

## CHOICES AND CONSEQUENCES: REFOCUSING THE DEBATE ON THE MEANING OF *FORTUNATA Y JACINTA*

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In a period of four years Geoffrey Ribbans has published two extensive monographs on Galdós, a feat that is all the more noteworthy because of his official retirement from active academic service this year. When most scholars in his situation would have been content to rest on their laurels, Ribbans has continued to write studies that attest to the continuing vitality and relevance of his ideas. The second of these two books, *Conflicts and Conciliations: The Evolution of Galdós's "Fortunata y Jacinta"* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue Univ. Press, 1997), pp. xv & 352, is, like its predecessor, a magnificent study, displaying all the virtues *galdosistas* have come to expect and admire from its author: impeccable scholarship in the sifting and evaluation of textual evidence, a descriptive and discursive style that is absorbing and elegant (apart from the redundant "in my view"), as well as managing to transmit an enormous amount of factual detail together with well-reasoned commentary, emotionally seasoned, on the odd occasion, as when, in discussing Juanito Santa Cruz's view of "pueblo" morality, he exclaims: "about individual moral standards he is a fine one to talk!" (153).

Undoubtedly destined to become the authoritative study on Galdós's masterpiece for years to come, Ribbans's book is quite unlike previous monographs on this novel. First, it has an ampleness of space in which to develop at leisure ideas that was not available, for example, to Harriet Turner. Whilst she tied her study exclusively to the text of *Fortunata y Jacinta*, Ribbans is able to roam wider with references to Galdós's other work, before and after the "*magnum opus*," but not to the degree Stephen Gilman did in his 1981 book, whose principal aim was to trace the development of Galdós's narrative strategies through the years from the first novel, *La Fontana de Oro*, published in 1870, until their triumphant perfection seventeen years later in *Fortunata y Jacinta*. Ribbans does cover this ground, but in two brief pages (12-14) and with a different purpose: to establish Galdós's constant interest in formal experimentation. However, his monograph does resemble Gilman's in another way: basically, it is a re-writing of previously published articles and (unlike Gilman's) a book (1977), through, in the author's words, "a process of recycling which has left them all but unrecognizable" (x).

Yet there is much new material: the quotations are now taken from Francisco Caudet's standard edition of the novel; the intensive research on the novel during the last twenty years, especially by feminist critics, is duly incorporated, leading to some slight modifications of Ribbans's interpretations of certain episodes and characters. (For the obvious chronological reasons, Teresa Vilarós's Lacanian study and Paul Ilie's anti-Freudian monograph in this volume of *Anales Galdosianos* were not available.) As in his 1993 study of history in Galdós's fiction, Ribbans displays a new tendency to buttress textual analysis and documentation with apt references to the work (and terminology) of such literary theorists as Bakhtin, Genette and Iser, amongst others.

The most innovative feature of *Conflicts and Conciliations*, however, is its comprehensive examination of the evolution of the text of *Fortunata y Jacinta* through the five stages of composition: 1) the Alpha version (A), which, although it covers, schematically, the whole range of the novel, has many “cuartillas” missing, with varied treatment of the respective Parts; 2) the Beta manuscript (B), which was used for the galley proof; 3) discarded sheets from earlier versions of the Beta text, labelled C by Ribbans; 4) the galley proof (G); 5) the printed text (P). Other scholars have examined this material in varying degrees before (Caudet, Entenza de Solare, Fernández Sein, Hyman, López-Baralt and Whiston, amongst others), but none as comprehensively as Ribbans does in his new book, whose aim is not to treat all these versions in isolation “but, as part of the process of reaching out toward the coherent definitive text” (ix). Hence the constant desire to indicate the respective variants as he discusses the major elements of the novel. The former, skilfully marshalled and coordinated, are inserted into the main body of the study as well as into more than 450 notes (not all totally justifiable, e.g. note 53 [295], on Galdós’s Latin teacher at university) that are to be found in the 67 pages of supplementary material. Simultaneous consultation of the latter requires a constant flicking of pages back and forth that does not make for a fluent read. Nevertheless, the various correlations are fascinating and indispensable to Ribbans’s fundamental purpose. Typographical errors are few, although more prevalent towards the end of the study, the most egregious being the spelling of the Aransis family name from *La desheredada* (“Asensis,” 34).

