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HARRIET TURNER

The realist novel

When we think of realism in fiction, we think first of mimesis—the imitation of life—a concept that at once implies the existence of something outside the writer’s own mind which he or she is trying to imitate. The imitation of this supposedly external “thing” undergirds the term “realism,” whether applied to painting, philosophy, literature, or film. As Harry Levin reminds us, “Etymologically, realism is thing-ism. The adjective ‘real’ derives from the Latin *res* [meaning ‘thing’] and finds an appropriate context in ‘real estate’—land, property, things.¹ The realist novel in Spain places a special emphasis on this primary engagement with the things of this world. In this emphasis, nineteenth-century Spanish realism harks back even to the epic *Poema de Mío Cid* (1140), in which a close-up focus on things—cages laid bare, emptied of hunting falcons, weeds growing on the threshold of an abandoned castle—participates vividly in telling the story of exile.

Writing in this realist tradition, Benito Pérez Galdós (1843–1920), in his 1870 essay on the art of the novel, first evokes the principle of mimesis. His stated aim is to *reproduce* life as objectively as possible, depicting things as they “really” are—houses, dress, furniture, gestures, and habits of speech. In a later essay (1897) he affirms that language itself constitutes the most telling sign of personal and national identity.² Similarly Leopoldo Alas (1852–1901), known by his pen name Clarín, advocates the idea of the novel as a “reproduction” based on close observation and documentary evidence, on “scrupulously examined details.”³ The trope of the mirror expresses the mimesis of this visible, external reality. Galdós speaks of the contemporary so-

1 H. Levin, *The Gates of Horn. A Study of Five French Realists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 34.

2 B. Pérez Galdós, “La sociedad presente como materia novelable” (1897), in *Ensayos de crítica literaria*, ed. L. Bonet (Barcelona: Península, 1999), p. 220.

3 L. Alas, “Del naturalismo” (1882), in *Leopoldo Alas: Teoría y crítica de la novela española*, ed. Sergio Beser (Barcelona: Laia, 1972), p. 127.

cial novel as a “faithful mirror of the society in which we live.”⁴ Clarín reiterates the notion of the naturalist novel as “the exact reflection of life.”⁵

These images recall Stendhal’s famous definition (1830) of the novel as a mirror being walked along a road. On the one hand, the mirror reflects the dailiness of living, which is visible, constant, verifiable. On the other, that image is *moving* as the novelist carries his mirror the length of the road, and as a moving image it is subjective, variable, uncertain. As Michael Wood advises, “Stendhal’s mirror on the road and the Naturalists’ slice of life were gestures toward the neutral observation the nineteenth century thought it wanted and could have. But the gestures were full of other possibilities and the nineteenth century wanted other things as well. The mirror could be tilted and the slice taken at an angle.”⁶ Catching the tilt, espying the angle, are choices that establish, in the realist novel, a creative tension between part and whole. This tension stems, on the one hand, from the inclusiveness that writers sought (Galdós’s emphasis, for example, on comprehensive lists, recurring characters, and a broad social, historical, and political canvas; Clarín’s focus on an “omnicomprehensive form”⁷), and, on the other, from the imperatives of specificity. The aim was to achieve a depiction of the whole in a creative balance with the finiteness, and the lack implied by a focus on only of a specific part. This part stands for, intimates, or poses as the whole but is not, in and of itself, that whole. Yet in the realist novel that whole of something ought to persist, unnamed and inviolate, gesturing, as it were, at the margins or below the surfaces of things. For it is precisely this whole, the enacted *cosmovisión* or world view or wisdom so deftly secreted in the pieces and parts of the story and its structures, that realists like Galdós and Clarín aspired to communicate to their readers.

In the Spanish realist novel, tricking out that larger meaning through the interplay of part and whole called for experimentation with the tropology of image and motif. In telling, narrators keep associating one thing with another, digressing from plot to atmosphere to character, while objects become transformed into “synecdochic ‘close-ups’ and metonymic ‘set-ups’.”⁸ Examples in Clarín’s *La Regenta* (1884–5) are the collusions of metaphor and motif in the development of the gaze, the image of the tower, of a ubiquitous mud-stained environment, slaving appetites, the hunt, and intertextual allusions. In

Galdós’s *Fortunata y Jacinta* (1886–7), the bird-egg motif becomes a dynamic element of structure,⁹ as do less visible *menudencias*, ordinary, trifling objects like buttons, the staff of Saint Joseph, or a pair of harnessed mules, homely origin of the mercantile fortunes of the Santa Cruz-Arnaiz alliance.

The interplay of part and whole also requires disguises: narrator as character and vice versa; the illusions of shadows, alter egos, or imagined personae; the interplay of voices through monologue, dialogue, and the free indirect style. These are linguistic strategies that construct the dialogic or polyphonic novel. We find also the themes of masks, play-acting, and inset stories that inhabit, and thus alter, the very story that the narrator tells. Even the phenomenon of intertextuality, the multiple ways in which one text reflects or echoes or alludes to another text, may operate at once as an instance of the mimetic mirror and as a mask. This convergence is brilliantly developed, as we shall see, in chapter 16 of *La Regenta* in which Zorrilla’s famous play *Don Juan Tenorio* (1844) is performed. As Lilian Furst notes, Stendhal himself toys with his own “concoction,” that mirror walked along the road: “[W]ith his usual love of disguises, [he] ascribes it in the epigraph to chapter 13 of *Le rouge et le noir* to a seventeenth-century historian, Saint-Réal (that is, the saint of the real).”¹⁰ The mirror itself is a disguise for the rhetoric of the realists to represent life as it “really” is.

In the novels of Galdós and Clarín, the contradictory, unstable nature of mirror images, depicting at once what is constant and what is variable, also forms part of the process of change itself. In *La Regenta*, Ana Ozores, acclaimed by the city of Vetusta as “la Regenta,” sits alone at the table and contemplates the “ruins” of dinner: a coffee urn of burnished tin, a glass emptied of anisette, and a half-smoked cigar lying “impregnated” (II: 10) on a saucer, “its ash forming a repulsive paste with the slopped-over cold coffee” (Rutherford translation, p. 351).¹¹ In these “ruins” she sees the world and her husband, a man “unable to go through with either the smoking of a cigar or the loving of a woman” (*ibid.*). She sees herself orphaned, alone, living an expropriated existence as la Regenta, the wife of a retired magistrate who is

4 B. Pérez Galdós, “Observaciones sobre la novela contemporánea” (1870), in *Ensayos de crítica literaria*, p. 124.

5 Alas, “Del naturalismo,” p. 140.

6 M. Wood, “The Art of Losing,” *The New York Review of Books* (19 February 1999), p. 7.

7 Alas, “Del naturalismo,” p. 140.

8 R. Jakobson, “The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles,” in *Critical Theory Since Plato*, ed. H. Adams (Irvine: University of California Press, 1971), p. 1115.

