial images is countered, however, by the sights that follow: Fortunata glances into a textile shop and sees a dwarf, described as “alimaña de transición que se ha quedado a la mitad del camino darwinista” (*Fortunata* 2.255), and then comes upon a chaotic traffic jam. Both are images of obstructed progress: in the first the Darwinist path

defined by the “survival of the fittest” has been deserted, and in the second the daily flow of the street is blocked by an awkward chain of mules.

The traffic jam scene takes up the majority of the passage describing the dream:

> Ocurre entonces una de estas obstrucciones que tan frecuentes son en las calles de Madrid. Sube un carromato de siete mulas ensartadas formando rosario. La delantera se insubordina metiéndose en la acera, y las otras toman aquello por pretexto para no tirar más. [. . .] No hay medio de abrir paso, porque el rosario de mulas hace una curva, y dentro de ella es cogido un simón que baja con dos señoras. Éramos pocos… A poco llega un coche de lujo con un caballero muy gordo. Que si pasas tú, que si te apartas, que sí y que no. El carretero de la carne pone a Dios de vuelta y media. Palo a las mulas, que empiezan a respingar, y una de estas coces coge la portezuela del simón y la deshace… Gritos, leña, y el carromatero empeñado en que la cosa se arregla poniendo a Dios, a la Virgen, a la hostia y al Espíritu Santo que no hay por dónde cogerlos. (2.256-57)

A frequent occurrence in the Madrid of the day, the traffic jam exemplifies the quotidian reality of a society caught between the representational systems of religious tradition and market value as it strives toward modernization. The conflict between provincial animals, arranged in the form of a rosary, and city traffic mirrors the rivalry between traditionalists and progressives in nineteenth-century Spain. As the secular outlook represented by commerce and business strives after economic development, it clashes with the outmoded mules. Yet the scene in turn reveals that in the midst of this

clashing Spaniards continue to invoke a God who is supposedly not to be found in the modern age.

While the traffic jam scene sets the backwardness of traditional, religious Spain in a ridiculous light, it also contains a critique of society's faith in progress. As she takes in the sights of the obstruction, Fortunata laughingly notices a group of merchants, among whom are sellers of new inventions: glass cutters and pencils with unbreakable points (hailed as "los lápices más fuertes del mundo"). These are products whose presence, as Ilie notes, "accords easily with other mechanical advances, such as motor pumps and plumbing pipes" (74). Yet in Fortunata's dream these merchants "recogen a escape su comercio" (*Fortunata* 2.257), forced to run from the violent mules. Their impotent flight from the chaos of the scene suggests that the advances these vendors herald and the system of commerce under which they operate cannot resolve the conflict between Spain's modernization and its past.

This phantasmagoric escapade through the landscape of *Fortunata y Jacinta*—a topography undergoing a process of modernization more like a traffic jam than a linear ascent—gives insight into the workings of Fortunata's mind. While the narrative does not enter her consciousness until part 2, when it finally does we soon learn that she has an imprecise understanding of history, geography, and especially religion:

> La poca doctrina cristiana que aprendió se le había olvidado. Comprendía a la Virgen, a Jesucristo y a San José; les tenía por buenas personas, pero nada más. Respecto a la inmoralidad y a la redención, sus ideas eran muy confusas. Sabía que arrepintiéndose uno, bien arrepentido, se salva; eso no

> tenía duda, y por más que dijeran, nada que se relacionase con el amor era pecado" (1.482).

Lacking a formal education or indoctrination into the Catholic faith, Fortunata absorbs religion as it appears in society and mixes it with a "love conquers all" philosophy. The combinations of ideas that she makes exemplify the "constant effort" by which Benjamin believes nineteenth-century society transmits the cultural "riches" of civilization: her personal theology exhibits the ways religion becomes "strangely altered" in the collective consciousness, passing from doctrine to confusion.

Though Maxi and Doña Lupe send Fortunata to Las Micaelas in order to fill in the gaps and correct misconceptions in her personal theology, the experience does less to clarify her ideas than to ripen their confusion. Like the "rosario de mulas" in the traffic jam, her experience with institutional religion in the convent does not result in a clear advance; it rather creates a situation where elements of faith, social expectations, and capitalist culture blend together in chaotic confusion. While Fortunata receives spiritual instruction from the nuns of the convent, she also takes in the advice of the rebellious libertine, Mauricia *la Dura*. Learning that Fortunata has already given birth to a child, nicknamed *el Pituso*, as a result of her first romance with Juanito, Mauricia encourages the idea that her fellow inmate has more of a claim to Santa Cruz than his wife, Jacinta. Discussing her past affair and Jacinta's infertility, Fortunata comments, "¿Qué me importa que la Jacinta beba los vientos por tener un chiquillo sin poderlo conseguir, mientras que yo…?" Mauricia responds, "Mientras que tú los tienes siempre y cuando te dé la gana. Dilo tonta, y no te acobardes" (1.631-32).

Yet even as, at Mauricia's prompting, she ponders her rivalry with Jacinta, Fortunata also entertains the idea of reconciliation between the two *casadas*. In her compliance with Maxi's plan to make her into "una honrada," she fantasizes about becoming like Jacinta, and is impressed by her rival's generosity when she learns that Juanito's wife has tried (though unsuccessfully) to find and take in *el Pituso*. As her obsession with emulating Jacinta grows, Fortunata becomes fascinated with certain objects donated to the convent by the Santa Cruz family, among them a shawl for the Virgin Mary and the communion host.

As Fortunata contemplates the host, she arrives at a new idea, her "*idea blanca*":

> Gozaba de cierta paz espiritual, desconocida para ella en épocas anteriores, paz que sólo turbaba Mauricia arrojando en sus oídos una maligna frase. Y no fue esto la única conquista, pues también prendió en ella la idea de la resignación y el convencimiento de que debemos tomar las cosas de la vida como vienen, recibir con alegría lo que se nos da, y no aspirar a la realización cumplida y total de nuestros deseos. Esto se lo decía aquella misma claridad esencial, aquella *idea blanca* que salía de la custodia. Lo malo era que en aquellas largas horas, a veces aburridas, que pasaba a rodillas ante el Sacramento, la faz envuelta en un gran velo al modo de mosquitero, la pecadora solía fijarse más en la custodia, marco y continente de la sagrada forma, que en la forma misma, por las asociaciones de ideas que aquella joya despertaba en su mente. (I.634)

Couched in the material form of the host, the idea that impresses itself on Fortunata is both religious and pragmatic. Unlike Maximiliano's view of Providence, this resignation

to God's will does not expect the total realization of one's desires, but thankfully receives what life offers. In this spirit, Fortunata concentrates the "asociaciones de ideas" stimulated by her experience in the convent—her sense of rivalry with Jacinta and her desire for reconciliation with her—on a material object, whose significance is dictated by her personal view of religion. To use a phrase that Irving Wolhfarth employs to describe Benjamin's historical materialism, she "recast[s] theology into a materialist mold" (9).[9]

Although her interest in the physical form rather than the symbolic significance of the host might seem to confirm Geoffrey Ribbans' claim that "the effects on Fortunata of Las Micaelas are purely external" (*Conflicts* 231), her stay in the convent in fact demonstrates—even focuses on—the internal developments of Fortunata's character as she interacts with institutional religion. Indeed, the passages quoted above appear in a chapter entitled "Las Micaelas por dentro."[10] The convent, like the Interior that Benjamin discusses in Convolute I of the *Arcades Project*, is a closed-off space where décor—in this case, religious iconography—becomes the basis for a fantastical microcosm of the world outside. In his exposé of 1935 Benjamin writes, "From this arise the phantasmagorias of the interior—which, for the private man, represents the universe. In the interior, he brings together the far away and the long ago" (*Arcades* 9). Within the walls of Las Micaelas, Fortunata "brings together" her past with Juanito and her fantasies about Jacinta's world. The religious edifice serves as the context for the phantasmagoric birth of an "idea" that will take on various yet related forms in the remainder of the novel.

As we have noted, Fortunata's return to the exterior world is marked by both her marriage to Maximiliano and the recommencement of her affair with Juanito. Passing from the sacred shelter of the convent to the secular space of the modern city, the

pragmatism and resignation associated with the "blanca idea" conceived in the convent ironically lead her to accept what she should now, after her religious reformation, recognize as a sinful existence. Back in the industrial, urban setting, she views herself much as Maxi views his windmill, as a mechanism directed by a divine force: "Se consideraba Fortunata en aquel caso como ciego mecanismo que recibe impulso de sobrenatural mano. Lo que había hecho, hacíalo, a juicio suyo, por disposición de las misteriosas energías que ordenan las cosas más grandes del universo." Yet unlike Maxi, Fortunata does not expect this force to improve her situation. Instead, she accepts the state of affairs in which she finds herself, and incorporates it into the worldview she has pieced together thus far: "se *conformaba*, tal era su idea, *con ir al infierno*" (*Fortunata* 1.689)

Still, Fortunata's idea continues to evolve during her renewed relationship with Juanito. Having resigned herself to committing adultery in order to be with him, Fortunata still longs to become Santa Cruz's true wife. She finds a possible means toward this end in the commercial paradigm of exchange:

> —Escucha, nenito de mi vida, lo que se me ha ocurrido. Una gran idea; verás. Le voy a proponer un trato a tu mujer. ¿Dirá que sí?
>
> —Veamos lo que es.
>
> —Muy sencillo. A ver qué te parece. Yo le cedo a ella un hijo tuyo y ella me cede a mí su marido. Total, cambiar un nene chico por el nene grande. (1.695)

In Fortunata's mind, a simple transaction can satisfy both Jacinta's desire for offspring and her own love for Juanito. The devout Guillermina Pacheco is of course scandalized

when Fortunata confesses this idea—now "la pícara idea"—to her, yet the adulteress is somehow convinced of its rightness: "Yo quiero echarla de mí; pero a veces se me ocurre que no debo echarla, que no peco…" (2.250). While she resists complete adoption of the religious moral code to interpret her instincts, she retains a sense of purpose in her individual actions, and incorporates an aspect of the marketplace into her ideas about religion, rivalry, and reconciliation.