One immediate question raised by the content and format of this book is the identity of the target audience, especially in light of the statement made in the Preface that in the English-speaking world “Galdós has yet to make decisive inroads in the nonspecialized literary consciousness” (ix). How far this state of affairs is corrected by a book which does not provide English translations of the quotations and presupposes a very intimate knowledge of *Fortunata y Jacinta* as well as of other Galdós novels, is open to question. Certainly veteran *galdosistas* will be very familiar with the general lines of Ribbans’s interpretation of the novel, as well as with the chronological details about the composition of *Fortunata y Jacinta*, the contemporary situation of narrative in Spain and Galdós’s personal life and mature production (1-14). Nonetheless, even in such a short Introduction temporarily forgotten or unexpected snippets of information catch the eye: for instance, from an examination of the dating on the various Parts of the manuscripts and Galdós’s personal correspondence (especially with Pereda and Alas), as well as of his journalistic articles for *La Prensa* of Buenos Aires at the same time, Ribbans demonstrates that the writing of Part III gave Galdós the most trouble. Equally surprising is the almost total lack of visibility the novel received in the contemporary press. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that the prime beneficiaries of this study will be the novice joining the Order of *Galdosistas*, who will have at their disposal an exquisitely delicate instrument with which to diagnose their initial readings of the text.

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The outline of Ribbans's second book on *Fortunata y Jacinta* follows closely that of his first, although the titles of chapters and sub-divisions have been slightly modified, if not always to illuminating effect: for example, Chapter One is now entitled "Structure," but the first half deals not with what one expects to be the structure of the novel, but its various stages of composition. Perhaps a pluralized title would have captured better the author's intention in this chapter. Somewhat similar confusion is created by the title of the final section of Chapter Two ("The Treatment of Time"), for that of Chapter Three, five pages on, is entitled "Time and Space." In fact, that final sub-section of Chapter Two would have been better placed in the Introduction or right at the beginning of Chapter One, for it offers a very lucid and concrete summary of the novel's plot. In its current position, it presents events and characters that already have been discussed in some detail as if they were being presented for the first time, a not infrequent occurrence, although Ribbans generally tries to forecast or cross-reference repetitions.

Chapter One of *Conflicts and Conciliations* lays the foundation for the subsequent chapters when it classifies the characters of the novel into principal, leading and secondary groups: the last has the important function of connecting the other two, with their different social and economic milieux (treated at length in Chapter Three and Chapter Four ["Characters in Family and Society"]). To represent the relationships of the principal and leading characters, Ribbans prefers a wedge-like triad structure to Ricardo Gullón's closed "triángulos cambiantes," sketching out a number of diagrams that he discusses at length in Chapter Five ("The Positivist-Idealist Dichotomy"), Chapter Six ("Frustrations and Accommodations") and Chapter Seven ("Fortunata"). With characteristic perceptiveness, Ribbans notes that, as well as never meeting the other aggrieved spouse in the novel—Jacinta—, Maxi does not figure prominently in these triad structures, because he has a largely independent development of his own.

Chapter 2 ("Representation") presents a discussion of Galdós's narrative technique, with Ribbans using as his point of departure the metafictional discussion on form and content, or story and discourse, between Ponce and Segismundo on their way to Fortunata's burial. Ribbans argues persuasively that, by indicating at the end of the novel these differences of approach to the representation of Fortunata's life, Galdós is inviting the reader to meditate on—to use Wolfgang Iser's term—the "indeterminacy" of the text: a semiotic approach ignoring the context is as inadequate as a socio-historical interpretation that overlooks the structure. In a similar attempt to reconcile conflicting interpretative strategies, Ribbans stresses the need to see both metonymy (long associated with the Realist novel) and metaphor (more associated with modern literature) at work in *Fortunata y Jacinta*. Other implements in Galdós's narrative armoury are then briefly introduced for prolonged examination in subsequent chapters: summary and scene; spoken language, with allusions to Saussure's distinction between "la langue et la parole" and Bakhtin's theory of "heteroglossia"; free indirect style; dreams and the subconscious; the narrative voice; the reliability of the narrator (aptly and usefully designated throughout the study as Mr. X), and the machinery of time treatment: ellipsis, pause, analepsis, paralipsis, prolepsis and non-closure.