9 A. Money, “The Bird Motif and the Introductory Motif: Structure in *Fortunata y Jacinta*,” *Anales Galdosianos* 9 (1974), pp. 51–75.

10 L. Furst, “All is True”: *The Claims and Strategies of Realist Fiction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 8.

11 Quotations come from *La Regenta*, edited and with an introduction by G. Sobejano, 2 vols. (Madrid: Castalia, 1981). The translations are my own except in cases when I give John Rutherford’s translation (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1984), as indicated in parenthetical references in the text. In the case of *Fortunata y Jacinta*, quotations come from the edition by Francisco Caudet (Madrid: Cátedra, 1983). The translations from this novel and others by Galdós are my own.

no longer a *regente* and, in truth, no longer a “real” husband: “She, too, was like the cigar—something which had proved not to be of use to one man and could no longer be of use to any other” (ibid.). Realism as thing-ism, as real estate, as property, surfaces ironically in this scene as Ana, in the manner of a realist writer, records as through a glass darkly her desolate existence as an expropriated person, one who is, nonetheless, “owned” as a piece of property. She is a household “good” like the coffee urn, the saucer, the glass emptied of anisette, the “impregnated” half-smoked cigar. All is reversed in these mirror images of Ana’s own narrated and lived “realist” novel: household goods in *Vetusta* are bad, degraded things: the coffee urn is of tin, a base metal, not pure silver; an impregnated, half-smoked cigar foretells the barrenness consequent upon union with an aging, impotent husband.¹²

In Galdós’s *Fortunata y Jacinta*, which bears the mirror-like imprint of intertextual allusions to *La Regenta*,¹³ the unfaithful lover and philandering husband, Juanito Santa Cruz, talks to his reflection in the mirror. “*We’re really something*,” he declares (I: 282), aware of his reflection as a kind of companion (a good-looking, verifiable alter ego) and of himself as a potent, plural entity. At the same time, of course, he is unaware that in that moment he also appears in Galdós’s mimetic mirror as a dual image, not only of his times but also as the novel’s supreme emblem of the mirror-like metaphoric process of substitution and replacement. At the very beginning of the novel, Juanito had expounded his theory about real and imaginary pork chops—how much better, he says, to taste the real thing rather than experience it vicariously as a text, as a realistic story described in every detail.

This self-reflexive gesture toward a theory of the novel in the novel points up a special irony. For if Juanito, ostensibly at the center of things and a catalyst for action, discards mistress for wife and vice versa, thinking of them as texts to be read and reread, he also appears in the realist mirror as a textual artifact: the narrator compares the workings of his mind to a serial novel, a French *folletín*, a snippet of scripted speech and the speech of an amateur actor in a melodrama. From the moment, then, that Juanito propounds his theory about fiction and reality, comparing the idea of *novelas* to that of real and imagined pork chops, he gestures unknowingly toward himself as precisely that textual “pork chop.” He also surfaces as the novel’s richest repository of metaphor because, like a magician or prestidigitator, like the reversals of a mirror image itself, Juanito never is *really* what he appears or claims to be.

12 G. Sobejano, “La inadaptada (Leopoldo Alas: *La Regenta*, capítulo xvi),” in *El comentario de textos*, ed. André Amorós (Madrid: Castalia, 1973), pp. 136, 149.

13 S. Gilman, *Galdós and the Art of the European Novel: 1867–1887* (Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 154–86.

Thus we recognize both the inner logic and the suspect reality of his non-being when, at the end, he, too, appears “discarded”—like the women he seduced. He is simply another “text, set aside as something already too well known” (I: 285), used up and old before his time. The italicized declaration “*We’re really something*,” so visible an image, thus decodes as “*We’re really nothing*.” Now thing-ism, material substance, becomes exchanged for an invisible textual sign of emptiness. In the Spanish realist novel of the 1880s, then, uncertainty is more than a constant. It is the very muse that inspires the artistic and intellectual fascination with the unstable nature of the mimetic mirror, on the part of the characters and the narrator, of course, but also of the text itself. As the above scenes illustrate, mirror images exhibit what Lilian Furst has identified as the tension between the claims of referentiality, on the one hand, and those of textuality on the other. This tension becomes “the distinctive hallmark of the realist novel.”¹⁴

Américo Castro, singling out the common Spanish expression *pasarle a uno algo*, which expresses the idea of who or how you *are* in terms of having something *happen* to you—literally, having something *pass through* you—pin-points that frictive, intermediate space where changes take place in a character’s thinking or feeling. Castro applies the concept to *Don Quijote*, showing how outer circumstance and surroundings—one’s living conditions—become an inner action that the mind keeps making. The unanticipated shifts from naming to doing thereby present what is real as the living rub of thinking and feeling. This in-between action surfaces as a kind of dramatic scene or *tableau*, located *in* the mind and pictured at the very moment when that mind comes into play with reality, the one changing the other as events become *personned* and persons become *evented*.¹⁵

Thus, as Castro is quick to note, the *Quijote* was manifestly the origin for Stendhal’s *Le rouge et le noir* as it was, later in the century, for Clarín’s two novels, *La Regenta* and *Su único hijo* (*His Only Son*, 1891), as well as, among others, Galdós’s *La desheredada* (*The Disinherited Lady*, 1881) and *Fortunata y Jacinta*. One example from the *Quijote*, the famous episode of the *baci-yelmo* (basin-helmet), pointedly illustrates the process that Galdós and Clarín develop in their realist novels of the 1880s. For don Quijote—the idealist—the barber’s basin mutates into the glorious helmet of the giant Mam-

14 Furst, “*All is True*,” p. 12.

15 Quotations from Américo Castro’s essay on the *Quijote* come from *An Idea of History. Selected Essays of Américo Castro*, tr. S. Gilman and E. King (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1977), pp. 77–139. The relations of Castro’s analysis of the influence of *Don Quijote* to European realism and to the discussion of Galdós’s particular theory of realism are developed further in my book *Galdós, “Fortunata y Jacinta”* (Cambridge University Press, 1992).

brino, while for Sancho—the skeptic—such a “helmet” stubbornly persists as a lowly basin. However, once “passed through” the exchange of minds in dialogue, the object becomes both “personned” and “evented” to produce an entirely new thing—a *baci-yelmo*—the living compromise of a basin-helmet.

