



D. Perceval

Heath's Modern Language Series

MARIUCHA

COMEDIA EN CINCO ACTOS

POR

BENITO PÉREZ GALDÓS

*EDITED WITH INTRODUCTION, NOTES, AND
VOCABULARY*

BY

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D. C. HEATH & CO., PUBLISHERS
BOSTON NEW YORK CHICAGO

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PREFACE

Some one will naturally ask: "Why did not the editor select Galdós' bestplay, *El abuelo*, for publication?" I should like to reply to this question in advance. *El abuelo*, with all its beauties, has certain features which make it slightly undesirable for use by classes of American students in High Schools and the elementary years of College. First, one of its beauties is itself a drawback for this particular purpose; namely, the rather vague and abstract moral it conveys. Then, the main-spring of the plot, like that of *Electra*, lies in a dubious obscurity to which it is not necessary to direct the attention of young people. *Mariucha*, on the other hand, presents clean-cut, open problems of daily life, and they

are also problems which any American can readily understand, not local Spanish anachronisms. I chose *Mariucha* believing it to be the best fitted for general class use among all the dramas of Galdós; and I hope that Spanish teachers may not find me wrong.

The Introduction is confined to a discussion of Galdós as a dramatic author, since a study of his entire work or of his influence on his generation would be quite out of place.

To my friend and colleague Professor Erasmo Buceta I am deeply grateful for generous and suggestive help; and I am indebted to Doña María Pérez-Galdós de Verde for information which gives the Bibliography an accuracy it could not otherwise have had.

S.G.M.

October, 1920.

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INTRODUCTION

A. THE LIFE OF D. BENITO PÉREZ GALDÓS

Benito Pérez Galdós was born May 10, 1843, in Las Palmas, Grand Canary Island. The first school he attended was kept by English people; hence perhaps his great admiration for the

English. He showed an early and lasting talent for music and drawing. In 1864 or 1865 he went alone to Madrid to study law, which he disliked. He made slow progress, but completed the course in 1869. Latin was his favorite study, and he never practised law.

His first writing was done for Madrid newspapers; he reported sessions of the Cortes, and wrote all sorts of general articles. During this period he wrote two poetic dramas, never performed. His failure to gain the stage turned him to the novel, and he did not again attempt drama till 1892. Dickens and Balzac most influenced his conception of the novel. His first book, *La fontana de oro*, was published in 1870; the first of the *Episodios nacionales*, *Trafalgar*, in 1873. Since then the *Episodios* reached the number of forty-six; the *Novelas de la primera época* (those based on history rather than on observation), seven; the *Novelas españolas contemporáneas* (based on observation), twenty-four; dramas and comedies, twenty-one; opera, one.

Galdós was never entirely dependent on his pen for his living; he always had a slight income from family property. He never married. He traveled all over Europe at different times, and made a special study of Spain, journeying third class, in carriage and on horse, throughout the country, always by day, and usually in the company of a servant. Fondness for children was a distinctive trait. In 1897 he became a member of the Spanish Academy. He was a liberal deputy for Porto Rico from 1886 to 1890. In 1907 he was elected deputy from Madrid by the Republican party, and retained the post for some years, but without any liking for politics. In 1912 he became completely blind.

For many years he published his own works from the famous office at Hortaleza 132; but handling no other books and cheated

by an unscrupulous partner, he finally had to transfer the business to a regular firm. Galdós' novels have enjoyed an enormous sale, but at the low price of two or three pesetas a volume, instead of the customary four or five. In 1914 Galdós was represented as in poverty, for reasons never made clear, and a public subscription opened for his benefit; an episode sadder for the sponsors than for him. He died on Jan. 4, 1920.

B. BENITO PÉREZ GALDÓS AS A DRAMATIC WRITER

I. The Background.—The closing decades of the nineteenth century saw a curious state of affairs in the drama of Spain. They were years when dogmatic naturalism, with its systematically crude presentation of life, was at its height in France, and France, during the nineteenth century, had more often than not set the fashion for Spain in literary matters. The baldness of Zola and the pessimism of de Maupassant were quickly taken up on the French stage, and Henri Becque and the *Théâtre libre* served slices of raw life to audiences fascinated by a tickling horror. The same naturalism had, indeed, crossed the Pyrenees and found a few half-hearted disciples among Spanish novelists, but, on the whole, Spanish writers resolutely refused to follow this particular French current.

During the years from 1874 to 1892, when Europe was permeated with the new doctrine, the stage of Spain was dominated by one man, who gave no sign that he had ever heard the name of Zola. José Echegaray held the audiences of Madrid for twenty years with his hectic and rhetorical plays. The great dramatic talent of this mathematician and politician drew upon the cheap tricks of Scribe and the appalling situations of Sardou, and combined them with a few dashes of Ibsenian thesis and the historical *pundonor*, to form a dose which would harrow the

vitals of the most hardened playgoer. Only a gift of sonorous, rather hollow lyricism and a sincere intention to emphasize psychology saved the work of this belated Romanticist from being the cheapest melodrama.