In the final section of the novel, the various ideas that Fortunata has been collecting and connecting throughout combine into an ultimate, redemptive idea that brings the story to its resolution. Physically exhausted and dying after giving birth to her second son by Juanito, Fortunata decides to enact part of the exchange conceived in her "pícara idea," offering the baby to Jacinta. As Harriet Turner observes, traces of her original plan are realized here in an unanticipated form, becoming "fleshed out in the new-born child" ("Tornasoles" 277):

> La cabeza se le había serenado; la respiración era fácil aunque corta; la debilidad crecía atrozmente en las extremidades. Pero mientras la personalidad física se extinguía, la moral, concentrándose en una sola idea, se determinaba con desusado vigor y fortaleza. En aquella idea vaciaba, como en un molde, todo lo bueno que ella podía pensar y sentir. (*Fortunata* 2.519)

The resignation of her earlier "idea blanca" also plays a part in the act, as Fortunata accepts her death and chooses to emulate the generosity she admires in Jacinta while at Las Micaelas. Even Maximiliano's crazed prophecy is shown to contribute to the idea in its final form, which Fortunata believes to be "la llave de la puerta del Cielo" (2.520), and

which enacts a kind of redemptive reconciliation between the novel's two *casadas*. A dialectical synthesis of modern exchange and Christian virtue, the idea becomes a sanctified, "bendita idea" (2.520).

As he orchestrates the evolution of Fortunata's idea over the course of the novel, Galdós acts as a Benjaminian allegorist, combining fragments taken from the religious and commercial systems of Madrid with new meanings so as to create a truly modern method of representing reality—one that discovers redemptive possibility in the mind of an uneducated, lower-class woman. The birth of Fortunata's child at the end of the novel proves to be indeed messianic, if not in the way Maximiliano envisions: it marks an instance of the novelist's "weak Messianic power" to signal what ought to be.

In her study of beauty in *Fortunata y Jacinta*, Turner comments on this teleological bent in the novel:

> [I]n *Fortunata y Jacinta* we find that, however fragmented or unstable, instances of the perception of beauty consistently signal what would be or ought to be, if the form, the principle, the innate capacity operating through a body, a mind, or a spirit were allowed to complete itself. That such a final completion cannot, in the end, be carried out to its logical fulfillment only confirms in each instance the presence of a living force bent toward a finished totality. ("Tornasoles" 282)

This longing for a completion that cannot be fully reached corresponds to Benjamin's view of history.[11] For him, history's purpose is not realized through industrial or political progress, but illuminated by the dialectics of modern allegory, which weave ideas and

relics of past tradition along with contemporary concepts and materials into a new system for representing reality.

In *Fortunata y Jacinta*, the character Segismundo Ballester expresses this Benjaminian enthusiasm for meaning generated through juxtaposition and combination. He declares, "En uno y otro arte todo es combinar, combinar. . . . El *quid* está en saber herir con la composición la parte sensible" (2.286). This insight ultimately allows Ballester to appreciate the creativity of Fortunata's approach to urban and religious life, as in the final pages of the novel his view of her contrasts with her husband's. While Maxi continues to see Fortunata through his idealism—"adoro en ella lo ideal, lo eterno, y la veo, no como era, sino tal y como yo la soñaba y la veía en mi alma," he pronounces (2.540)—Ballester, quietly declaring, "Era un ángel," recognizes her as an angel of modernity.

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[1] Labanyi references Benjamin, but bases her analysis on the theories of his contemporary, Georg Simmel, whose work also often appears quoted in the *Arcades Project*.

[2] In *The Practice of Realism*, Whiston suggests this characterization of Maxi as revolutionary, in light of a marginal note in the manuscript of *Fortunata y Jacinta*, which reads "Maximiliano Robespierre." See Whiston, *Practice* 205ff.

[3] For a discussion of Juan Pablo's ideological makeup in comparison with Maxi, see Ribbans, *Conflicts* 163-67.

[4] Ultimately, it is to this tower that he retreats at the end of the novel. Locked up in the asylum Leganés, he declares, "Pongan al llamado Maximiliano Rubín en un palacio o en un muladar… lo mismo da" (2.542).

[5] Like Don Quijote, Maxi becomes convinced of his role as a *redentor* by reading literature: "después de aquella sacudida que el amor le dio, entróle tal gusto por las grandes creaciones literarias, que se embebecía leyéndolas" (1.493-94).

[6] In his study of *Fortunata y Jacinta*, Geoffrey Ribbans views the windmill as "a symbol . . . for Maxi's expectations"; Galdós' character "comes to feel that his fate is linked to this modern *noria*" (*Conflicts* 177).

[7] See Buck-Morss 184-85.

[8] Here I depart from Ilie, as he claims that religion does not "seem to have much significance" in the dream (66).

[9] Another example of this materialist recasting in nineteenth-century literature is Flaubert's Félicité, protagonist of *Un Coeur simple*, who, like Fortunata, focuses on a physical object—in Félicité's case, a stuffed parrot—in her understanding of faith.

[10] As Anderson has pointed out, the dichotomy of "por fuera" and "por dentro" in this chapter and the one that precedes it emphasizes the interiority of Fortunata's experience, creating a tension between the world outside and her inner contemplation (Anderson, *Espacio* 28).

[11] Indeed, in their writings on the Parisian manuscripts of the *Passagen-Werk*, Michel Espagne and Michael Werner refer to Benjamin's method as "une téléologie de l'inachèvement" (Espagne 868).

CHAPTER 2

MIAU: PLAYING WITH GOD

While the story of *Fortunata y Jacinta* unfolds amid a plurality of interpretive systems, in *Miau* one force dominates the Madrid setting: determinism. This novel, written the year after *Fortunata y Jacinta*, focuses on the family of Ramón Villaamil, an honest, hardworking public administrator who, as a result of the political changes of the day, loses his job just two months before earning his pension. Villaamil appears briefly in *Fortunata y Jacinta*, voicing his frustration: "Dos meses, nada más que dos meses me faltan, y todo se vuelve promesas, que hoy, que mañana, que veremos, que no hay vacante…" (Galdós, *Fortunata* 2.36). As his words suggest, Villaamil's story is one of disillusionment: despite all his efforts and hopes of finding employment, he is continually denied and his family fated to mediocrity and economic difficulty. The modern world appears in *Miau* as an absurd, naturalistic, and coldly secular environment where God is impotent and life operates only on the principle of the "survival of the fittest." Rejecting the Villaamils for their failure to adapt, it relegates them to the stature of alley cats, as voices from workplace, theater, and school taunt them with the nickname "Miau."

In response to the harshness of public society, the family members retreat into the interior of their home. Like Fortunata in Las Micaelas, they construct a view of the world from inside their Benjaminian "place of dwelling":

> For the private individual, the place of dwelling is for the first time opposed to the place of work. The former constitutes itself as the interior. Its complement is the office. The private individual, who in the office has to deal with reality, needs the domestic interior to sustain him in his illusions. This necessity is all the more pressing since he has no intention of allowing his commercial considerations to impinge on social ones. In the formation of his private environment, both are kept out. From this arise the phantasmagorias of the interior—which, for the private man, represents the universe. [. . .] His living room is a box in the theater of the world. (*Arcades* 9)

The interior sustains the individual in his or her illusions, providing phantasmagoric insulation from urban modernity outside—however threatening that outside may be. "In the most extreme instance," writes Benjamin, "the dwelling becomes a shell" (220).

The phantasmagorias that arise in the Villaamil interior act as this protective shell, combining religious faith with the personal obsessions of the adult family members in order to shield them from the extremes of Madrid's inhospitable exterior. Still, the determinism of the outside world holds sway over the novel, driving Villaamil to suicide at its end. Whether this conclusion is due to his faulty understanding of modernity or the sheer cruelty of his modern situation,[1] his story ends on a note of hopelessness. The only character who manages to resist this disillusion—and who, consequently, lends structure and development to an otherwise uneventful and fatalistic story—is Luisito, Villaamil's grandson. In this chapter I hope to show that, as he counters both exterior determinism and the phantasmagorias of the adult world, Luis carries out "the task of children" as

Benjamin defines it, bringing the modern world into new, "symbolic space" (*Arcades* 390). In *Miau*, the play of this child's imagination—like the dramatists of the Spanish baroque in Benjamin's reading—preserves a space for transcendence and hope in *Miau*'s bleak landscape.

As both Nicole Malaret and Vernon Chamberlin have shown, pervasive animal imagery and allusions to Darwinism help to portray the Madrid of *Miau* as a savage and deterministic place. Chamberlin traces the use of the "survival of the fittest" motif specifically to Herbert Spencer's social Darwinism, noting that the adaptability of characters is linked not only to their physical appearance but also to their "political and religious views" ("Social" 301). The best example of this in the novel is the hierarchy set up among Víctor Cadalso, Villaamil's son-in-law and the father of Luisito; Villaamil himself; and Mendizábal, the family's neo-Catholic neighbor. While the liberal, atheist Víctor is "un ejemplar de los que parecen destinados a conservar y transmitir la elegancia de formas en la raza humana" (Galdós, *Miau* 106), Mendizábal is described as a "gorila": "resabio de una raza que hasta hace poco ha andado a cuatro pies" (104). Between these two extremes—representatives of the progressive and traditional sides of nineteenth-century Spain—is Villaamil, whose persisting religious faith becomes doubtful and problematic in the face of his increasingly desperate financial and social situation.

Villaamil's difficulty in adapting to modern society can be traced to the rise of the middle class in Spain, an event described early in *Fortunata y Jacinta*: "Era, por añadidura, la época en que la clase media entraba de lleno en el ejercicio de sus funciones, apandando todos los empleos creados por el nuevo sistema político y administrativo, comprando a plazos todas las fincas que habían sido de la Iglesia" (*Fortunata* 1.153). The

repercussions of this transition to secularity under the *leyes de la Desamortización* (led by Juan Álvarez Mendizábal, the ironic namesake of the Villaamils' neighbor) abound in *Miau*, where the most notable aspect of religion is its absence.

Part of Madrid's newfound secularity is due to the philosophical ambience of the nineteenth century, which problematizes the idea of religious faith for *Miau*'s characters. Víctor articulates this when he declares, in an echo of Marx or Nietzsche, "La religión, entiendo yo, es el ropaje magnífico con que visten la nada para que no nos horrorice" (*Miau* 243). Although the Villaamils attend mass and raise Luisito in the Catholic tradition, theirs is a faith "más de pico que de obras, como suele suceder" (209). The narrator tells us, "Las prácticas religiosas de los Villaamil se concretaban a la misa dominguera en las Comendadoras, y esto no con rigurosa puntualidad. Don Ramón faltaba rara vez, pero Doña Pura y su hermana, por aquello de no estar vestidas, por quehaceres o por otra causa, quebrantaban algunos domingos el precepto" (208). Religion in the Villaamil household is superficial, less a matter of piety and devotion than of keeping up appearances and bargaining with God for financial security.

Linked in this way to social expectations and capitalist views of exchange, faith cannot offer solace from the pressures of modern life. Consequently, when God does not deliver the job Don Ramón asks for, he is viewed as a swindler no different from the corrupt bureaucrats that put off Villaamil's requests: "Dios no protege más que a los pillos… ¿Crees que espero algo del Ministro de Dios? Todos son lo mismo… ¡Arriba y abajo, farsa, favoritismo, polaquería!" (267). Even Abelarda, the most devout of the family, says to Luisito in a moment of frustration, "Sal ahora con la pamplina de que ves

a Dios... Como si hubiera tal Dios" (284). *Miau*'s modernity, where good people go unrewarded, resists the idea of faith in a just creator.