This “inner doing” of two particular minds in dialogue is what renders the *Quijote* a touchstone for nineteenth-century realism. As Galdós declared in an early essay (1870), Cervantes and Velázquez (1599–1660), court painter to King Philip IV, are the direct precursors of the “modern” contemporary social novel in Spain: each locates what is real in that magical operation of a mirrored verisimilitude encoded in the verb *parecer*, “to seem like,” “to appear as.” Thus Galdós writes:

When we see something amazing, anomalous, extraordinary, we say it *seems like* a novel [. . .] [my italics]. On the other hand, when we read the great works of art that Cervantes produced [in his time] and that today Charles Dickens is writing, we exclaim: “How true to life this is! It seems like life itself, that we have [intimately] known such characters.” People in love with Velázquez find his characters so familiar that they feel they have known them, dealt with them.¹⁶

So astonishing is this impression of life-likeness, of the life-liveliness, of these novels and paintings that the idea of art and artifice appears erased: we are seeing the “real thing.”

Erasure, however, is a function of metaphor, the invisible persuasion of its secret argument that art and life are one and the same. In effect, the “quasi-metaphorical dimension”¹⁷ of the realist aesthetic forms an essential component of the rhetoric that Galdós and Clarín employ to create in fiction an illusion of reality so that the reader will confuse the two, applying to life outside the book the values imaged within. Thus while fiction stands recognized—even flaunted—as artifice, we may construe fiction as reality, the way life is, an “image of life” as Galdós told the members of the Spanish Royal Academy in 1897 (“La sociedad presente,” p. 220). In that address Galdós reminded his colleagues that fiction is real and unreal at the same time. The job of the novelist is to keep the balance between art and life, he advised, for in the art of the novel, defined as the “modern,” “veridical” social novel of manners, “there should always exist that perfect point of balance between the exactness [*exactitud*] and the beauty [*belleza*] of the reproduction” (p. 220).

Here, in his address to the Academy, Galdós sketches out a kind of “equation” for realism, positioning what is known or factual—*exactitud*—in rela-

tion to beauty—*belleza*, that is, invention, aesthetic design. What is “real” happens. It is a process of exchange and transformation taking place in the mind of narrator, character, and reader, and thus this “real thing” eludes words. It is not always susceptible to naming. Rather the “real thing” precipitates, as it were, from the conjunction, the consequence, of one term and the other, establishing a dialectical structure that involves the roles of narrator, character, and reader. This concept of a dialectical realism reiterates, on another level, those triangular structures so prominently featured in the plots of the Spanish realist novel.

These plots, arising, in the main, from adulterous relationships, offer, as Ricardo Gullón has observed, the spectacle of changing love triangles.¹⁸ For example, in *La Regenta*, the most salient triangular groupings are the following: Ana, her husband don Víctor, and her confessor, the Magistral; Ana, her seducer don Álvaro, and the unknowing, impotent don Víctor. Don Víctor, disconcertingly feminized in his vulnerability and passion for his friend Frígilis (who had arranged the marriage with Ana), cluckingly construes Frígilis as Ana’s competitor; however, soon Víctor transfers his affections to the actor Perales and later to don Álvaro himself, who—ever the strategic plotter—imagines the offended husband as an enclosure, a “game preserve” ripe for poaching. In this ironic and predatory way (Víctor is himself a hunter, an expert marksman), Álvaro construes this husband as a passive, vulnerable feminine persona, one to be hunted as he, Víctor, inhabits a space akin to Ana’s virginal garden.

Triangles proliferate: Don Víctor, enamored now of Álvaro—a shameless, almost mechanistically “electric” lover—is unfaithful in his mind to both Frígilis and Ana. Ana, in turn, reluctantly keeps company with a treacherous friend, Visitación, who is none other than a former lover of don Álvaro and who attempts to seduce *him* into seducing Ana in Ana’s name, as if she, Visitación, *were* Ana—naked, moaning, tumbling among bedclothes. Meanwhile Álvaro engages the Magistral in a grim contest for the love of Ana, now the priest’s own “daughter” of confession. After Ana’s adultery with Álvaro is discovered, a duel ensues: Don Víctor pardons his rival at the moment that Álvaro’s bullet pierces his bladder, which, the narrator darkly notes, “was full” (II: 518). Don Víctor dies face down, scrabbling and chewing dirt, in the end an honorable man poisoned by his body and by the best part of himself.

In *Su único hijo* these adulterous triangles criss-cross and blur further, configuring ever stranger alliances: the viciously imaginative and sensual

¹⁶ Galdós, “Observaciones sobre la novela contemporánea,” p. 126.

¹⁷ Furst, “*All is True*,” p. 16.

¹⁸ R. Gullón, “Estructura y diseño en *Fortunata y Jacinta*,” in *Técnicas de Galdós* (Madrid: Taurus, 1970), pp. 154–86.

Emma, her soulful, hapless husband Bonifacio, and Serafina, the English-Italianate opera diva, form the basic threesome. This group shifts to Serafina, Mochi (her manipulative impresario), and Bonis, and then mutates again into the triangle of Emma, Minghetti, a baritone in the traveling opera company, and Bonis. Finally, in an unexpected twist—what the narrator calls a kind of “contagion”—Serafina and Emma appear to fuse, trading roles, affections, and behaviors in the face of a discarded Bonis, while the “expropriated” Bonis, once in possession of his only begotten son, triumphs in his imagination as “virgin, father, and mother” within the “priesthood of parenting” as he forms a new family with Emma.¹⁹

Changing triangular relationships, dividing and combining in almost infinite permutations, also articulate the action of Galdós’s great novel of adultery, *Fortunata y Jacinta*; Here we find, in kaleidoscopic combinations, Fortunata, a woman of the people, who is seduced by Juanito, the “dauphin” or bourgeois “prince,” only son and heir to the mercantile fortune of the Santa Cruz family. Juan abandons Fortunata to marry his first cousin, the pretty, darting Jacinta. Given over to prostitution, Fortunata meets the deformed, idealistic little Maxi Rubín, a member of the petty bourgeoisie. Urged by him to spend time in Las Micaelas, a convent established for the reform of wayward women, she agrees to Rubín’s proposal of marriage. Shadowing this incongruous pair of newlyweds is that compulsive, ubiquitous seducer Juanito Santa Cruz, who now repeatedly betrays both wife and former mistress.