The allusions to variants at other stages in the compositional process take on greater prominence in Chapter Three (perhaps, in other respects, the least revised and, therefore, the most instantly recognizable, of previous publications). Ribbans is adamant in his defence of the

relevance of the incorporation of historical material through its various manifestations: the recall of historical events by such characters as Estupiñá and Isabel Cordero; physical resemblances to historical characters; the intertwining of contemporary political events with the strands of the plot. The use of Madrid and Spanish topography is also charted at length.

If Ribbans appears to be over-indulgent in his analysis of minute historical and sociological details, it is precisely because Galdós, extremely careful with their incorporation in the novel, forces the conscientious reader to respond in kind. This is particularly noticeable in the novelist's use of financial details when presenting the various representatives of the social classes in Restoration Spain, the subject of Chapter Four. Rejecting Blanco Aguinaga's notion of a class conflict in Galdós's presentation of Restoration Spain, Ribbans reckons that the novelist was more interested in painting a society "in a state of perpetual fluidity, with a constant jockeying for position among its constituent parts" (123). In a novel principally concerned with two married women, considerable attention is given to the lives of petty bourgeois widows. Doña Lupe, for one, has a surprising amount of freedom for independent action, and in *Aurora*, Galdós may be charting—in social terms, at least—a new direction in job possibilities for single women. As far as the "pueblo" is concerned, they lack the sympathetic spokesman that the bourgeois have in Mr. X or Feijoo. Within this considerable social contextualization, Ribbans is able to sketch some penetrating psychological character studies, substantiating, in a number of instances, the findings of Turner. Of particular note is his assessment of the essential idleness of Juanito and the excitement he derives from illicit conduct, an assessment that is resumed in a memorable phrase: "he [Juanito Santa Cruz] is a Don Juan in miniature" (138).

Ribbans's most complete and successful character study—of Maxi—follows a discussion of the respective merits of the forces of social determinism and idealism at the beginning of Chapter Five. An adroit selection of variants from the A manuscript shows that Maxi did engage in some kind of sexual activity with Fortunata before marriage. By opting for a more ambiguous sexuality in the final P version, Galdós gave more credibility to Maxi's plans for the spiritual redemption of Fortunata. The failure of this attempt and Maxi's growing insanity are traced in the remainder of the chapter as Ribbans proceeds to justify the largely autonomous development of Maxi's story and its forceful presence at the end of the novel as a sign of the great importance Galdós attached to the idealistic impulse that Maxi, more than any other character, represented.

In Chapter Six the structure of Ribbans's book, not entirely satisfactory, perhaps, for some readers, emerges more clearly: picking up the threads of previous observations, he proceeds to analyse the three female figures who have such a decisive influence on Fortunata: Mauricia la Dura, Guillermina and Jacinta. The most impressive case study is that of Mauricia la Dura, who, like Maxi from amongst the principal characters, receives the most independent development of all the leading characters. Ribbans ably applies Bakhtin's theories to Mauricia's behaviour in the famous chapel scene in *Las Micaelas* when she tries to steal the Host: directing questions to an unidentified interlocutor is an example of "hidden dialogicality", whilst Mr X's condemnation of her at the same time as he reproduces her thoughts and words in free indirect style is an example of "double-voiced discourse." Ribbans is certainly more positive in his view of Mauricia than most critics, with the exception of Braun, whom he cites often, preferring to see beneath her blasphemy, uninhibited sexuality, and rebellious behaviour more spiritualistic,

idealistic urges. At the same time, she is a representative of all poor, downtrodden women as well as an example of the Mad Woman in the Attic syndrome.

Despite his warm embrace of recent feminist approaches to Galdós's fiction, Ribbans does not always accept their conclusions, as, for example, when he disagrees with Catharine Jagoe's view of Guillermina's role as an infraction of the "ángel del hogar" syndrome. For Ribbans "la santa" is indeed an exception to the rules of Restoration society, but she is to be admired, if not imitated. Yet his own previous and subsequent evaluation of her activities would suggest that "admiration" is not quite the right word. Indeed, like *Mauricia*, Guillermina is a confusing mixture of conformist and revolutionary attitudes that reflect internal impulses within Fortunata herself, as readers of *Fortunata y Jacinta* have long recognized. In all three women these antagonistic forces are symptomatic of a much deeper spiritual urge.