The secularized situation which makes Madrid inhospitable to hardworking men like Villaamil and church-going women like Abelarda recalls Benjamin's description of the baroque in his study of the *Trauerspiel*. There he argues that the artists of the seventeenth century look back on the Renaissance's carefree religiosity with nostalgia:

> Whereas the painters of the Renaissance know how to keep their skies high, in the paintings of the baroque the cloud moves, darkly or radiantly, down towards the earth. In contrast to the baroque the Renaissance does not appear as a godless and heathen period, but as an epoch of profane freedom for the life of the faith while the Counter-Reformation sees the hierarchical strain of the middle ages assume authority in a world which was denied direct access to the beyond. (*Origin* 79)

In the nineteenth century, any remaining "freedom for the life of faith" has been all but snuffed out by secular realities that deny the old religious mystery of the divine. As Galdós himself comments in "La sociedad presente como materia novelable," "Contábamos, sin duda, los incansables viajeros con que una voz sobrenatural nos dijera desde lo alto: *por aquí se va, y nada más que por aquí*. Pero la voz sobrenatural no hiere aún nuestros oídos" (*Ensayos* 177).

The sky of *Miau*'s Madrid has clouded over; it is a place where access to the beyond is no longer possible, nor credible. Though its era is the age of the middle class, hierarchy persists in the form of social Darwinism, and hope for transcendence cedes to determinism. As Víctor remarks, "a Dios se le ve soñando, y hace tiempo que desperté"

(*Miau* 112). God appears in the novel, but when he does he is no less a *cesante* than Villaamil. In this moral vacuum, any meaning to be found must be constructed—from material objects, the remnants of religious tradition, and their intersection in the realm of phantasmagoria.

Phantasmagorias of the Villaamil Interior

In response to the threats and difficulties of the exterior world, the Villaamils take refuge in the interior of their home.[2] The women of the family rarely leave their *piso*, reflecting through their self-imprisonment the situation of the inmates in the women's jail located across the street. Exiled from the workplace, Villaamil paces his office like a caged tiger, and Luisito's daily experience is clearly divided between school and home. This sharp separation of interior from exterior allows the family members to construct a Benjaminian "private environment," a representation of the universe outside filtered through phantasmagoria.

We get insight into these fantasies through a description of the family dining room, as observed one night by Víctor:

> La luz menguó de tal manera después de media noche, que apenas alumbraba con incierto resplandor la estancia; y en el cerebro insomne y febril de Víctor, esta penumbra y el olor a comida fiambre que flotaba en la atmósfera, se confundían en una sola impresión desagradable. Examinó punto por punto el comedor, las paredes vestidas de papel, a trozos desgarrado, a trozos sucio. En algunos sitios, particularmente junto a las puertas, la crasitud marcaba el roce de las personas; en otros se veían

> impresas las manos de Luisito y aun los trazos de su artístico lápiz. El techo, ahumado en la proyección de la lámpara, tenía dos o tres grietas, dibujando una inmensa M y quizás otras letras menos claras. En la pared, agujeros de clavos, de los cuales colgaron en otros tiempos láminas. Víctor recordaba haber visto allí un reloj que nunca había dicho *esta campana es mía*, y señalaba siempre una hora inverosímil; también hubo antaño bodegones al cromo con sandías y melones despanzurrados. Láminas y reloj habían desaparecido, como carga que se arroja al mar para que el barco no zozobre. (117-18)

In this passage we see how the interior's shell "bears the impression of its occupant[s]" (*Arcades* 220). With wallpaper, knick-knacks, and crayons, the Villaamils leave traces of their presence on the doors and walls. The evidence of rubbing—"el roce de las personas"—on the surfaces of the room suggests that it is a site of struggle, where its inhabitants exert their energies in an effort to carve out a private space for themselves against the forces of the exterior world. It appears, however, that they are fighting a losing battle: evidencing the difficulties of the Villaamils' economic situation, the room falls into disrepair and cracks stretch across the ceiling. Yet the family members continue to retreat into this decaying interior and nurse personal preoccupations, their phantasmagoric interpretations of the world.

The first of the phantasmagorias of in the Villaamil dining room arises from efforts to decorate the space, surely the work of Doña Pura and her sister Milagros, whose obsession with keeping up appearances takes a heavy toll on the little financial

resources still available to the family. In fact, earlier in the novel we are told that Pura would sacrifice almost anything before giving up her décor:

> Y cuando el espectro de la necesidad se le aparecía y susurraba en su oído con terrible cifra el conflicto económico del día siguiente, doña Pura se estremecía de pavor, diciendo: "No, no; antes las camisas que las cortinas." Desnudar los cuerpos le parecía sacrificio tolerable; pero desnudar la sala… ¡eso nunca! (72)

For the Villaamil women, *las buenas apariencias* are an object of devotion that borders on worship, yet their limited means make this quasi-religious fetish into an insubstantial veneer layered over kitsch and tastelessness. The definitive adjective used to describe these women in the novel is *cursi*—a term that is, according to Noël Valis in her book, *The Culture of Cursilería*, "particularly lower middle class, reflecting the need to keep up appearances and the inability to do so in a satisfactory way" (11). Nostalgic for a time before their branding as *cursis*,[3] when life was not riddled with financial problems and oppressed by a hostile exterior world, Pura and Milagros fill the house with decorations meant to recreate that carefree time. Still, underlying the façade of their décor is a general dissatisfaction with the status fate has assigned them. Abelarda remarks, "Somos unas pobres cursis. Las cursis nacen, y no hay fuerza humana que les quite el sello. Nací de esta manera y así moriré" (*Miau* 167).

Faced with the hardships of her family's situation, Pura also uses the idea of Providence to shield herself from the exterior world. Early in the novel, when her husband gives voice to his worries about finding employment, she replies, "ten confianza en la Providencia, hombre, como yo la tengo" (46). As the story progresses, however, we

see that her concept of Providence is merely another layer of insulation that Pura uses to avoid dealing with reality. By putting her confidence in a higher order, she excuses herself from taking responsibility for her own actions, and is able to maintain the spending habit that fuels her phantasmagoric illusions of social status.

In their fetishistic preoccupation with décor and their superficial religiosity, then, the Villaamil women are reluctant to deal with the concerns of reality, preferring to maintain their illusory "theater of the world" inside. In fact, they only emerge from the house to go to another theater, the Teatro Real. But just as the wallpaper in the dining room shows wear, "a trozos desgarrado, a trozos sucio," the artifice of their *buenas apariencias* cannot withstand decadence and *cursilería*: their shabby, handed-down dresses are the subject of gossip among the theater-goers who christen them "las Miaus." Confirming the breakdown of their decorative phantasmagoria, the "láminas" that once hung on the wall have disappeared, like so much cargo thrown overboard to lighten the load of a sinking ship.

The second phantasmagoria indicated in the description of the dining room corresponds to the other object that has disappeared from the room: "un reloj que nunca había dicho *esta campana es mía*, y señalaba siempre una hora inverosímil." This mechanism, which represents rationality and perhaps even evokes an Enlightenment view of the world as the creation of a "clockmaker God," significantly fails to function correctly in the Villaamil household.

One possible interpretation of this broken timepiece is that it represents Ramón Villaamil himself, a man who has made his living by devising systems for the administration of a political order that has passed. Indeed, the *Administración* has

pervaded his life and thoughts for so long that it has become, as Gustavo Correa puts it, "la razón misma de su existencia personal" (*El simbolismo* 119). A dependence on methodical rationality like that which he formerly used at work characterizes Villaamil's outlook throughout the novel, even as it vacillates between Christian hope and fatalism.

In both cases, he tries to arrange his beliefs according to a system ordered by reason:

> [O]ía misa si era tiempo de ello, y si no, se estaba un ratito de rodillas, tratando, sin duda, de armonizar su fatalismo con la idea cristiana. ¿Lo conseguiría? ¡Quién sabe! El cristianismo nos dice: *pedid y se os dará*; nos manda que fiemos en Dios, y esperemos de su mano el remedio de nuestros males; pero la experiencia de una larga vida de ansiedad sugería al buen Villaamil estas ideas: *no esperes y tendrás; desconfía del éxito para que el éxito llegue*. (*Miau* 261)

Villaamil's somewhat Krausist attempt to harmonize two worldviews does not achieve synthesis, but merely inverts a Biblical idea. An inner dialogue that Villaamil has with himself early in the novel further demonstrates his rationalizations: "Tengo esperanza. No, no quiero consentirme ni entusiasmarme. Vale más que seamos pesimistas, muy pesimistas, para que luego resulte lo contrario de lo que se teme" (69). As Valis points out, this new attitude is actually nothing new, just "upside-down optimism" ("Benito Pérez" 419). When the Biblical way of thinking fails to help him find employment, Villaamil simply reverses his system.

For all his experimentation with optimism and pessimism, Villaamil does not receive any alleviation of his problems. His attempts to manipulate the events of his life

through reason clearly do not work; they amount to another superficial faith like Pura's facile trust in Providence. Don Ramón's rationality is merely a passive superstition that, like the timid clock in the dining room, does not announce itself with conviction and ultimately lacks verisimilitude. Like Maximiliano Rubín, Villaamil imposes a system—"el sistema aquel de imaginar el reverso del deseo para que el deseo se realizase" (*Miau* 370)—onto reality that only succeeds in distancing him from that reality.

Later in the novel, Víctor reiterates Villaamil's theory of opposites, characterizing Spain as a nation *al revés*: "Así es el mundo, así es España, y así nos vamos educando todos en el desprecio del Estado, y atizando en nuestra alma el rescoldo de las revoluciones. Al que merece, desengaños; al que no, confites. Ésta es la lógica española. Todo al revés; *el país de los viceversas*…" (161). Once Villaamil resolves to do and hope for the opposite of what he desires, he tries to see the world vice-versa, as one would see it in a mirror that inverts everything it reflects. What he does not realize is that such a mirror also distorts images, creating grotesque representations of reality. Villaamil's efforts to comprehend the "lógica española" fail because in actuality it is not logic at all: the Madrid of *Miau* is a nineteenth-century theater of the absurd.[4]

Absurdity then reveals a second possible interpretation of the broken clock in the Villaamil dining room: it stands not only for Ramón's failed rationalizing, but for the breakdown of reason itself. Compared to the absurd circumstances of Villaamil's life, reason is "inverosímil." In *Miau*, Galdós demonstrates that reality and rationality are not interchangeable, and again acts like Benjamin's historical materialist, exposing Villaamil's faith in Enlightenment logic as another of the phantasmagorias of the modern age.