In Galdós’s novel, as in *La Regenta*, love triangles transgress the boundaries of family, age, social class, and gender. Barbarita, obsessed with her only son Juanito, plans an incestuous marriage to Jacinta, her niece, seeing this niece already as a daughter-in-law. In this way Jacinta becomes programmed, as it were, to replace her aunt and mother-in-law as “mother” to the only son in what will prove to be an overtly sterile marriage. For her part, Jacinta imagines a love relationship with Moreno-Isla, a wealthy banker allied to the Santa Cruz family who, in pressing his suit, dies—literally—of heartbreak. Aurora, former lover of Moreno-Isla and new lover of Juanito, betrays Fortunata, while Fortunata, having conceived a child on purpose in order to achieve the status of her rival, Jacinta, the legitimate wife, comes into contact with the militant Catholic social worker Guillermina Pacheco, aunt to Moreno-Isla. As the “first mother” of the new child and heir, Fortunata imagines momentarily a new, “feminist” family: herself as “la mamá primera,” Jacinta, and Guillermina as second and third in a radically new, “holy” and “Trinitarian” family of women. It is an inclusive family, resting not on the Way to Egypt but on the great stone

stair where the initial encounter between Fortunata and Juanito took place. Finally there are the changing triangles of reconciliation: Fortunata, Jacinta, and the newborn child, delivered upon Fortunata’s death to Jacinta, who, in turn, imagines the child, the only legitimate heir of the Santa Cruz family, as belonging to the elegant, impassioned expatriate Moreno-Isla.

Tracing the branching pathways of these triangular relationships illuminates further the implications of Galdós’s and Clarín’s ideas about realism in the Spanish contemporary social novel. The basic “equation” as formulated by Galdós in his address to the Spanish Royal Academy accomplishes two, overlapping artistic objectives: the equation is *itself* a metaphor, picturing scales in balance, while it *operates*, as does metaphor, by joining two terms to engender a new figure. Thus the “equation” as metaphor creates an aesthetic of “birth” that reflects, on still another level, the motif of birth and hope of regeneration that impels the plot of *Fortunata y Jacinta* to its ambivalent conclusion and which, conversely, points up the absence of life-giving birth in *La Regenta*: in Clarín’s novel, the metaphoric mode signals an “improper birth,”²⁰ a “monstrous birth”²¹—deprivation, orphaning, and absence. Absence arises pictured, for example, in the comparison of the beautiful but childless Ana to Raphael’s painting of “La Virgen de la Silla”: unlike the Virgin, Ana’s sweet, shadowed face only tilts toward emptiness, toward the place in her arms where a newborn child should have been.

A further consequence of the duality or dialectic built into the theory and practice of the Spanish realist novel is the linguistic and literary articulation of a dynamics of movement and change. For example, as in the case of changing triangles in *Fortunata y Jacinta*, the terms or poles of Galdós’s basic “equation” keep altering in nature or, at the least, keep being relocated at greater or lesser removes from the social or individual person, thing, or event that emerges as a live entity, captured and held, as it were, between the changing relations of one pole to the other. At the same time, the “thing” itself—the *res*, the real—keeps coming into being at the interface, the point of contact between two phases or two surfaces: external, visible signs and those inner beliefs or forces or mechanisms that keep operating below. Fortunata herself comes to recognize the dynamics of this deeper structure, picturing it in her mind as the face and inner clockwork of a watch. The narrator, taking his cue from *her* figure of speech, *realizes* through that self-same meta-

20 N. Valis, “Aspects of an Improper Birth: Clarín’s *La Regenta*,” in *New Hispanisms: Literature, Culture, Theory*, ed. M. Millington and P. Julian Smith (Ottawa: Dovehouse Editions, 1994), pp. 96–126.

21 N. Valis, “On Monstrous Birth: Leopoldo Alas’s *La Regenta*,” in *Naturalism in the European Novel*, ed. Brian Nelson (New York: Bergo, 1992.), pp. 191–209.

19 J. Oleza, “Introducción” to *Su único hijo* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1998), pp. 46–56.

phor the conflictive fact of visible surfaces and invisible depths. Reflecting upon the spectacle of the exquisitely engineered, *real* event of the reconciliation of Fortunata's ill-fated marriage to Maxi, he slyly—ironically—confides to the reader: "It was one of those things that just happens, without anyone's knowing how or why [. . .]; for while one can sense these things coming, one simply can't see the hidden mechanisms that bring them to pass" (II: 162).

In several novels of the 1880s Galdós invents a kind of narrator-character who appears only to relate what he sees or hears, acting in the story as a reliable witness but in a somewhat distracted way. In *La de Bringas* (*That Bringas Woman*, 1884), as he, a small-time administrator, dozes during a gathering of friends, doña Cándida must rap him to attention, flicking his knee with the tip of her fan and repeating for his sluggish ear the words of a rather boring conversation. On other occasions, everything appears to pass through his mind effortlessly, and in this we discern, even in his distractions, a certain quality of transparency, a kind of porosity, about his sensibility. Galdós, recast as storyteller, seems to absorb vital essences and expel them as novels in the manner of a man breathing or, as Clarín once noted, of a man sipping a glass of water.²² In his biographical essay on Galdós (1889), Clarín sums up the case: "Galdós is best at writing when he's not even aware of what he is doing and when the reader is no longer conscious of a presence mediating between the author's ideas and his own."²³ Clarín the critic has seized precisely on the parallel between the way Galdós writes a novel and the way his fictional characters cock an ear to gossip or whisper their stories as news, as *novelas*.

For his part, Clarín, a novelist possessed of an impassioned temperament and a fierce, biting intellect, also creates the *persona* of an ambivalent narrator but to very different effect. Apparently omniscient, focusing from on high, in *La Regenta* the narrator also steps into the story but in an oblique, shifting, winking manner. While ostensibly raised above the vicissitudes of Vetusta, a city contemplated as a blackened heap of stones sequestered in the rainy, dreary province of Asturias, the narrator not only moves into the minds of the characters: he jostles their elbows, peers into their dressing rooms, anticipates their speech, and cracks jokes at their expense. The very proteic nature of this narrator, at once reliable and controlling, at once absent and punishing, qualifies him as someone who participates in the suffering consciousness of his characters at the moment when he abandons them to that suffering.

22 *Cartas a Galdós*, presentadas par Soledad Ortega (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1964), p. 249.