The third and probably most decisive influence on Fortunata is Jacinta, whose function in the Santa Cruz household and later relationship with Moreno-Isla are fundamental determinants in the development of her personality and her influence on Fortunata. Once more Ribbans perceptively points out the flaws in some feminist interpretations of the novel: Jacinta is not the typical "ángel del hogar," precisely because she has no legitimate children or the chance of having any. Ironically, both she and Fortunata long for the ideal of normal peaceful domesticity propagated by the "ángel del hogar" apologists. But in this desire they are thwarted by the patriarchal establishment of the Santa Cruzs and Rubíns, who are not concerned about heirs. The late development of Moreno-Isla's passion for Jacinta in Part IV, as well as providing Fortunata with another reason to be interested in her lover's wife, serves to give Jacinta's story solid support just when Fortunata's is overwhelming the narrative.

It is in Chapter Seven that all the threads of the preceding character and thematic studies are brought together in the detailed examination of Fortunata's development from a rather passive character, reliant on others and possessing a fatalistic view of events, into a liberated woman in charge of her own destiny at the beginning of Part IV. Her meditative stroll down the Calle de Santa Engracia towards the end of Part II is correctly viewed as an important turning-point in this development. Another climactic moment of self-assertion is reached in her two interviews with Guillermina, which Galdós had split off from a single confrontation in a discarded section of the Beta manuscript, labelled C3 by Ribbans.

The Conclusion of *Conflicts and Conciliations* (Chapter Eight) commences with a frustrated attempt to place Galdós in one of the three groups into which 19th-century Realist novelists can be classified, but, not surprisingly, Galdós can not be neatly pigeonholed into any of them, as he shares features with all, to a certain extent. Chance versus fate, the prominence of women, and narrative self-consciousness are the other topics that are all summarized before Ribbans delivers his verdict on the novel's unique presentation of a compassionate, ironic view of life.

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As one of a number of modern students of the novel whose publications are most generously cited, the present writer would appear ungrateful and churlish if he were to label as flaws in Ribbans's thesis the following reservations, which are essentially slight differences of interpretation or emphasis, generated in fruitful, professional dialogue (as so often in the past) by Ribbans's most stimulating research.

In his on-going discussion of fate and chance in *Fortunata y Jacinta*, Ribbans seems to argue that, within the parameters of these two forces, Galdós posits the freedom of the individual to make certain choices of action, prompted by their idealistic urges, or—to continue the culinary metaphor so prominent in the novel—to select options from a menu, however poor and limited. And, of course, these choices have their inevitable consequences, whether logical or illogical, positive or negative. Such an eminently acceptable approach to the novel's basic operational assumptions could be better reflected in a change of title for the study: "Conflicts and Conciliations" (an adaptation itself of a chapter title in the 1977 Critical Guide, "Confrontations and Reconciliations") could be replaced by another pair of c-words: "Choices and Consequences." The choices that Fortunata, the novel's central character, makes are of crucial importance: at the general level, they control the direction of the story; for example, what would have happened if she had decided not to look out of the half-opened door to see who was climbing the staircase at No. 11, Cava de San Miguel, or if she had not transferred her baby to Jacinta before her death? In particular terms, these choices have important consequences for both her and many others. Is she aware of them, does she have to be? Unfortunately, at these two important junctures in her fictional existence, the narrator exercises his own options, by not filling in the full picture for the reader. More precisely, after the initial staircase encounter, we are not directly shown the beginning of the Fortunata and Juanito liaison, although we hear later from both separately its general line of development and immediate consequences. Who seduced whom after that initial meeting? There is every reason to believe that Fortunata is not averse to attracting the attention of men from a higher social order: particular attention is called to Juanito's fascination with her elegant footwear, although Ribbans, unlike Goldman, does not enlarge upon this important detail. In an obviously unequal relationship that could never become permanent through marriage, the readers are not accorded the privilege of witnessing directly the exchanges between the two lovers so as to establish their respective responsibility for what ensues: of course, there is responsibility on both sides, but to the same degree? Much less problematic is the division of responsibility in the part of Fortunata's life that constitutes the core of the novel. The readers can judge for themselves who is to blame for what and when. The fickle Juanito toys with Fortunata when his fancy takes him and then abandons her. For her part, Fortunata can not resist his appeal, even though she is now a married woman, and succumbs. Each character is equally responsible for his and her actions, especially Fortunata when she conceives her "pícaro idea". Despite its measured incubation, it is, in social terms, an entirely unrealistic plan, and, as Ribbans notes, on her deathbed is compared to alcohol. In fact, this obsession with Juanito had been characterized as a "borrachera" in the dream sequence examined by Ilie in this volume of *Anales Galdosianos*: "A la media hora le entró, como el día anterior, la embriaguez aquella, el desvanecimiento de las ideas, que se emborrachaban con tragos de dolor y se dormían" (III, vii, 4; 255). Coincidentally, in that same dream sequence, her perambulations across Madrid under the sway of "la pícaro idea" are clearly presented as a