Like the dirty, fading wallpaper and the broken clock, the phantasmagorias of the Villaamil interior break down under the pressure of secular determinism imposed by the outside world. Modernity as represented by Víctor—an age that lacks divine justice and seems to reward the dishonest—triumphs over the attempts the Villaamils make to shelter themselves from the exterior, and even infiltrates their dining room. The stale odor and "impresión desagradable" that float in the air convey the stagnation and general hopelessness that the family members feel as they are confronted with economic difficulty and social ridicule. Moreover, the ceiling, like the cloudy sky of Benjamin's baroque, threatens to cave in; the cracks that trace "una inmensa M y quizás otras letras menos claras" across it scrawl the nickname that destines the Miaus to a banal existence of *cursilería*. It seems that the Villaamils ought to follow Víctor's example and wake themselves from the dream worlds of fashion, reason, and religion.

The Child's Scribbles

While the adult world of the nineteenth century remains under the influence of phantasmagoria, in the *Arcades Project* Benjamin associates the dream specifically with the figure of the child:

> A generation's experience of youth has much in common with the experience of dreams. [. . .] Every epoch has such a side turned toward dreams, the child's side. For the previous century, this appears very clearly in the arcades. But whereas the education of earlier generations explained these dreams for them in terms of tradition, of religious doctrine, present-day education simply amounts to the distraction of children. (388)

Children are close not only to dreams, but also to a sense of mystery that "previous generations" have explained in religious terms. In their proximity to the dream, children also hold a key to Benjamin's concept of awakening, wherein fantasy does not oppose reality, but illuminates it. In her study of the "Child of the Arcades," Maeve Pearson comments that, for Benjamin, remembrances of childhood represent points where "the dream of a redeemed society bubbles near the surface of the cultural imagination" (134). This effervescence of redemptive possibility arises from the child's creativity, particularly as he or she interacts with illustrations: "They inscribe them with their own marks, or scribble on them. This is their primary inauguration into the world. It is the means through which they explore their capacity to act on the dream" (Pearson 134).

The centrality of Luisito to the story of *Miau*, which has been well demonstrated by José Ruano de la Haza, is founded especially on this youthful creativity, which differentiates him from his adult relatives. The novel opens with a scene at Luisito's school, and most of the events that take place in the Villaamil home are related to the reader through his perspective. Since his grandfather often sends him out on errands, the child's imagination gets exposure to the exterior world in addition to the interior:

> [E]n este oficio de peatón adquirió tan completo saber topográfico, que recorría todos los barrios de la Villa sin perderse; y aunque sabía ir a su destino por el camino más corto, empleaba comúnmente el más largo, por costumbre y vicio de paseante o por instintos de observador, gustando mucho de examinar escaparates, de oír, sin perder sílaba, discursos de charlatanes que venden elixires o hacen ejercicios de prestidigitación. (*Miau* 48)

As a pint-sized *flâneur*, Luis gathers images and artifacts from the streets, which contribute to the workings of his imagination and to the plot of the novel.

The first of a series of five dreams in which the little boy meets with God draws on one of these artifacts, as the vision occurs just after he passes a blind beggar: "Pues como se iba diciendo, cayó el pequeño en su letargo, inclinando la cabeza sobre el pecho, y entonces vio que no estaba solo. A su lado se sentaba una persona mayor. ¿Era el ciego? Por un instante creyó Luis que sí, porque tenía barba espesa y blanca" (55). From this point on, Luisito's oneiric conversations with God provide a counterpoint to Villaamil's experiences in the waking world, structuring the unfolding of his story. Thus the innocent observation of urban life and playful imagination of the child is at the heart of *Miau*'s novelistic development.

Furthermore, Luisito's imagination is specifically linked to drawing and illustrations. An example of this appears when he learns that his grandmother and aunts have been labeled "las Miaus" by the patrons of the Teatro Real. In response, he imagines his relatives as cats dressed like people:

> Su imaginación viva le sugirió al punto la idea de que las tres mujeres eran gatos en *dos pies y vestidos de gente*, como los que hay en la obra *Los animales pintados por sí mismos*; y esta alucinación le llevó a pensar si sería él también gato *derecho* y si mayaría cuando hablaba. (43)

Here Luisito bases his mental image on an illustrated children's book, *Los animales pintados por sí mismos*. In a similar fashion, the white-bearded God of his dreams resembles not only the beggar he sees in the street, but also a figure on a stamp he has seen in his aunt Quintina's shop: "Cierto día vio un Padre Eterno, de luenga y blanca

barba, en la mano un mundo azul, imagen que le impresionó mucho" (142). In his mind, Luisito scribbles on images from the exterior world with his own creativity, blending ideas he absorbs from the *calle* and the conversations that take place in his home. Just after his father gives him another stamp, this one depicting God "en el acto de fabricar el mundo," the narrator comments on Luisito's own creative abilities, rooted in the innocence of childhood: "Luis, como niño, asociaba las ideas imperfectamente, pero las asociaba, poniendo siempre entre ellas afinidades extrañas sugeridas por la inocencia" (159).

As they contribute to Luisito's fantastical interactions with God, these associations create a transcendent space of imagination in *Miau*.[5] His series of visions counters the phantasmagorias of the adult world, and points to a truth[6] beyond his grandparents' personal fantasies and the determinism of the exterior. Notably, the only decorations in the Villaamil dining room that resist the forces of decadence in the room are the imprints of the child's hands and the "trazos de su artístico lápiz." Like Calderón in Benjamin's view, Luisito playfully engages the sacred—an area that modern society makes problematic outside the imaginative and artistic space of his dreams. Thus, *Miau* recreates the ludic aesthetic of *La vida es sueño*: "if the secular drama must stop short on the borders of transcendence, it seeks, nevertheless, to assure itself of this indirectly, in play" (*Origin* 81). In both Galdós' text and in Benjamin's later analysis of the nineteenth century, this kind of play defines the role of children. As Pearson explains, in the *Arcades Project* "the child's desire to awaken from the dream is enacted playfully. The child's emulation of the monochromatic line through scribbling is an act of play *against* the dream that seeks to realise it rather than relinquish it" (134-35).

As Luisito's dream world transcends both the interior and the exterior, Víctor's belief that he has awakened to the true, deterministic reality of secular modernity begins to appear dubious. The limitations of the senior Cadalso's strictly materialistic perspective in comparison with his son's inclusive imagination suggest that, if this man is the representative of advanced modernity in *Miau*, the modern outlook is by no means free from illusions. This fact is one of the fundamental premises of the *Arcades Project*, where Benjamin asserts that the nineteenth century as a whole is not in a waking state, but rather a hallucinatory one: "The world dominated by its phantasmagorias—this, to make use of Baudelaire's term, is 'modernity'" (*Arcades* 26).

According to Benjamin, the illusions of the nineteenth century are not merely individual; they reflect the phantasmagorias of collective consciousness. In *Miau*, Pura's obsession with *las buenas apariencias* and Don Ramón's superstitious rationality are symptomatic of widespread delusions current in society at large—delusions which also include ideas about progress and determinism that exploit the tenets of Darwinian evolution.[7] When Luisito decides that "el mote puesto a su abuela y tías en el paraíso del Real era la cosa más acertada y razonable del mundo," apparently accepting society's view of his family, it is important to note that this conclusion comes in the form of a childish blending of reality and fantasy. When he incredulously pictures his aunts as "gatos en *dos pies y vestidos de gente*," his innocence exposes society's equating people with animals as an absurd application of Darwinian biological theories to economic conditions. By playfully rearranging common ideas, Luis's imagination counters the phantasmagoria of social Darwinism that dominates the adult world.

While Darwinism appears as the accepted, secular "History of Civilization" in *Miau*, traces of traditional religion and Luisito's perception of the world attest to a reality that defies tidy explanations, where mystery continues to pervade material life. A historical-materialist interest in portraying the nineteenth century as it was—an interest shared by Galdós and Benjamin—will not simply confirm general opinion, but demonstrate that this opinion is built on its own phantasmagoric distortions. Benjamin goes about this in the *Arcades Project* by creating his own counter-phantasmagoria—a montage of diverse quotations that requires its reader to draw his or her own connections between them. As Henrik Stampe Lund explains, "he has to go through the Phantasmagoria to get rid of it," achieving a "demythification through myth" (97, 98).

Luisito's dreams, scattered as they are through the text of *Miau*, perform a similar (if less disruptive) function in Galdós' novel, as they demythify the phantasmagorias of both the Villaamils and society at large. The associations that the child uses to interpret his visions may be incorrect according to the adult world, but they nevertheless reveal a fresh way of seeing and, like the Benjaminian allegorist, assign new meaning to modern reality. This, according to Benjamin, is the "task of children": "to bring the world into symbolic space. The child, in fact, can do what the grownup absolutely cannot: recognize the new once again" (*Arcades* 390). Throughout *Miau*, the play of Luisito's imagination brings exterior and interior together into symbolic space, and in the process exposes the mythical nature of the phantasmagorias that dominate Galdós' Madrid.

Like Fortunata's "idea," Luis's re-allegorization of the modern world is especially an endeavor that subconsciously mixes the secular and the religious. Critics generally agree that the God figure in the little boy's dreams is a psychological construct

originating in his unconscious.[8] Displaying detailed familiarity with Luisito's grammar lessons, but unable to say when his grandfather will find work, God's knowledge is largely limited to what the child experiences or imagines. Thus, according to Ruano de la Haza, "the main function of [Luisito's] visions is simply to allow the reader a clearer insight into the workings of his ratiocinative mind" (29). Indeed, his conversations with God allow us to witness how, through these ratiocinations, Luisito constructs his allegorical interpretation of modern life. Moreover, they demonstrate how the child's mind mixes religious ideas with other aspects of Madrid society. In his dreams, he combines things he hears about and sees while awake—his grandfather's unemployment and his references to God, the *Administración*, the Villaamil family's Catholicism, stamps depicting the Biblical creation, and a street-side beggar—in novel arrangements between sacred and secular.

Yet, as we have seen, Luisito's visions do have another express function in *Miau*: to expose the phantasmagorical nature of ideas held by adults in the novel, and particularly Villaamil's persistent understanding of religious faith according to administrative systems. Since his grandfather conceives of God in terms prescribed by modern bureaucracy, becoming angered with the delay in the "Ministro de Dios," Luisito assumes that the deity is required to work within the system. Consequently, in his dream the child does not ask God to work a miracle, but rather advises him to write a letter to the Ministry on Villaamil's behalf. Not surprisingly, this method receives no response from the secular world. God reports, "No hacen caso. Pues si consintiera en bastonazos, por eso no había de quedar. Los doy tremendos, y como si no" (*Miau* 336). When placed in the mind of a child, the idea that God operates according to the laws of the

Administración—a belief that is actually at the heart of Villaamil's worldview—is exposed as ridiculous.