23 L. Alas, *B. Pérez Galdós* (Madrid: Fernando Fe, 1889), p. 32.

Thus the persona of the narrator in *La Regenta* sketches out a disquieting resemblance to the very inhabitants of Vetusta who have become, from the outset, the target of his omniscient, critical, ironic gaze. Faced with such a mercurial, winking narrative presence, as readers we not only become "accomplices" in the telling of the story;²⁴ we are enjoined further to question the reliability of this apparently all-seeing narrator. To what degree is he, like the Magistral (Anna's confessor), or Don Álvaro (Ana's seducer), a voyeur and stage manager? Does he see too much, tell too often, and distort the outlines of characters' thought and behavior, enacting unawares a kind of betrayal of his own novelistic world? Does Clarinian irony become ironic about itself? Lou Charon-Deutsch poses this troubling reassessment of the role and character of the voyeuristic narrator in *La Regenta*, arguing, in effect, that this narrator's all-seeing eye provides "a map of many men's fantasies."²⁵ The narrator's eye appears to participate in the very masculine machine of Vetusta that he himself so confidently criticizes.²⁶ At the same time Clarín, in this particular guise as author-narrator, keeps reflecting the action from an ever-widening range of perspectives. His is a singularly mobile, composite eye that *enacts in and of itself* the ironic interplay of satiric critique and confessional feeling that defines his point of view. His perspective as narrator alternately closes in and steps away, finally collapsing into the world view of his characters to shape one, interminably bleak, unredeemable image of perdition: the kiss that Ana, falling in a faint, feels smeared upon her lips as if that kiss were "the viscous belly of a toad" (II: 537).

In *La Regenta*, the spectacle of this errant collapse into one dissolving image of suffering and nausea reframes and expands the fundamental principle of mimesis upon which the Spanish realist novel is based. Within this expansion Clarín exploits further the literary strategies of mimetic realism while at the same time he illuminates that basic link, first established in Aristotle's *Poetics*, between imitation and knowledge. For in the case of *La Regenta*, the concept of imitation does not only refer to the ideas and practices of literary realism. In the story of Ana Ozores, imitation itself operates as a two-fold, defining mode of action, thought, and feeling. Corresponding to the division that Emilio Alarcos marks within the highly symmetrical structure of *La Regenta*,²⁷ forms of imitation may be said to be either "presen-

24 J. Rutherford, "*La Regenta*" y el lector cómplice (Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 1988).

25 L. Charon-Deutsch, "Voyeurism, Pornography and *La Regenta*," *Modern Language Studies* 4 (Fall 1989), p. 101.

26 H. Turner, "From the Verbal to the Visual in *La Regenta*," in "*Malevolent Insemination*" and *Other Essays on Clarín*, ed. N. Valis (Ann Arbor: Michigan Romance Studies, 1990), p. 73.

27 E. Alarcos Llorach, "Notas a *La Regenta*," in *Clarín y La Regenta*, ed. S. Beser (Barcelona: Ariel, 1982), pp. 225–45.

tative” (mirror-like posturings, servile, aping behaviors in dress, speech, or thought) or “active” (a performative mode that seeks to discover truth in representation). Chapter 16, the numerical mid-point of the novel, offers the spectacle of the convergence of these two forms of imitation, mimesis and mask, as, in turn, these occur within a metafictional, intertextual frame provided by Zorrilla’s famous play *Don Juan Tenorio* (1844).

Chapter 16 opens, as we have seen, with Ana contemplating the “ruins” of her life. From this desolate reality, which she, in the manner of a realist writer, has represented to herself, Ana moves to the balcony at the moment that Don Álvaro appears below, riding a pirouetting white horse. A conversation ensues, Ana “falling into a well” of feeling as Álvaro plans his seduction, even an assault, proposing to take advantage of what he cynically construes as Ana’s critical “fifteen minutes” of submission. The scene sketches an oblique allusion to the moment in *Don Juan Tenorio* when don Juan approaches the balcony of doña Ana de Pantoja. The mimetic imprint of this intertextual allusion frames and foretells the seduction that will take place also on a balcony—that ubiquitous, intermediate space—toward the close of Clarín’s novel.

Now Ana, tagged by the narrator as “Doña Ana,” attends the performance of *Don Juan Tenorio* and begins to participate in the play. She interprets—relives—character, scene, and setting as poetry, that is, as true-to-life images: the convent is her own cloistered existence; the cell, her empty house; the regimen, the rule of Vetusta; the Comendador, her aging, fatherly husband. Don Álvaro, seated behind her, is, of course, don Juan, although, at this very moment, even he, “el Tenorio vetustense” (II: 49), sees himself “debenched” by a powerful fictional rival. All he can do is strive for a fairly creditable “presentative” imitation, that is, to “play the part of the secret sentimentalist like the ones in Feuillet’s plays and novels,” thereby to conjure before Ana’s impassioned eyes that indispensable “mirage of visionary enthusiasm” (Rutherford, p. 377). Most tellingly, however, Ana sees doña Ines as . . . none other than herself: “Ana shuddered when she saw Doña Ines in her cell. The novice looked so like her! As Ana noticed the resemblance so did the audience—there was a murmur of admiration, and many spectators ventured to take a look at Vegallana’s box.” (Rutherford, p. 376). Further, in still another convergence of the real and the poetic, the actress playing the part of doña Ines is, in real life, the wife of the actor Perales who plays the role of don Juan. Thus Doña Ines infuses her recitations with real feeling—“pasión cierta”—thereby achieving a “poetic realism” (II: 47) that, among actors and audience, only doña Ana and the narrator himself are capable of appreciating. Appreciating, in this context, means recognizing true value of a “poetic” realist art.

In this redoubled mimetic scene Ana, “drinking in” the poetry of *Don Juan Tenorio*, performs an act of imitation that allows her to come into knowledge. In that knowledge she enacts Aristotle’s aesthetic concept of mimesis as a living event. It does not matter that Ana leaves the theater before the last act, or that she perceives the play’s duel and pistol-shot as signs that foretell the eventual duel between her husband and don Álvaro. What matters in the scene is that Ana, through her imitative performance and dramatic moment of recognition, does not faint, does not lose her grip on reality, does not evade the “poetic” truth of what she sees. Upon returning home, she does not flee even from the impositions of another “incendiary letter” that recalls the famous “carta incentiva” of *Don Juan Tenorio*. This version of don Juan’s letter is sent the next morning by Ana’s confessor, the possessive don Fermín, who in this letter gestures as yet another donjuanesque figure. Within the convergence of the dual form of imitation, both “presentative” and “active” in expression, overt and covert, negative and positive in value, Ana and her story emerge as a living, tragic representation of a concept of mimesis both classical and modern, one that turns on the question of knowledge and its relation to the spectacle of literature lived as life and vice versa.