decision consciously made on her part, but without full cognizance of its reason: "allí duda si tirar hacia Pontejos, a donde la empuja su pícara idea, o correrse hacia la calle de Toledo. Opta por esta última dirección, sin saber por qué" (III, vii, 4; 256). The last sentence sums up perfectly Fortunata's attitude in the formulation and realization of her "pícara idea": she makes a decision on what to do of her own free will, yet the reasons for that choice seem, even for her, clouded in an alcoholic haze, to become denser as the action unfolds.

The readers are certainly front-seat spectators of Fortunata's last moments when she dictates to Estupiñá the letter in which she cedes the recently born infant to Jacinta. So there can be no room for doubt about what Fortunata says and does in her last moments of full consciousness. Or can there? The words she wants Estupiñá to write in the letter are subject to constant rectification and we never know whether Estupiñá has correctly transcribed them or, at best, represented her intentions (Bly). The nearest we come to an understanding of her real reasons for this act of sacrifice (totally impossible in the matter of her bequest of the bonds to Guillermina) is when she decides on the following wording: "Para que [Jacinta] se consuele de los tragos amargos que le hace pasar su marido, ahí le mando al verdadero *Pituso*" (IV, vi, 13; 521). These bland words hardly do justice to the force of conviction in her original "pícara idea," now suddenly transformed into a very different "idea": "Vaya, D. Plácido, prepárese: verá qué golpe... Se me ocurrió una idea, hace poco, cuando estaba sin habla, al punto que me entraba también la idea de mi muerte" (IV, vi, 13; 521). Fortunata's final choice is, therefore, for her, one made with total cognizance of its consequences and of her own responsibility for it. But for the reader, doubt lingers on after the novel's open ending, as it must, given what we are told about the motives, wisdom or indeed efficacy of this final act of autonomous action, especially with regard to its long-term consequences for other people. Ribbans's proposition that Fortunata is an angel in human terms, (if not in those of Christian theology or those of the "ángel del hogar" ideology), with her essential goodness vindicated, has, then, to be assessed in the light of the enigmatic nature of Fortunata's last lucid moments.

Ribbans, however, is determined to reconcile opposing interpretations of this dénouement, maintaining that Fortunata's final settlement establishes a "new balance between realistic and idealistic considerations" (282) for it shows that she is thinking of the interests of her baby, Jacinta's need for a child, the interests of the Santa Cruz dynasty and the maintenance of her new-found dignity. The result is a general infiltration of the "pueblo" into the bourgeoisie, with a corresponding reassessment of values, regarding both patriarchal society and the situation of women. Yet Ribbans diminishes the force of his argument by later recognizing that Fortunata's "aburguesamiento," propounded by Blanco-Aguinaga and Goldman, is only "a stage in a process of assimilation—part of the 'dichosa reconciliación de las clases sociales'—which is steady, if limited and partial." If this social assimilation is limited and partial, or snail-like, to cite Ribbans's own favoured metaphor, how beneficial is it, then, in the long run and to whom? To the "pueblo," which is being slowly assimilated, individual by individual? Or to the bourgeoisie itself, revitalized and therefore made more prosperous by dint of the personal sacrifices of such "pueblo" women as Fortunata and Mauricia? If Ribbans does not deny the ending's tragic side nor is prepared to accept the novel as a work of gentle optimism, his view that the forces of altruism, though less powerful, are no less evident does not really amount to very much, since no final equilibrium or balance is achieved. What the novel ends on is a tilt toward the side of

the forces of conservatism in Restoration society, however regrettable and unfair that may seem to the unbiased reader. The idealism of Maxi and the altruism of Feijoo do deserve recognition, but in both cases, they are tragically flawed at important junctures by inevitably self-centred concerns.