Though Luisito's God cannot offer solutions for his grandfather's predicament, his appearance preserves the possibility of a beyond that the adult world, dominated by its own phantasmagorias, cannot reach. In the child's dreams, God resembles a *cesante* like Villaamil, but he is not inaccessible as he is for the adults in the novel. He responds to the child's questions and ideas about finding his grandfather a job, and even displays divine omniscience when he predicts Villaamil's death. Through this dream figure, the sense of transcendence lost in secular modernity is playfully regained. Luisito's visions entertain the dream of the divine in *Miau*, providing a glimmer of hope—however ephemeral—in an otherwise bleak landscape.

Between exterior Madrid and the interior of his home, the child of *Miau* resembles the child of Benjamin's *Arcades*. These youthful figures occupy a liminal space of dream and awakening, which the narrator of Galdós' novel describes as a "lugar indeterminado": "Lo primero que vio el chiquillo al adormillarse fue una extensión vacía, un lugar indeterminado, cuyos horizontes se confundían con el cielo, sin accidente alguno, casi sin términos, pues todo era igual, lo próximo y lo lejano" (334).What the adults in *Miau* tend to dismiss as "the distraction of children" makes them uneasy because it points to the actual, ambiguous reality of modernity as Benjamin exposes it in the *Arcades Project*, where private and public, exterior and interior, sacred and secular interpenetrate one another. When Víctor declares, "a Dios se le ve soñando, y hace tiempo que desperté," his deterministic view of the world is immediately countered by the beginning of one of his son's episodes: "Luisito escondió su faz entre las almohadas, sintiendo un

frío terrible, malestar grande y todos los síntomas precursores de aquel estado en que se le presentaba su misterioso amigo" (*Miau* 112). Víctor's awakening proves to be only a continuation of the phantasmagorias of modern society, while the play of Luisito's imagination preserves the possibility of transcendence; it is oriented toward the realization—not the relinquishment—of the dream.

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[1] Criticism on *Miau* has divided between those who blame Villaamil himself for his suicide and those who view him as a victim of society. See, for example, Sackett, Gullón. Arnold M. Penuel offers an overview of this critical debate in the opening of his essay, "Yet Another View of *Miau*" (Penuel 85-94).

[2] In "Madrid y el espacio de *Miau*," Farris Anderson confirms that a polarity between exterior and interior characterizes the novel (26).

[3] Ricardo Gullón draws this connection between nostalgia and the mediocrity of *las Miaus*: "Bien asentadas en el espacio de la cursilería, . . . se desviven por aparentar lo que no son, perdiéndose en vagos recuerdos de un ayer en el que, durante un instante, alguien las vio o dijo verlas según ellas se imaginaban" (17).

[4]While the grotesque is more likely to be associated with periods preceding or following that of nineteenth-century realism (including the baroque), John Kronik has argued that Galdós employs it in a number of his works (See Kronik, "Galdós and the Grotesque"). In *Miau*, Galdós' insistence on likening characters to animals already creates a somewhat surreal aesthetic atmosphere from the novel's outset. Villaamil does view his social enemies as grotesque—he angrily tells Víctor at one point, "Vete a vivir con los esperpentos que te protegen" (326)—yet he assumes that these people represent individual divergences from the social system rather than recognizing that society itself has become distorted.

[5] Indeed, Gustavo Correa devotes a section of his essay on religious symbolism in *Miau* to "La visión trascendente del mundo infantil" (126).

[6] Luisito's ability to illuminate reality through fantasy makes him appear prophetic. When he informs his grandfather that God cannot grant him the longed-for *colocación*, the narrator comments, "El estupor de Villaamil fue inmenso. Eran las palabras de su nieto como revelación divina, de irrefragable autenticidad" (349). Theodore Sackett has identified Luisito as "the voice of truth" in the novel (32), and Ruano de la Haza notes, moreover, that the child gains his "supernatural" quality "by reflecting in an unadulterated form the values, thoughts, and attitudes" of both his family and the world around him (40).

[7] The presence of Darwinism in *Miau* certainly does not imply Galdós' wholehearted acceptance of the way the English naturalist's ideas were appropriated by society. In *Galdós and Darwin*, T. E. Bell comments that this novel reflects "Galdós's deep unease about a world dominated by Darwinian and Materialist laws" (131).

[8] See especially Ruano de la Haza, Gullón.

CHAPTER 3

MISERICORDIA: ENACTING MESSIANIC TIME

Misericordia is a historical novel that culminates with a transcendence of history, a realist work that ends with a miracle. While in *Miau* a child's dreams mark potential for transcending the phantasmagorias of the nineteenth century, in that text the possibility remains only imaginative, limited as it is to Luisito's mind. His play—while it reveals much about reality—cannot intrude on the events of the story and avert Villaamil's final suicide. When Galdós writes *Misericordia* nine years later, however, the dream breaks into the physical setting of the novel; imaginative potential is realized as redemptive narrative potential.

Situated in the decadence of the Spanish *fin-de-siècle*, just one year before the last remnants of the empire would be lost, *Misericordia* portrays a reality defined by economic hardship and stalled progress, yet includes a mysterious figure whose presence challenges the boundaries of that reality. We first encounter this figure—a priest by the name of Don Romualdo—as the invention of the story's protagonist, Benigna de Casia. In the opening chapters of the novel, we learn that Benina has found herself forced to beg on the steps of the San Sebastián church in order to provide for her mistress, Doña Paca Zapata—a bourgeois woman *venida a menos* who, like Pura Villaamil, has fallen on hard times yet strives to maintain *las buenas apariencias*. In order to shield her prideful

mistress from the knowledge that her servant has become a mendicant, Benina creates a fictional Don Romualdo, telling Paca that the priest has employed her in his home and thus gaining an alibi for the time she spends on the church steps.

The fiction of Don Romualdo emerges out of a dialectical pairing of traditional faith with modern sensibility in Benina's character; while she maintains a steadfast trust in God and a selfless and compassionate attitude toward others throughout the novel, she also lives within the harsh material conditions of Madrid at the end of the nineteenth century. In contrast to Paca's phantasmagoric efforts to retain the social status she has lost, Benina consistently displays a sober and pragmatic view of the material and social realities of her time. Because she relates creatively to these real conditions, she—like her namesake St. Rita de Cascia, the "abogada de imposibilidades"[1]—Benina achieves the improbable, managing to provide for herself and those she loves by depending on practical intuition. The near-miraculous quality of her creative resourcefulness reaches its pinnacle when, near the end of the novel, Don Romualdo materializes in the flesh.[2]

With this uncanny event, the fiction that Benina formulates in a pragmatic and imaginative response to pressing economic needs transcends the limitations of the material world. In Don Romualdo's becoming real, reality itself gains a new dimension which interrupts the linear flow of the novel's narrative.[3] Originating in the dialectical union of Benina's religious faith and her modern pragmatism, the materialization of her invention constitutes a redemptive intrusion in the novel's history. Thus, I argue, *Misericordia* provides a glimpse of what Benjamin refers to in the *Arcades Project* and elsewhere as "Messianic time."

While the equal presence of material and spiritual concerns in *Misericordia* is repeatedly acknowledged by critics, studies of the novel have tended to view it either as a work of religious symbolism or social criticism. On the religious end of the spectrum, Gustavo Correa proposes that the novel depicts Benina's process of sanctification through charity, while Robert Russell traces her role as an unknowing Christ figure in the story. More recently, however, Teresa Fuentes Peris has argued that more attention should be paid to the novel's engagement with its historical moment, declaring, "*Misericordia* is not simply concerned with spiritual issues, but is deeply reflective of contemporary social problems and controversies" (109).

In fact, in this novel the social and the spiritual are mutually dependent aspects of a larger, dialectical reality. Social issues have moral implications, and vice versa. Eamonn Rodgers has argued that this interdependence reflects a Krausist harmonization of the physical and religious spheres in the novel ("El krausismo"). In this view, materiality and spirituality are joined like the two faces of San Sebastián described in *Misericordia*'s opening passage:

> Dos caras, como algunas personas, tiene la parroquia de San Sebastián… mejor será decir la iglesia… dos caras que seguramente son más graciosas que bonitas: con la una mira a los barrios bajos, enfilándolos por la calle de Cañizares; con la otra al señorío mercantil de la Plaza del Ángel. Habréis notado en ambos rostros una fealdad risueña, del más puro Madrid, en quien el carácter arquitectónico y el moral se aúnan maravillosamente. (*Misericordia* 75)

In *Misericordia*, these two sides of reality—"el carácter arquitectónico y el moral"—are indeed interdependent, and even so intertwined as to become indistinguishable. Still, the critical portrayal of poverty put forth in the novel resists Krausism's optimism about society's progress towards a harmonized and ideal future. The relationship between traditional religious ideas and current social problems in this novel does not point to a neat synthesis, but creates a dialectic of past and present that ultimately throws the idea of linear, historical progress into question.

This dialectic manifests itself in Benina, who is clearly one of the "algunas personas" that manage to embody both sides of *Misericordia*'s dualistic reality. Her ability to care selflessly for others rests on both her savvy navigation of the material world and her faith in God, a belief that she understands as completely relevant to her immediate situation. For Benina, "Todo es de Dios": "Y mirando las cosas como deben mirarse, yo digo que Dios, no tan sólo ha criado la tierra y el mar, sino que son obra suya mismamente las tiendas de ultramarinos, el Banco de España, las casas donde vivimos y, pongo por caso, los puestos de verdura… Todo es de Dios" (116). Religion does not only apply to ancient and immutable things, but also to the new and changing daily realities of modernity.

This firm belief in God's sovereignty over all aspects of life, from nature to finance, allows Benina to see possibility for alleviating the suffering of those around her everywhere—not only in the material world, but also in the immaterial realms of faith and mysticism. She is intrigued by the rituals that her blind friend and fellow mendicant, Almudena, describes to her as a way to solve her financial problems through magic; as the narrator tells us, "la miseria despertaba en ella el respeto de las cosas inverosímiles y

maravillosas, y aunque no había visto ningún milagro, esperaba verlo el mejor día" (157). This belief in miracles causes Benina to speculate as to whether the deity of which Almudena speaks, King Samdai, might actually respond to her petitions and bring riches to the Zapata household. She herself declares, "También te digo que suceden cosas muy *fenómenas*, y que andan por el aire los que llaman espíritus [. . .] lo que una sueña, ¿qué es? Pues cosas verdaderas de otro mundo que se vienen a este… Todo puede ser, todo puede ser" (160).