In this way, alert to that basic quixotic phenomenon of “enchantment,” of transforming one person or thing into another, Galdós and Clarín exploit the possibilities of mimesis to question whether or not imitation leads to knowledge. Further, their novels question whether or not knowledge itself is possible, and, if so, how and why knowing takes place and whether what people know can reach beyond their own minds. The trajectory of their novelistic production articulates this increased focus on questioning. Galdós is the author of 77 novels, 26 plays, some short fiction and occasional pieces, essays, and journalistic writings. Clarín produced two major novels, with the second, *Su único hijo*, conceived as part of an unfinished *Sinfonía de dos novelas* (“Two Novels as a Symphony”) that included “Una medianía” (‘A Dull, Average Person’), consisting of seven chapters published serially in 1889. He also authored two chapters in a collaborative novel (*Las vírgenes locas* [‘Crazy Virgins’, 1886]), several volumes of short stories and novelettes, two plays (one published posthumously) and a biography of Galdós, as well as books of literary criticism and a voluminous quantity of essays and articles. Through this production, which established a lively dialogue between them, each author came to inquire more and more about the shaping or conditioning effects of “enchantment,” of belief, perception, the will, and other invisible, “latent” presences, Clarín’s word for the subconscious or the unconscious.

The term “unconscious” (*inconsciente*) began to appear with some frequency in the latter decades of the century and certainly before Freud. This

term initiated the nineteenth-century reader into a perception of those unnamed, shadowy forces and fusions that gesticulate below the surfaces, as it were, of the realist novel. In consequence, recognition of the conscious and unconscious parts of the mind caused a readjustment in thinking about the nature and boundaries of texts and things. In Europe, nineteenth-century writers came to display this readjustment through a kind of self-reflexive perspectivism: the depiction, within a story or picture or novel or newspaper article, of the act of writing, painting, or creating that particular work. For example, Alexander Pushkin's narrative poem *The Bronze Horseman*, written in 1833 but published only posthumously in 1839, is manifestly based on fact. An advisory note carries this statement: "The incident described in this story is based on fact. The details of the flood are borrowed from newspapers of the time."²⁸ Yet when introducing the hero, "Young Evgeny," Pushkin breaks the mimetic mirror by inscribing a provocative instance of self-referentiality: "My rhyme / Selects this name to use in speaking of our, young hero. It's a sound / I like; my pen has long been bound / in some way with it; further naming is not required [. . .]" (300). Pushkin's poem calls attention to itself as a linguistic artifact. This instance of self-reflexivity resembles similar moments in the *Quijote* or *Las meninas* (1656), in which the painter Velázquez paints himself painting at the same time as he reflects the dual subject of that painting—the little princess Margarita and her maids (*meninas*), facing the king and queen, whose "portrait" appears in the mirror on the back wall. Thus *Las meninas* takes a turn to reflect within itself the creative process of painting, as the *Quijote* does of writing, putting to question the idea of origins and of identity.

Such instances almost become an artistic norm in nineteenth-century Spain. As pointed up in the final chapter of this volume, the journalistic writings of Mariano José de Larra (1809–1837) are, in essence, self-reflexive compositions. In his guise as "Fígaro," Larra acts simultaneously as narrator and character, evolving through the dialogic structures of his texts simultaneously to picture, represent roles, and criticize those representations and performances. The slips and circularities of a regional novel like Valera's *Pepita Jiménez* (1874) eventually show how Valera's own omniscient narrative persona enacts unknowingly the Latin motto *Nescit labi virtus* ("Virtue ignores the possibility of sliding/gliding down"), which is meant to apply to his fictional character, the young, inexperienced don Luis de Vargas. In fact, this narrative *persona* also "slips down" to become subject to the same ironic critique that he has brought to bear on his protagonist. In this way,

28 A. Pushkin, "The Bronze Horseman," in Waclaw Lednicki, *Pushkin's Bronze Horseman. The Story of a Masterpiece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955), p. 297.

the author as narrator invokes the kind of irony that had enlivened Fígaro's conduct in Larra's famous sketch "El castellano viejo" ('A Castilian of the Old Order', 1832). For in *Pepita Jiménez*, the "slips" of an omniscient narrator, one who declares himself to be "perfectly knowledgeable about everything,"²⁹ deconstruct mimesis and its link to secure knowledge. Further, the reflection of the narrator's preferences in those of the young, inexperienced Luis subverts the reliability of this narrator's omniscience, calling into question the validity of his own views, even of his identity as the teller of the tale.

Galdós and Clarín, dramatized variously in their novels as narrator-characters, also act out the impressive, confounded truths of their writings to depict on occasion when and how a novel comes into being. An intriguing case is that of Feijoo, a character in *Fortunata y Jacinta*, often perceived as an alter ego of Galdós. Feijoo's teachings in the ways of the world aim to reform Fortunata and thus offer, as an instance of the Pygmalion theme, a reflection of the act of artistic creation.³⁰ Another instance refers to the genesis of *Fortunata y Jacinta*. In his *Memorias* ('Memoirs', 1916), Galdós tells how, in the waning days of summer, he returns to Madrid, only to find at the door his friend and fellow novelist, don José Ido del Sagrario. Ido, bursting with the latest news, tells of the novel's characters, abandoned by their author over the summer. These characters appear to be reinvented by Ido, who is himself a fictional character and also a novelist, a hack writer of *folletines*. As such he "wanders" from novel to novel (his name literally means "gone from the sanctuary"). Now fictional people like Ido reflect the role of the novelist who carries his mirror to the streets. They move Galdós to action: he rambles through old Madrid, waving, talking, observing, listening, *copying*: here, Galdós says, is José Luengo, stall holder in the Plaza Mayor, a man who is the spitting image of parrot-faced Estupiña, a social type so faithfully rendered in *Fortunata y Jacinta* that no description is warranted. We have seen him already as the man really is.³¹

The scene presents Galdós and Ido—two friends, two novelists, two stories: each reflects the other not only to confound our notion of what is real but to make us relive the making of those stories. Galdós restarts a novel that contains Ido's own novel, patently false because it is both fictional and invented, about the child that Jacinta tries to adopt at the close of Part I. At the close of Part IV, however, that child has become a real, living person who reconciles Fortunata to Jacinta. Further, in the wake of Fortunata's funeral, the

29 J. Valera, *Pepita Jiménez*, ed. María del Pilar Palomo (Barcelona: Planeta, 1987), p. 79.

30 J. W. Kronik, "Galdosian Reflections: Feijoo's Fabrication of Fortunata," *Modern Language Notes* 97 (1982), pp. 272–310.