In the "ironic view of life, inclining towards a wry, attenuated pessimism which does not eclipse an underlying vitalism" (282) that, for Ribbans, the novel offers the reader, the evaluation of Segismundo Ballester's role in the composition of this "chiaroscuro" picture is crucial. One may be inclined to accept that he is a unique example of completely unconditional love and friendship for Fortunata, but, on the other hand, her decease has conveniently avoided a breakdown of his fragile composure. Ribbans's second role for Segismundo—as a possible husband for Fortunata—is highly questionable, leading to some fanciful speculation about the suitability of such a union. Segismundo does stand as a mirror character to all of his predecessors as Fortunata's champion and defender, but surely the principal reason for Galdós's daring introduction of this new leading character in Part IV is that he needed an efficient, practical helper for Fortunata in the final phase of her odyssey, when her previous protectors had either abandoned her for good (Juanito) or were unable to help her for health reasons (Feijoo and Maxi). The final struggle with opposing forces, both natural and social, would have been unfairly weighted against her from the outset. Moreover, how accurate is it to claim that Segismundo's third and final role is to testify, "as a true and reliable witness who has full knowledge of her life and behavior, of the essential innocence of her character" (264)? Does Segismundo know all about Fortunata and her innermost thoughts, even the full extent of her "pícaro idea"? María-Paz Yáñez is nearer the mark when she calls Segismundo a "lector incompleto" of Fortunata's story. Furthermore, Ribbans, although he goes to great lengths to emphasize how Segismundo reluctantly but realistically accepts that the passing of time will eventually obliterate Fortunata from his memory, fails to note the irony of this realization when the story of Fortunata, in far greater detail than even Segismundo could know, has been immortalized in the fiction that Mr X has assembled. This is even a surprising oversight for such a devotee of the arts as Segismundo, especially after his perceptive metafictional discussion with Ponce before Fortunata's funeral. For Ribbans, Segismundo "represents the most balanced outlook in the book. His mixture of unselfishness and pragmatism allows for both idealistic impulses and the practical continuation of life" (283). But what if Fortunata had not died? Would Segismundo have been able to control his natural impulses much longer?

The most serious objection to this view of the novel's balanced message, exemplified by Segismundo, derives from Mr X's final discharge of his narrative duty. Although Ribbans, prompted by Galdós's terse statement that "el estilo es mentira. La verdad mira y calla," (65), shows a proper awareness of the ability of all verbal constructs to confuse and deceive, giving rise to a constant use of irony that is subversive of the directly mimetic process, he lapses into an occasional loss of direction. When he adamantly affirms that Mr X's opinions have to be assessed in the light of his social prejudices and limitations, he is only half-stating the truth. The context of Mr. X's statements may well undermine the substance of his remarks, as, for example, when he pontificates on impulsive behaviour as Fortunata is considering assaulting the Santa Cruz house in Part III. Yet Mr X's "rather convoluted arguments" here (77) are not without some truth and can not be dismissed out of hand. Similarly, Mr X's use of such terms



as “la santa” and “la mona del Cielo” to refer to Guillermina and Jacinta respectively may reflect his class attitudes and reinforce social stereotyping, but he is not the only “dramatis persona” to employ these designations with some frequency, unless we incline to the view that even the choice of words by the fictional characters is a reflection of Mr X’s social prejudices.