For Benina, anything is possible and dreams can become real. While this conviction originates from her religious faith, she also bases it on the seemingly miraculous innovations that appear in the modern world:

> ¿Pues cuántas cosas se tuvieron por mentira y luego salieron verdades? Antes de que inventaran el telégrafo, ¿quién hubiera creído que se hablaría con las Américas del Nuevo Mundo, como hablamos de balcón a balcón con el vecino de enfrente? Y antes de que inventaran la fotografía, ¿quién hubiera pensado que se puede una retratar sólo con *ponerse*? (161)

The inclusion of the telegraph and photography along with King Samdai in the scope of Benina's imagination demonstrates that she sees transformative potential both in the ancient tradition of Almudena's Judaism and in the technological developments of the nineteenth century. In her religious and modern worldview, God can work through both spiritual and material worlds.

In fact, the uncanny materialization of Benina's own "invention," Don Romualdo, is tied to both the physical realities of the city and to Almudena's mysticism. The "fingido personaje" is first created as the result of Benina's desire to alleviate the hunger

and need of Doña Paca and her family, as the pressure to provide for them drives her to mendacity. When, in response to these material demands, she "authors" Don Romualdo and situates him realistically within the Madrid landscape, the protagonist stays true to Galdós' own aesthetic sensibility. Inexplicably, several of the characteristics she gives her fictional character (his profession, the fact that he has a niece and hails from the nearby town of Alcalá) also correspond to the real person who appears later in the novel. Still, when the second Don Romualdo shows up on the Zapata doorstep to tell Doña Paca that she is to receive an unexpected inheritance from a deceased relative, his role as a bearer of riches recalls King Samdai, the god of the underworld who is able to provide "*Tuda, tuda* la que haber en el Banco, *millonas mochas, lotería*" (160). As Harry Kirby points out in his study of Don Romualdo's character, the flesh-and-blood version of the priest corresponds to both Benina's pragmatic, reality-based fiction and to the otherworldly visions of Almudena. Kirby remarks, "as the main action of the novel comes to a close, the figures of [the fictitious] Romualdo and Samdai subtly converge" (106).

The concrete applications of Benina's spiritual virtues and the ambiguous sources of Don Romualdo's final figure provide further examples of what Turner identifies as Galdós' ability to bridge gaps between the material and the immaterial, the social and the spiritual realities of his day. Geoffrey Ribbans articulates this in closing his article, "The Janus-Face Structure of *Misericordia*":

> Neither perspective—neither that of the external world of class differentiation, ingrained selfishness, unbridled extravagance and dire poverty, nor that of inner charitable values [. . .], which justify themselves

> in themselves, but which correspond potentially to a call to sainthood or to an identification with God's purposes—can be excluded. *Misericordia* is made, enigmatically and provocatively, of both. (217)

The allusion of Ribbans' title recalls the epigraph to Benjamin's 1939 exposé on the *Arcades Project*, quoted from Maxime Du Camp's *Paris*: "History is like Janus; it has two faces. Whether it looks at the past or at the present, it sees the same things" (*Arcades* 14). Like the San Sebastián church, Benjamin's view of history joins two sides of reality: here, the old and the new. As it includes contemporary social concerns and technological advances along with religious traditions of Catholicism and Almudena's Judaism, *Misericordia* also draws from both present and past. It encompasses the immediate demands of the capitalist age, as well as the traces—what Benjamin would identify as ruins[4]—of multiple religious worldviews that form part of Spain's history. This assortment of artifacts depicts Madrid's uniquely Spanish composite of ancient and modern.

The interdependence of past and present is at the heart of Benjamin's concept of "Messianic time," which he explains in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History":

> We know that the Jews were prohibited from investigating the future. The Torah and the prayers instruct them in remembrance, however. This stripped the future of its magic, to which all those succumb who turn to the soothsayers for enlightenment. This does not imply, however, that for the Jews the future turned into homogeneous, empty time. For every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter. (*Illuminations* 264)

While in his view of the Messianic Benjamin draws on the Jewish heritage that he shares with Almudena,[5] the sense of ever-present possibility in this outlook is especially aligned with Benina's conviction that "todo puede ser." The perspective runs counter to worldviews such as Krausism or the nineteenth century's faith in progress, which look to the future for eventual perfection, and instead focuses on the redemptive potential of the present—Benjamin's "time of the now" (*Illuminations* 263).

Emphasis on the present is a token of all of Galdós' later novels, aptly referred to as the *novelas contemporáneas*. With *Misericordia*'s focus on the economic destitution of the poor, however, the critique of linear, historical progress that we have already observed in *Fortunata y Jacinta* and *Miau* gains urgency. This is especially clear in an early scene of the novel where, with clear irony, Galdós stages a conversation between Benina and Almudena in the Plaza de Progreso. As they discuss the relentless financial difficulties that impede and deny any improvement in their situation, the impoverished mendicants sit beneath the statue of Juan Álvarez Mendizábal, the initiator of Spain's transition to capitalist modernity.[6] Significantly, Benina does not recognize him: "Mendizábal, aquel verdinegro señor de bronce que ella no sabía quién era ni por qué le habían puesto allí" (*Misericordia* 104). This memorialized champion of progress means nothing amid the economic stagnation of Benina's present.

Despite the advances set in motion by Mendizábal, capitalism in nineteenth-century Madrid has failed to support the poor of the city, and thus the figure memorialized by the statue holds no relevance for them. Like the Villaamils' broken clock in *Miau*, here the idea of progress is "inverosímil"; it does not reflect the reality lived by Benina and Almudena. In their experience, the breakdown of the monetary

system of representation anticipated by the closing of the Rubín shop in *Fortunata y Jacinta* has created an economic situation without escape: "Y si la ansiada moneda pasara de las manos que con otras muchas la poseían, a las suyas, no se notaría ninguna alteración sensible en la distribución de la riqueza, y todo seguiría lo mismo: los ricos, ricos; pobre ella" (104).

As *Misericordia* portrays it, poverty in Madrid at the end of the century not only exposes the failure of Spain's efforts at modernization, but also represents a point of contention between traditional and progressive views of society. In her article, Fuentes Peris points out that this theme is at the crux of a transition from an old, "providential" understanding of social class to a new perspective gaining currency at the end of the nineteenth century—an outlook similar to the deterministic, survival-of-the-fittest worldview that dominates the setting of *Miau*. In the novel, the providential view of poverty is espoused by Don Carlos Trujillo and the other alms-givers at San Sebastián, whom Galdós' narrator calls "las conciencias impuras que van a donde lavan" (*Misericordia* 77). In this Catholic understanding, the poor exist for the spiritual wellbeing of the rich, providing the upper classes with a way to express charity and thus ensure their salvation. The progressive view, by contrast, interprets poverty as a result of an inherent flaw in those who suffer it, the "innate dissolute nature of the poorer classes" (Fuentes Peris 110-112). We see this attitude expressed in *Misericordia* in chapter 31, when a policeman arrests Benina for begging in a certain street without a permit and unjustly calls her a drunkard: "¡Calle usted, *so borracha*!" (*Misericordia* 292).

Benina's own attitude, however, resists both of these views of society. She quickly sees through the hypocrisy of Don Trujillo's miserly giving, which invokes

Providence in order to maintain the status quo, laughing at his belief that he can solve her financial problems by giving her a mere two *reales* a month. At the same time, she denounces the cruelty of the progressive system, which fails to meet the immediate needs of the poor. As she remarks to the policeman who takes her to San Bernardino jail, "Pues manténgame el señor Gobernador, que yo de hambre no he de morirme" (292). As she concerns herself only with the present moment and its demands, her understanding of Providence can be traced to Matthew 6:26, "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them."[7] In this Biblical view, God's provision applies to the present, and the faithful need not worry about future stability or improvement.

Since Benina's faith applies to material demands in the here and now, Don Carlos' advice that she save her money and keep a record of her spending seems ridiculous to her: "caldo de números y substancia de imprenta… ¡qué risa!... En fin, para las mentiras que he de decirla a Doña Paca, Dios me iluminará, como siempre, y vamos tirando" (*Misericordia* 155). Here again we see Benina's practical concern for material needs combined with faith in God, her realistic outlook on the nineteenth century paired with religious tradition. Even the lies she tells Paca about Don Romualdo are supplied by Providence, and she is confident that God will provide them when the need arises. This sentiment and its Biblical origin are reiterated at the end of the novel, where Benina and Almudena, abandoned by the Zapatas after Don Romualdo makes the family rich, set off on their own: "Por lo que debemos hacer lo que nos manda la conciencia, [. . .] y tomar lo que Dios nos ponga delante, como los pájaros" (354).

Through her trust in God to supply for her daily needs and the needs of those she cares for, and through the pragmatic resourcefulness with which she recognizes the possibilities he puts before her, Benina actually embodies divine provision in the eyes of those who depend on her.[8] When she enters the Zapata home, Paca's daughter Obdulia sees "la Providencia, en figura de Benina" (*Misericordia* 178), and Frasquito Ponte—a distant relative who also comes to depend on Benina's benevolence[9]—declares later on, "yo *me inclino a creer* que en el cuerpo de usted se ha encarnado un ser benéfico y misterioso, un ser que es *mera* personificación de la Providencia, según la entendían y entienden los pueblos antiguos y modernos" (194). In a manner reminiscent of Benjamin's dialectic view of past and present, Benina embodies Providence *not* merely as an antiquated theological concept, but also as a modern reality, a force in contemporary life. In *Misericordia,* Providence is not only spiritual but material, even incarnate.

As the embodiment of Providence in the novel, then, Benina represents the meeting of two worlds—one material and corporeal, the other spiritual and imaginative. In her, the prophetic nature of dreams and fantasy that we have seen demonstrated in *Miau*'s Luisito makes contact with the physical world. She imagines a beneficent priest capable of rescuing the Zapatas from their financial problems, and such a priest emerges onto the streets of Madrid. When Benina learns that there is an actual Don Romualdo in the city, she wonders if her fiction, itself created in response to material conditions, has taken physical form: "pensaba si, por milagro de Dios, habría tomado cuerpo y alma de persona verídica el ser creado en su fantasía por un mentir inocente, *obra de las aflictivas circunstancias*" (287, my emphasis). The mysterious phenomenon of Don Romualdo's

appearance blurs and transcends conventional distinctions between real and imaginary; at this point in the story Benina repeatedly feels that "lo real y lo imaginario se revolvían y entrelazaban en su cerebro" (268). In fact, the two sides of the divide are shown to interact: economic realities inspire fictions, and the creations of the imagination become part of real life.