31 B. Pérez Galdós, "Memorias de un desmemoriado," in *Obras completas*, ed. F. Carlos Robles, 6 vols. (Madrid: Aguilar, 1966), vol. VI, p. 1652.

pharmacist Ballester, who likes to talk about the realist aesthetic, proposes to his friend, the literary critic Ponce, that Fortunata's life be recreated as either a play or a novel. In this work the writer would mix, in appropriate measures, fact ("raw fruit") and fiction ("stewed fruit": II: 535).³²

Such instances of self-referential perspectivism abound in Galdós's contemporary social novels as well as in his novels of historical fiction, the *Episodios nacionales*. For example, in his first novel, *La sombra* (*The Shadow*, 1870), Galdós as narrator-recorder leaves the scene half-persuaded of the reality of a hallucination suffered by the protagonist, don Anselmo, who has recounted to him, the narrator, in the manner of a confession, the various episodes that had determined his, Anselmo's, mental illness. The narrator, becomes the shadow (*sombra*) of his own fictional character who, in turn, lives obsessed by his shadow, a multiple identity of Paris / Alejandro X***, pictured variously as the painting of the myth of Paris, Helen, and the Trojan War, and as a reenactment of another story: don Anselmo relives, as it were, the impertinence of the jealous husband Anselmo, protagonist of an interpolated story in the *Quijote* (*El curioso impertinente*). Don Anselmo also exists as a collective social construct: his jealousy and delusional behavior are driven by stories that a sick society maliciously fabricates to torment him. The version of the lover Paris in the person of Alejandro X*** is a gossipy tale cooked up to provoke Anselmo's fears about his wife Elena's—Helen's—infidelity.

Even an early, so-called "thesis" novel like *Doña Perfecta* (1876), which argues for progress in the face of religious fanaticism and social prejudice, offers the ambivalence of language usage as a theme. The narrator's attention to allegorical signs and speech, forms of word play and puns, lies and verbal "spin," and to intertextual references (e.g. *Don Juan Tenorio*) builds into the novel a self-referential critique of the written and spoken word. At the same time, the narrator keeps referring to allegory, image, and sign as indispensable tools for telling the story. Language as a means of communication is thrown into doubt, causing the enterprise of novel making to become the instrument of its own meditation.

La desheredada (1881), which initiates Galdós's "second style," is manifestly the most Quixotic of his novels. The story of Isidora Rufete, who in the manner of a popular serial novel sees herself as a changeling and rightful heiress to the fortunes and title of the Marquise of Aransis, dramatically reenacts the conflict between fact and fiction. Intertextual allusions to the *Quijote* and to the process of making a novel propel the plot forward as a kind of detective story aimed at discovering who or what is responsible for Isi-

dora's delusions. Now the literary technique of constructing a palimpsest of texts expands the horizons of the novel. The story of noble birth concocted by Isidora's father has contaminated the imagination of her Quixotic uncle, don Santiago Quijano, a rural priest from Tomelloso, a place somewhere in La Mancha; thus do Isidora's origins echo obliquely the famous opening words of *Don Quijote*. Santiago Quijano, in a series of letters and documents, writes up fiction as truth, laying the ground for Isidora's "novel" of noble birth. At the same time, that very fiction (a "deplorable comedy": VI: 1141) is actually powered by a vital truth: a person's desire "to be somebody" in a reified world, even "if only for ten minutes. We who are nothing fall prey to such dangers" (VI: 1150), murmurs Isidora's godfather, now an alcoholic, half-mad for her attentions, and who pathetically—incestuously—proposes marriage to save her from prostitution.

In the telling of the palimpsest of Isidora's story, scientific views appear to prevail over illusion, reason over passion, and the claims of modest obscurity, sanctioned feminine roles, and household thrift over romance, beauty, artistic insight and its degraded form as a brilliant kind of consumerism. And yet Isidora's extraordinary, even insane powers of imagination on occasion almost "de-bench" masculine reason, exercised in the person of the doctor, Augusto Miquis—fittingly, a name denoting things both large and small—and in the authorial control of the narrator. Miquis comes from Toboso, the town of Dulcinea in the *Quijote*, and at times he inadvertently plays the role of Sancho to Isidora's Quixotic illusions. Yet both Miquis and the narrator fall under Isidora's spell, registering loss and missed opportunities even as they show how Isidora, gripped by her conviction that she is somebody, inevitably slips into degradation. *La desheredada* becomes both a referential and textual enigma of disenchantment and disinheritance, at the same time gesturing as a realistic symbol of the Spanish state itself.

Autobiographical eyewitness narration in *El amigo Manso* (*Our Friend Manso*, 1882) represents another experiment in the riddles of literary self-reflexivity. Galdós depicts himself as a hack writer who "buys" a story from his character, Máximo Manso. Thus the act of telling that story evolves through a re-framed narrative structure, a metafictional set-up in which Manso's interpolated story alternates with his declaration that he doesn't exist, that he is a fictional being, born from an inkwell. He himself brings meaning into being as he weaves and unweaves the text, reminding us that he, too, is a reader, inside and outside his own story. In this exchange of roles, identities, and destinies of author, character, and reader, *El amigo Manso* anticipates Unamuno's *Niebla* (*Mist*, 1914), an almost post-modern narrative experiment that blurs the boundaries between fiction and reality.

³² Moncy, "The Bird Motif and the Introductory Motif," p. 53.

Later novels like *La incógnita* (*The Unknown*, 1888–9) and *Realidad* (*Reality*, 1889) capture an interrelated series of letters and dialogue, both veridical and illusory as Galdós construes the reader-writer relationship as part of the plot. *Realidad* does not only represent the reworking of the text of *La incógnita*.³³ The epistolary relationship of the enigmatic Equis, a quasi-parental figure, and Manuel Infante, a younger man, even child-like in his flawed use of words (*infante*, from *infans*, “without speech”), together “raise up” a new “family” member—a pair of novels that, like Siamese twins, depend vitally upon each other for existence. In turn, their complementarity sketches a metafictional model for the acts of reading and writing as Equis (“X”), the internal reader, completes the verbal potentiality of Infante’s text by filling in its gaps—the *incógnitas*.³⁴ In their symbiotic relationship, *La incógnita* and *Realidad* actually reinvent the staples of realism: the focus on family alliances, recurring characters, physical and psychological clues, and the gaps produced by unconscious motivations as these become *passed through* the structures and plots of detective fiction, newspaper articles, and popular serial novels.