Romanticism is never wholly out of season in Spain, and that is doubtless why the art of Echegaray held its own so long, for it was neither novel nor especially perfect. In spite of the solitary and unrewarded efforts of Enrique Gaspar, a Spanish John the Baptist of realism in the drama, the reaction was slow in coming, and the year 1892 may be said to mark its arrival. That was the date of *Realidad*, Pérez Galdós' first drama. Two years later Jacinto Benavente made his début with *El nido ajeno*. In 1897 the brothers Quintero produced their first characteristic work. It will be seen that although the contemporary era of literature in Spain is generally considered to date from the Spanish-American war, the remarkable efflorescence of her drama was well under way before that event. The new school, of which Pérez Galdós is admitted to be the father, is a school of literary and social progress, vitally interested in a new Spain, where the conditions of life may be more just.

II. Galdós Turns from Novel to Drama.—When *Realidad* was performed, Galdós was the most popular novelist in Spain, the peer of any in his own generation, and the master of the younger men of letters. He was known as a radical, an anti-clerical, who exercised a powerful influence upon the thought of his nation, but, above all, as a marvelous creator of fictional characters. He had revealed Spain to herself in nineteen novels of manners, and evoked her recent past in twenty historical novels. He had proved, in short, that in his own sphere he was one of the great vital forces of modern times.

What persuaded this giant of the novel to depart from the field of his mastery and attempt the drama, in which he was a novice? Was it because he desired a more direct method of influencing public opinion in Spain?^[1] Was it, as Sra. Pardo Bazán suggests, with the hope of infusing new life into the Spanish national drama, which had been too long in a rut? Both these motives may have been present, but I do not doubt that the chief was the pure creative urge, the eagerness of an explorer to conquer an unknown region. The example of certain French novelists, his contemporaries, was not such as to encourage him. Zola, Daudet, de Maupassant, the de Goncourts, had all tried the drama with indifferent success or failure. But Galdós held the theory^[2] that novel and drama are not essentially different arts, that the rules of one are not notably divergent from the rules of the other. Few or no dramatic critics will subscribe to this opinion, which explains most of the weaknesses of Galdós' plays.

Again, Galdós had been working toward a dramatic form in his novels, by the increasing use of pure dialog and the exclusion of narrative and description. This tendency culminated in the *novelas dialogadas*, *El abuelo* and *Realidad*, and, later, in *Cassandra* and *La razón de las razones*. The inner reason for the gradual shift toward dialog was increasing interest in human motives and character, and a corresponding distaste for colorful description. Galdós had never, like Pereda, taken great delight in word pictures *per se*, though his early novels contain some admirable ones, and as he grew older his genius was more and more absorbed in the study of man.

His transition to the drama was not, then, so abrupt as might appear. But two things were against his success. First, few writers have approached the stage with so poor a practical

equipment. His friends assure us that, cut off as Galdós was from social diversions by his continuous writing, he had hardly attended the theater once from his university days till the performance of *Realidad*, although it is true that his lack of practical experience was compensated at first by the personal advice of a trained impresario, don Emilio Mario. Second, the drama is above all the genre of condensation, and Galdós, even as a novelist, never condensed. His art was not that of the lapidary, nor even that of the short story writer. He has few *novelas cortas* to his credit, and he required pages and pages to develop a situation or a character.

III. His Dramatic Technique.—His Success.—It is not to be wondered at, then, that Galdós found himself hampered by the time limit of the play. He uttered now and then rather querulous protests against the conventions (artificial, as he regarded them) which prevented him from developing his ideas with the richness of detail to which he was accustomed.^[3] Such complaints are only confessions of weakness on the part of an author. One has only to study the first five pages of any comedy of the brothers Quintero to see how a genuine theatrical talent can make each character define itself perfectly with its first few speeches. To such an art as this Galdós brought a fertile imagination, the habit of the broad canvas, a love of multiplying secondary figures, and of studying the minutiae of their psychology. Only by sheer genius and power of ideas could he have succeeded in becoming, as he did, a truly great dramatist. Naturally enough, he never attained the technical skill of infinitely lesser playwrights. His usual defects are, as one would suppose, clumsy exposition, superfluous minor characters and scenes, mistakes in counting upon a dramatic effect where the audience found none, and

tedious dilution of a situation. Bad motivation and unsustained characters are rarer. The unity of time is observed in *Pedro Minio* and *Alceste*; the unity of place, in *Voluntad* and *El tacaño Salomón*.

Galdós was not an imitator of specific foreign models. His first play, *Realidad*, was a pure expression of his own genius. But it placed him at once in the modern school which aims to discard the factitious devices of the "well-made" play, and to present upon the stage a picture of life approximately as it is. If he frequently deviated from this ideal (the farthest in *La de San Quintín*), it was due more to his innate romanticism, of which we shall speak later, than to a straining for effect. Never, except in the play just named, did he restore to the stock coincidences of Scribe and Pinero.

In the modern drama the conduct of the plot is of secondary importance, and character, ideas and dialog become the primary elements. In the first two Galdós needed no lessons. In naturalness and intensity of dialog he never reached the skill which distinguishes the pure dramatic talents of contemporary Spain: Benavente, the Quintero brothers, Linares Rivas. Galdós' dialog varies considerably in vitality, and it may happen that it is spirited and nervous in some plays otherwise weak (*Electra*, *Celia en los infiernos*), while in others, intrinsically more important (*Amor y ciencia*, *Mariucha*), it inclines toward rhetoric. *Realidad* and *El abuelo*, however, are strong plays strongly written. Galdós never succeeded in forging an instrument perfectly adapted to his needs, like the Quinteros' imitation of the speech of real life, or Benavente's conventional literary language. It took him long to get rid of the old-fashioned soliloquy and aside. In his very last works, however, in *Sor*

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