While Benina is stunned by the uncanny materialization of her fantasy, she maintains her practical outlook, viewing the strange occurrence as a possibility for sustaining the Zapata family: "En fin, veremos lo que resulta de todo esto [. . . .] Bien venido sea ese señor cura si viene a traernos algo" (287). This reaction is in keeping with the protagonist's view of Providence, in which God can work through any aspect of the present moment. Since for Benina "todo es de Dios," Don Romualdo's materialization—though she cannot explain it—is a potential source of redemptive relief for Doña Paca's household.

Benina's ability to recognize this redemptive potential in Don Romualdo's appearance, to accept it as a divine intervention in the material world, reflects the attitude of the Jews in Benjamin's description of "Messianic time." For Benina, the religious tradition of the past does not put off its fulfillment to some distant future, but can and does impact the present, in the incarnated form of the invented priest. Indeed, Kirby has pointed out that Don Romualdo's surname, Cedrón, links him to Old-Testament imagery for the Messiah in the Song of Songs and the book of Ezekiel. Thus, since "[t]he cedar tree in religious art often represents the Holy Father, His Son, and the Messiah. [. . .] there can be no doubt that his surname indicates that he is intended to be a kind of messianic figure who is endowed with divine qualities" (Kirby 103). Carrying these

overtones of messianic intervention, the priest's materialization introduces a new dimension into the story of *Misericordia*.

Whether it is seen as a miraculous intrusion of divine power or as a metafictional reflection on artistic creation, the event represents a break with linear conceptions of narrative, progress, and time. Multiple critics have suggested that the incarnation of the fictional priest causes a shift in the novel's relation to temporality.[10] Whereas earlier parts of the novel report the passage of hours and days meticulously, in what Russell calls "*servitude* to time," after Don Romualdo materializes days and weeks go by quickly, almost without mention from the narrator. Russell writes,

> The evaporation of exact time as a narrative control coincides with the appearance of don Romualdo: at a moment when it seems as if the demands of time have defeated Benina, time as an implacable enemy suddenly disappears [. . . .] Thus, the abandonment of exact chronology functions as the elimination of an unneeded narrative support (the new reality demands a new dimension). (109)

Ribbans rightly responds to this reading by pointing out that the shift does not change the novel's "realist structure" (211); indeed, time continues to pass regularly and be accounted for. Yet the interpenetration of real and imaginary in Romualdo's appearance and Benina's understanding of it does introduce an awareness of a "new dimension," a wider reality that includes but also transcends the physical and the temporal.

Evoking Benina's earlier claim that dreams hold "cosas verdaderas de otro mundo que se vienen a este," this pivotal, seemingly miraculous event in the novel suggests that the world of the imagination can engender truth and justice. According to Benina,

redemptive social change begins in this other world: “digo que no hay justicia, y para que la *haiga*, soñaremos todo lo que nos dé la gana, y soñando, un suponer, traeremos acá la justicia” (*Misericordia* 231).Through her dialectic combination of material, everyday reality with desires, dreams, and faith, Benina’s imagination creates a new reality that both transcends and redeems material difficulties.

As Don Romualdo’s physical manifestation brings material restoration to one family in Madrid society, Benina’s dream of justice realizes itself in a manner resembling a Benjaminian awakening. In the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin speculates, “Is awakening perhaps the synthesis of dream consciousness (as thesis) and waking consciousness (as antithesis)? Then the moment of awakening would be identical with the “now of recognizability,” in which things put on their true—surrealist—face” (463-64). Both Benjamin and Galdós recognize that reality is in part constituted of *sur*reality; dreams and the imagination impinge on everyday life through phantasmagoria (exemplified in *Misericordia* by Doña Paca and Frasquito Ponte[11]). In order to counter the delusional views of reality that result from this, the interdependence of dreaming and waking life must be made manifest. Thus, the incarnation of Benina’s fantasy in the person of Don Romualdo, a synthesis of imaginative possibilities and physical realities, ruptures the nineteenth century’s phantasmagoric dream. For Benjamin, this synthesis is the key to achieving social and political change. As the messianic materialization of Benina’s invention joins her spirituality with the secular economic issues of Galdós’ day, *Misericordia* demonstrates Benjamin’s vision of “life’s supremely dialectical point of rupture: awakening” (*Arcades* 464).[12]

Near the end of her story, after reflecting on the affinities of her fictional Don Romualdo and the "real" version, Benina remarks, "Y ya estoy segura, después de mucho cavilar, que no es el D. Romualdo que yo inventé, sino otro que se parece a él como se parecen dos gotas de agua. Inventa una cosas que luego salen verdad, o las verdades, antes de ser verdades, un suponer, han sido mentiras muy gordas" (*Misericordia* 361-62). In this statement Benina first distinguishes between the physically real Don Romualdo and her own imaginary version, but then acknowledges that the categories of reality and fiction, truth and falsity can and do bleed into one another in actual life experience. In *Misericordia*, realism is not only a matter of representing the physical world, but also of recognizing the impact of the imagination on that world. Ribbans affirms that in this novel Galdós does not "assert the superiority of imaginative creation over imitation of reality; he presents them both in parallel fashion and problematizes them both" ("Janus-Face" 210). In light of Benina's words, we might push this observation a bit further: Galdós does not merely *present*, but in fact *combines* imitation and creation, problematizing them through their dialectical dependence upon one another. Just as contemporary modernity and religious tradition coexist in Benina's person and consciousness, the creative dreams of the imagination and the concreteness of everyday life interpenetrate one another.

Through this interpenetration, the novel awakens to a new dimension of reality, a Benjaminian "Messianic time" running parallel to and sometimes glimpsed within historical time. As one of these glimpses, then, Don Romualdo's materialization in *Misericordia* echoes Benjamin's wariness about the idea of progress, which tends to reify events within a one-dimensional "History of Civilization." In his book *History and*

Fiction in Galdós's Narratives, Ribbans comments on Galdós' attitude toward linear history at the turn of the century:

> Galdós despairs about what has gone on and is going on in Spain, not so much about history itself. That is why despite everything he clings so strongly to detailed historical data, even though he treats them with a measure of contempt. This is not to deny that he is suffering a crisis about history, which caused him to abandon historical realism in his novels after *Misericordia*. The images of mimetic movement (Stendhal) or of organic growth (the tree) or of constant flow (the stream) no longer apply. (174)

As we have seen throughout this study, Galdós like Benjamin questions the nineteenth century's faith in progress, with its continual look to the future and oversight of both the potential inherent in the present and the present's dialectical relationship to the past. This does not drive the Spanish novelist to give up on history, but rather to take a historical-materialist interest in the minutiae of the past—forgotten pieces of civilization such as the beggars on the steps of San Sebastián. As the artifacts he finds explode the linear narrative of progress, they demonstrate that the present is not locked into a pre-defined "History of Civilization." It is rather the "time of the now," a potential point of entry for change and redemption.

Still, as Benjamin acknowledges, the "*weak* Messianic power" of the historical materialist can only enact this redemption in part. The glimpses of "Messianic time" that he salvages cannot stop the "catastrophe" of history, as Benjamin dubs it in his *Theses* (*Illuminations* 257). We see this in *Misericordia* as well, for after Don Romualdo's appearance, while Doña Paca and her family enjoy the comforts of restored financial

stability, Benina is abandoned; she and Almudena continue to suffer the harsh conditions of poverty. Yet even in this situation her combination of sober practicality and faith allows her, like Benjamin's "angel of history," to rise above the catastrophe, as it "keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of [her] feet" (*Illuminations* 257):

> Rechazada por la familia que había sustentado en días tristísimos de miseria y dolores sin cuento, no tardó en rehacerse de la profunda turbación que ingratitud tan notoria le produjo; su conciencia le dio inefables consuelos: miró la vida desde la altura en que su desprecio de la humana vanidad la ponía; vio en ridícula pequeñez a los seres que la rodeaban, y su espíritu se hizo fuerte y grande. Había alcanzado glorioso triunfo; sentíase victoriosa, después de haber perdido la batalla en el terreno material. (*Misericordia* 351)

Still, while she observes her society, its vanity, and the wreckage of its progress, Benina does not retreat from the material world. Unlike Benjamin's angel, who "would like to stay [. . .] and make whole what is smashed" but cannot (*Illuminations* 257), Benina continues to meet the physical demands of the present moment. Galdós' narrator continues, "Mas las satisfacciones íntimas de la victoria no la privaron be su don de gobierno, y atenta a las cosas materiales, acudió [. . .] a resolver lo más urgente en lo que a la vida corporal de ambos [Benina y Almudena] se refería" (*Misericordia* 351). Having been denied the promises of future progress, Benina again focuses on the present, illuminating it through her combination of worldliness and other-worldly virtue.

Throughout *Misericordia*, and especially in the "Messianic" incarnation of Don Romualdo, Benina's pairing of creativity with authentic trust in Providence reveals that

the immaterial realms of religious belief and dreams interact with and are in fact part of the reality of her time. By attesting to this interaction, *Misericordia* makes an *artistic* advance, toward what Benjamin calls "the truly new":

> In every true work of art there is a place where, for one who removes there, it blows cool like the wind of a coming dawn. From this it follows that art, which has often been considered refractory to every relation with progress, can provide its true definition. Progress has its seat not in the continuity of elapsing time but in its interferences—where the truly new makes itself felt for the first time, with the sobriety of dawn. (*Arcades* 474)

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[1] See Kirby 98. In his study, Harry Kirby traces the religious symbolism of the surnames and characterizations of Benina and the priest Don Romualdo.

[2] The ambiguity of Galdós' realism in this instance allows the appearance to be read as either a magical event (a view held by Timothy McGovern) or a mere coincidence (as Eamonn Rodgers argues); the text offers no definitive explanation of the event. See McGovern 54-84 and Rodgers, "¿Cristal o diamantes?"

[3] John Kronik and Nicole Malaret have identified this further dimension as the aesthetic self-consciousness of metafiction. As a novel-within-a-novel, Benina's "authoring" of Don Romualdo becomes a reflection on the creation of a realist text. See Kronik, "*Misericordia* as Metafiction" and Malaret, "*Misericordia*, una reflexión."

[4] In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin writes, "The allegorical physiognomy of the nature-history, which is put on stage in the *Trauerspiel*, is present in reality in the form of the ruin. In the ruin history has physically merged into the setting" (177-78). When he turns to the nineteenth century in the *Arcades Project*, the ruin continues to represent the theological worldview of the past as a material part of modern reality. See also chapter 6 in Susan Buck-Morss' *Dialectics of Seeing*, "Historical Nature: Ruin."

[5] For an analysis of Almudena's heritage, see Sara E. Cohen, "Almudena and the Jewish Theme in *Misericordia*," *Anales Galdosianos* 8 (1973): 51-61.

[6] On this passage and Mendizábal, see Ribbans, *History* 104-105.

[7] New International Version.