In this way, as Linda Willem notes, Galdós accomplishes the transformation of a part into a whole, that is, a “half” of something into whole, living thing (“el ser completo y vivo”), a whole at once more than and different from the sum of its parts (“Turning *La incógnita*,” 389). *Misericordia* (*Compassion*, 1897), seen as Galdós’s “last word” for realism, is a novel in which social documentation underlies the theme of charity.³⁵ *Misericordia* also records the experience of one Benina who dreams up a fictional character who becomes real. Her creation of a character shadows Galdós’s creation of herself as the protagonist of the novel. At the same time, as Nicholas Round argues, “in the dialogue which Galdós as maker and shaper of his text carries on with his readers, one ever-present element is a questioning of the simpler perspectives on offer: do we really know what we think we know? Can we safely judge as we think ourselves entitled to judge?” (“*Misericordia*,” p. 156).

Such basic questions inhere, as we have seen, in Clarín’s artistic expansion and critique of the concept of mimesis, which, in *La Regenta*, encompasses glancing hints of self-referentiality. One example occurs toward the end of the novel. Shocked by the scandal that the city’s own gossip and strategic plotting have so viciously concocted, Vetusta reflects upon Ana’s adultery, the duel and death of Víctor, the evasion of don Álvaro, the murderous

rage of the Magistral “as if [such a scandal] were a novel” (II: 535). The interplay of imaginative and physical acts of procreation in *Su único hijo* further tilt Clarín’s realist and naturalist novel toward modernism. As author he passes the phenomenon of self-referentiality through the fitfully exalted but meticulously realized paradoxes of tradition, perversity, and the reality of willed belief. These converging and diverging mixtures articulate the “family romance” of Emma, Bonis, and the newborn child.³⁶ Thus the shadowed, quasi-visible figures of the late Spanish realist novel, as illustrated by *La incógnita*, *Realidad*, and *Su único hijo*, come also to resemble, in their way, the “spectra” inhabiting James’s famous story *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) or the “ghost” that haunts Fontane’s novel of adultery, *Effi Briest* (1895).

Américo Castro’s seminal insight (1966) about the basic shift in artistic representation in *Don Quijote* provides the key to understanding how the realists created and maintained the art of illusion in a reified world. All told, this is a deeply disquieting, unstable world of things, old and new, arising within the flux of civil and foreign wars and radical economic, social, and political changes. Rapid change, ushering in the fear of the unknown, as well as a nascent confidence in progress, redefined nineteenth-century daily life, especially in Spain, given the context of her uneven, imperfect transition to modernity.³⁷ Further, Jo Labanyi argues that the shift from a mimesis of things to a mimesis of perception is “linked inextricably to the rise of mercantilism,” to paper money and credit.³⁸ Now what is real is merely (really) a representation, a piece of fiction in a manner similar to the relationship of paper money to coins and bars of gold. She suggests also that “this major shift in the European world view had its origins in the sixteenth-century Spanish discourse on inflation” (*Gender and Modernization*, p. 390), for inflation destroyed the notion that signs have a stable referent (p. 387).

There is little doubt that mercantile, monetary links between the 1600s and the 1800s do form another, albeit elusive, parallel between, on the one hand, the works of Cervantes and Velázquez and, on the other, the nineteenth-century Spanish realist novel. The parallel pivots, in part, upon self-reflexivity. In Part II of the *Quijote*, don Quijote and Sancho read about their adventures in a published version of Part I. They reflect and comment upon the truth-value of those images in fiction. Further, the very genesis of their story, arising from the translation by a Morisco of a manuscript in Arabic by

33 Willem, “Turning *La incógnita* into *Realidad*: Galdós’s Metafictional Magic Trick,” *Modern Language Notes* 105 (1990), p. 389.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 389.

35 N. Round, “*Misericordia*: Galdosian Realism’s ‘Last Word,’” in *A Sesquicentennial Tribute to Galdós 1843–1993*, ed. L. Willem (Newark, DE: Juan de la Cuesta, 1993), p. 156.

36 Oleza, “Introducción,” pp. 46–56.

37 S. Sieburth, *Inventing High and Low. Literature, Mass Culture, and Uneven Modernity in Spain* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994).

38 J. Labanyi, *Gender and Modernization in the Spanish Realist Novel* (Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 390.

a certain shadowy Cide Hamete Benengeli, a punning name that combines the notion of Castilian epic valor (*Poema del Cid*) and Arabic horticulture (“eggplant”), establishes from the outset how the *Quijote*, like *Hamlet*, contains concocted mirror images of itself. Similarly, as we have seen in *Las meninas*, Velázquez’s mirror contains the image of himself painting as it does the apparent subject of that painting—the faces of the king and queen. At the same time, the picture we see most vividly is of the little princess Margarita, at play with *las meninas*. Thus the painting proposes intersecting images of subject and object that blur the boundaries, spatial and pictorial, between art and life.

The works of these masters, visibly accessible not merely as influences but as active agents of the artistic imagination, engaged nineteenth-century writers in Spain to exploit the metafictional phenomenon of self-reflexivity. They fused, in a single text, social critique, a theory of representation, and a reproduction, faithfully mirrored, of the mores, costumes, objects, actions, beliefs, and rites of their times. Jo Labanyi finds such self-reflexivity to be the defining feature of the Spanish realist novel. Self-reflexive perspectivism, already built into the fundamental dualities of realism, leads to an expanded definition of realism as “the representation of a reality constituted by exchange relations” (*Gender and Modernization*, p. 392.). These relations have responded to the impact of complex forms of monetary and political representation upon which consumer capitalism and a liberal democracy depended in nineteenth-century Spain (p. 386).

In this way, the concept of the mimetic mirror once again bridges the gap between reality and representation by collapsing, in Labanyi’s words, “the two into a single entity; that is, a reality constituted by representation” (p. 385). What is real is *passed through* a national or individual consciousness to become represented in the abstractions and instabilities of paper money and political agendas. Thus we find, particularly in the novels of Galdós and Clarín, a reinvented notion of the Quixotic: people inevitably become, in part, the images they make for themselves. It is this perception about human behavior that each writer captures as they mirror the uncertainties of the economic, political, and social life of their times. While the question of dualism, of image and reality persists unresolved in theory, it is ever alive in the mediation that takes place between text and world in the nineteenth-century Spanish realist novel.

Guide to further reading

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