Yet, the essential narrative mode of the novel is ironic. As Diane Urey reminded us nearly two decades ago, readers have constantly to question the veracity of statements made by the omnipotent, if apparently not omniscient, Galdosian narrator in the light of what already has been read: interpretations have to be checked or rectified. Yet we can never be sure that any reading of the text is correct or complete, since the use of irony injects a shot of ambiguity that pervades the whole text. Hence when Ribbans declares: “I have no doubt that we are meant to view him [Feijoo], in human terms, in an essentially favourable light” (240), perhaps others would demur. Total certainty and definitive conclusions would seem to be precluded at any stage in *Fortunata y Jacinta* because of the use of irony. Mr. X is slotted directly into the fiction he narrates in order to sew the seeds of permanent doubt in the minds of Galdós’s readers.

In this context, Mr. X’s update at narrative time, i.e. in 1885, on Barbarita and Baldomero II, inserted so early in the novel is very important for what it omits: any reference to the final condition of Jacinta, Juanito or Juan Evaristo. Naturally, any such reference is totally out of the question, because their story has not even started by the time Mr. X gives that example of prolepsis. Nonetheless, because the readers know that Mr. X is familiar with the state of the Santa Cruz family ten years after the events he has narrated, they wonder later how Juan Evaristo has been reared by the Santa Cruz family: has he been socially indoctrinated by his grandparents and parents? Has Jacinta, though motivated by impressive maternal affection, attended to his every whim, as the Pitusín débâcle seems to ominously forecast that she might? Are we to conclude from that single enigmatic prolepsis in Part I that patriarchalism, where the worm of corruption resides, is alive and well in the Santa Cruz household, as in the rest of Restoration Spain in the “años bobos,” as Galdós later called them, of the eighties? If this is indeed the message to be read into Mr X’s bewildering reticence at the end, to whom is the eloquence of Galdós’s pro-feminist agenda in the rest of the novel to be directed? To contemporary male readers in the hope that they will change their life-style and attitudes to help the next generation of women—their daughters? That seems a rather far-fetched notion, conceivable but improbable, because Galdós, through Mr. X, has deliberately and discreetly shrouded the path to a total comprehension of his text with a veil of uncertainty and ambiguity, and there is nothing that the reader can do about the matter!

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The essential originality of *Conflicts and Conciliations* lies in its systematic treatment of the various versions of the *Fortunata y Jacinta* text. Ribbans proves beyond all shadow of a doubt that Galdós was most attentive to improving his text at every stage of its production. Galdós’s “modus operandi” in *Fortunata y Jacinta* as well as in other novels, as perceptively summarized by Entenza de Solare, seems to have been based on the need to produce in the first

instance the complete body of a text, albeit with some parts more developed than others, which he could keep on revising right up to the page-proof stage. Ribbans correctly concludes that the printed text (P) is undoubtedly superior to any of the intermediate versions, principally because the character of Fortunata is far more developed: if her staircase meeting with Juanito is not evident in A, her melodramatic suicide that terminates the same first version has been vastly modified. However, it is Ribbans's summation about the timing of these textual revisions that will undoubtedly catch the attention of all *galdosistas*, giving them much food for thought: "What is astonishing is the extent to which the novel's successes are the result of last-minute inspiration. Galdós seems to have possessed an intuitive capacity for determining the best solution in the nick of time" (269). A sobering thought, indeed!

Yet, for all the voyeuristic pleasure afforded by this kind of behind-the-scenes documentary in which the lens of Ribbans's paleographic camera leaves few details about the text's gestation unscanned, it is still the final form of that literary offspring, the princeps edition of 1886-87 (P), that must govern the readers' responses. Collating the variants in A, B, C and P does certainly illuminate the steps leading to the final version, but, paradoxically, at the same time it increases the complex and enigmatic texture of the novel. In the private inscription to a copy of his book that Geoffrey Ribbans sent, with typical generosity, to the present writer, he modestly referred to it as "one more exhaustive study of an inexhaustible text." *Galdosistas* will unreservedly apply the second adjective to Ribbans's own study as well, for it is, insooth, an inexhaustible source of nourishing ideas. Commenting on the metafictional discussion between Ponce and Segismundo at the end of *Fortunata y Jacinta*, Ribbans asserts that "only the quality of the finished project is essential. Since food imagery is so prominent, with Galdós we may in truth say: 'the proof of the pudding is in the eating'" (278). This proverbial saying could be applied with equal justification to *Conflicts and Conciliations* for "nous avons très bien mangé chez toi ce soir, Geoffrey!"

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