[8] Similarly, Russell notes, "Charity, we discover, is not necessarily present in a programmatic abstraction of poverty or in a sensible program of the administration of wealth; it exists in a concrete and individual person" (129).

[9] Ponte is a prime subject for further Benjaminian analysis. As Víctor Fuentes points out in several notes to the text in his critical edition of *Misericordia*, Don Frasquito is presented as a *flâneur*, and exhibits a fetishistic obsession with luxury items and personal appearance. Furthermore, he has been to Paris (if only briefly) and never tires of describing its streets and sights to Obdulia. See especially Fuentes' edition of *Misericordia*, pages 191 n. 17 and 312 n. 5.

[10] Russell follows Joaquín Casalduero's assertion in *Vida y obra de Galdós*, that after Don Romualdo appears "El apoyo cronológico deja de ser necesario" (Casalduero 235).

[11] As Galdós' narrator relates, Benina soothes Paca at night by entertainng her illusions: "Para atenuar las horas tristes, sacaban fuerzas de flaqueza, alegrando con afectadas fantasmagorías los ratos de la noche" (123). In turn, Ponte exhibits the phantasmagorias of *cursilería* characteristic of the Villaamil women in

Miau: “En la época en que aún no existía la palabra *cursi*, Ponte Delgado consagró su vida a la sociedad, vistiendo con afectada elegancia, frecuentando, no diré los salones, porque entonces poco se usaba esta denominación, sino algunos estrados de casas buenas y distinguidas” (182).

[12] Nicole Malaret sees social change as the focus of *Misericordia*’s metafictional comment on the novel: “La novela puede revelar indirectamente no sólo una verdad sicológica sino también otra social y política. Puede ser la prefiguración de acontecimientos que se produzcan más adelante. ¿No se halla aquí el reconocimiento por parte de Galdós del carácter potencialmente subversivo de la novela?” (“*Misericordia*, una reflexión” 93).

CONCLUSION

> Redemption depends on the tiny fissure in the continuous catastrophe.
>
> Benjamin, "Central Park"

In the opening passage of *Misericordia*, a description of the scene around the San Sebastián church, Galdós' writes, "En ninguna parte como aquí advertiréis el encanto, la simpatía, el *ángel*, dicho sea en andaluz, que despiden de sí, como tenue fragancia, las cosas vulgares, o algunas de las infinitas cosas vulgares que hay en el mundo" (76). Here again, the novelist's thorough realism creates a Benjaminian, historical-materialist compulsion to consider the vulgar, commonplace, and overlooked details of modernity, while he recognizes that his rendering of the nineteenth century will always be incomplete, only able to capture a few of the infinite fragments of the everyday that history will forget. The response to this fact is an urgent desire to preserve the artifacts one can—in this case the church building, an architectural representation of religious tradition in the midst of urban modernity. As the narrator concludes, this is "un rinconcito de Madrid que debemos conservar cariñosamente, como anticuarios coleccionistas" (77).

Over the course of this study I have proposed that the details Galdós chooses to collect and preserve in novel form in *Fortunata y Jacinta*, *Miau*, and *Misericordia* demonstrate that the interpenetration of sacred and secular worldviews pervades reality in late nineteenth-century Madrid. These works showcase the intermingling of religious

tradition and the modern conditions of industrial society—a phenomenon that many experience passively in the realm of phantasmagoria, and that a few imaginative individuals actively create, making new and unanticipated associations among the fragments of modern life.

In *Fortunata y Jacinta*, Maximiliano Rubín represents the first group; Fortunata the latter. While Maxi uncritically absorbs various discourses present on the palimpsest of modernity—from church dogma to the Calderonian *código de honor* to chemistry and technology—and escapes into a quixotic world of ideals, Fortunata applies key experiences in her life to the development of an "idea" that she revises throughout the novel. In so doing, she creates a modern allegory that combines commercial exchange and her desire for reconciliation with Jacinta. At the story's end, her redemptive act of giving her child to the other, childless *casada* creates a new, meaningful relationship between two women situated within the vastness and variety of urban experience portrayed in Galdós' longest novel.

This Galdosian view of urban life reflects Benjamin's definition of modernity as "the world dominated by its phantasmagorias" (*Arcades* 26). In *Miau*, the phantasmagorias of the adult world—namely, Pura Villaamil's fetishistic fixation on appearances and Don Ramón's attempts to impose systematic rationality on an absurd setting—are exposed as delusions by the dreams of a child. While Luisito Cadalso's relatives retreat into the interior of their home to protect themselves from society's hostility, the little boy's fantasies connect exterior and interior. His oneiric talks with a white-bearded deity counter the grimly secular determinism of the outside world, preserving the possibility of transcendence in play.

Finally, in *Misericordia* Benina's pragmatism contrasts with the illusory, nostalgic state in which Doña Paca lives, as she refuses to let go of a way of life that her current situation cannot support. In contrast, Benina keeps a firm hold on reality as she attends to pressing material demands and faithfully trusts her God to help her meet them. The product of her pragmatic imagination, Don Romualdo, synthesizes material and immaterial realities, and his final appearance as a flesh-and-blood person transcends narrative history with a glimpse of Benjamin's "Messianic time." Galdós' realist aesthetic in *Misericordia*, as in *Miau* and *Fortunata y Jacinta*, goes beyond physical conditions to reveal the unnoticed, strange alterations that take place between the traces of traditional religion and the progressive pull of modernization that define Spain's reality in the last third of the century.

Ideas about Providence are especially indicative of this situation in the novels. For many, this theological concept has become synonymous with historical progress and improvement, resembling the equation of "Providence and the Ecole Polytechnique" that Benjamin cites in the *Arcades*. The influence of Krausism—with its insistence on the reconcilability of science and religion as well as its belief in eventual, divinely-ordained harmonization of life—is clear in Galdós' presentation of the concept, yet these three novels also depict the author's reservations about Krausist thought. Characters like Maximiliano Rubín and Ramón Villaamil, who expect Providence to work mechanistically like a water pump or a clock to improve their social standing, are shown to be out of touch with reality—even insane—and ultimately unable to survive in the modern world. Such syncretistic conflations of God's will with industrial, social, or national progress are definitively exposed as illusions in *Misericordia*, where the harsh

conditions of poverty in *fin-de-siècle* Madrid belie the promises of advancement represented by historical figures like Mendizábal. In each case, Galdós' texts challenge the idea of Providence as a monolithic historical progression.

Unlike Maxi and Don Ramón, the characters Fortunata, Luisito Cadalso, and Benina de Casia interact with modern life in such a way as to become directional, even providential forces in their own right within their stories. The "pícara idea" that Fortunata first conceives out of competition with Jacinta for Juanito Santa Cruz takes its final shape as a "bendita idea"—the gift of Juanito's child that reconciles her with her rival and closes the novel on a note of redemption. Benina's steadfast altruism and ability to support the otherwise helpless Zapatas makes her the "personificación de la Providencia" in her novel, and as the "inventor" of Don Romualdo she supplies the source of the family's salvation from poverty. Even Luisito, whose dreamed encounters with God form a counterpoint to Villaamil's experience in the structure of *Miau*, demonstrates clairvoyant insight into his grandfather's situation. These characters do not simply dream of a better future sanctioned by divine will and society, but apply their dreams to contemporary reality, acting in the present moment with urgency and immediacy that, in the end, direct the development of their stories.

The dialectical relationship between this present moment and the past that shapes it also plays an important role in Galdós' texts, as it does in Benjamin's view of modernity. In the novels we have examined here, Spain's religious heritage(s) persist as part of the Madrid landscape, ruins of a previous age's theological worldview. The baroque period, which Benjamin associates with Christian theology's crisis of representation and resulting secularization, is a point of reference in all three novels—and

particularly in *Fortunata y Jacinta* and *Misericordia*, where we observe that the capitalist system breaks down in modernity just as religious allegory did in the seventeenth century, and where the Calderonian *código de honor* represents just another of the failed worldviews underlying nineteenth-century life.

While characters like Maximiliano Rubín and Frasquito Ponte illustrate the irrelevance and incongruence of the *Siglo-de-Oro* outlook in their society, however, Galdós' treatment of the clash between sacred and secular in *Miau* resonates with Benjamin's baroque: like the dream-world of *La vida es sueño*, the imaginative and artistic play of Luisito's visions preserves the transcendent within secularized society. With Don Romualdo's materialization in *Misericordia*, this ludic potential found in dreams enters into reality, drawing another religious past—represented by Almudena's Jewish mysticism and his King Samdai—into the material world of the present.

Through their dreams, Fortunata, Luisito, and Benina trace connections among the artifacts of modernity collected by Galdosian realism, and in so doing illuminate glimpses of what "ought to be." In the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin associates this vision of a better world with the figure Galdós refers to in *Misericordia* as an "anticuario coleccionista": "The collector dreams his way not only into a distant or bygone world but also into a better one—one in which, to be sure, human beings are no better provided with what they need than in the everyday world, but in which things are freed from the drudgery of being useful" (*Arcades* 9). As novelist and collector, Galdós wrests "algunas de las infinitas cosas vulgares que hay en el mundo" from their perfunctory place in modernity and puts them to new use in *Fortunata y Jacinta*, *Miau*, and *Misericordia*.

This historical-materialist act uncovers a reality that is diverse and multi-dimensional, composed of physical and psychological, social and spiritual, secular and sacred.

Since the "cosas vulgares" of modern life exist in an infinite number, the work of realism and historical materialism can never be achieved in full. In this respect, Benjamin notes, "As far as the collector is concerned, his collection is never complete; for let him discover just a single piece missing, and everything he's collected remains a patchwork" (*Arcades* 211). A complaint voiced by Doña Paca in *Misericordia* picks up on this sense of incompletion:

> Vamos, que Dios, digan lo que dijeren, no hace nunca las cosas completas. Así en lo malo como en lo bueno, siempre se deja un rabillo, para que lo desuelle el destino. En las mayores calamidades, permite siempre un suspiro; en las dichas que su misericordia concede, *se le olvida* siempre algún detalle, cuya falta *lo echa todo a perder*. (310)

While this lack of completion frustrates Doña Paca, for Benjamin it is a source of hope: the inconclusive points in history open tiny fissures in the narrative of the accepted "History of Civilization." These cracks allow the historical materialist to do his work, to unearth new aspects of reality that affect—and potentially redeem—the present. In *Fortunata y Jacinta*, *Miau*, and *Misericordia*, the realist novel collects forgotten "rabillo[s]" scattered through Madrid—a windmill, a bourgeois dining room, a church with "dos caras"—and preserves them as artifacts of a culture and a nation caught between religious heritage and the push towards modernization. The multifaceted reality reflected by these curiosities is that of Spain's own "Capital of the Nineteenth Century."

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