# PATTERNS OF DECEPTION IN THE GALDÓS NOVEL

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In Galdós's *Novelas contemporáneas*, even in the so-called thesis novels like *Doña Perfecta*, the problem of the text and of narrating or writing the self becomes preeminent. *La desheredada* and *El amigo Manso, Fortunata y Jacinta, Miau*, and *Misericordia*: in these masterpieces, Galdós experiments continuously with modes of narrative consciousness on the part of the characters. As narrator, he uses the term *novela* as a large, loose metaphor for those various forms of conceiving and describing, dreaming and dissembling that people invoke when they endeavor to tell their story, represent roles, gain desired ends. As recent studies have shown, notably John Kronik's exemplary essays on the inner narrations of *Fortunata y Jacinta*, Feijoo's fabrication of Fortunata, and metafictive strategies in *Misericordia*, Galdós manipulates telling and retelling in ways that shape the text into self-referential forms; in Kronik's words: «A través de las narraciones interiores, Galdós se inventa un espejo de su propia invención» (279). This reflexive dynamic links formal design with psychological and moral aspects of verbal behavior, giving rise to a major theme; literature's own potential for instructing or deceiving, for self-realization or self-deception. To distinguish one from the other, yet also to mark the coincidence in form and function that the telling of truths and the telling of lies display, poses one of the fundamental challenges of the Galdós novel.

This essay focuses on the problem of deception and authenticity, a problem bound up with differing modes of narrative consciousness, the patterns they trace, and the moral values they project. [1] For as Stephen Gilman has observed: «Consciousness, Galdós wants us to realize, begins with conscience, because the latter forces us to observe and judge our own feeling from without» (329). Narration draws patterns that form visible, architectonic links between competing, fictive shapes—those devised by the characters and those drawn by Galdós in his narrative guise and as implied author. Narrative patterns interface with one another, forging pivotal relationships between the image-making minds of author, narrator, and character so that, as Germán Gullón shows in *Fortunata y Jacinta*, the process of imagining itself structures a reflex action that links self and other, subject and object (101; see also Babcock 2). This reflex action can make the act of storytelling turn inside out or upside down. For example, in the first and last chapters of *El amigo Manso*, appropriately described as a «novela a dos luces, como los tornasoles» (Montesinos 28), narration becomes a self-consciously flaunted game of fictive autonomy (Kronik, *Manso* 71); that same game, however, lies embedded in the sinuous *eses* of *Doña Perfecta* or buried beneath the multiple *capas* of *Miau*. In each novel, author and character reflect and refract each other,

openly or under cover, as modes of storytelling and of imagining participate in the art of drawing figures—*pintar la mona, hacer figurar, decir una cosa por otra.* As novelist, Galdós plays continuously with the concept of *allegoria,* the description of one thing under the image of another (McCarthy 49), drawing figures, tracing patterns, and painting signs that link the reflex action of metafiction with psychology and moral character.

This discussion consists of two parts: 1) reflections on the moral implications of novel-making and novel-writing, as this imaginative process takes place in *Fortunata y Jacinta* and 2) an inquiry into how such literary replay functions in *Miau.* By *moral* I mean all considerations that bear upon the rightness or wrongness of an action or state of affairs or on the goodness or badness of people or of character traits, as, in these two novels, people act out their lives novelistically, that is, in accordance with specific texts or tissues of words that, consciously or not, they themselves have invented or adopted as their own. In both novels, the moral and the social clearly overlap. However, as J. B. Stern has written of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina,* one must distinguish between the moral and the social while acknowledging the former to be embedded in the latter (858). In Galdós's two novels, family ties, business interests, political affiliations, religious practices—even the luck of the national lottery—fabricate connections that map out social trajectories. The trajectories form networks that, once operative in a person's consciousness, give rise to those *narraciones interiores*—inner renditions of the «book of life.» Storytelling in *Fortunata y Jacinta,* aptly defined as «una selva de novelas entrecruzadas» (Montesinos 203), and narration in *Miau*—those retrospective replays of the mind that characterize the vertical imaginings of Villaamil, Abelarda, and Víctor—take root in the social but issue as moral projections. For the interleaved sets of stories prompt us to ask if novels, in all their imaginative forms, lead a person to perceive or to obscure certain truths about the life lived day-to-day among their pages. The narrator's own commentary and his use of the book in all its multivalent paper guises pose the question of whether or not novels shape potential or ideal selves and, if so, how and when do they animate souls to fit that invented, fictive image. Some images are mere reflections—copies or parodies of the social text. Others, developed by the freedom to think and the power to imagine, redefine social norms and alter moral character. As implied author, Galdós induces his readers to speculate on whether novelistic form—even his own as narrator—disclose or deceive, clarify or confuse, whether they point to some kind of truth, as in *Fortunata y Jacinta,* or, conversely, refute the notion of an enlightened, governing principle at work in the course of human affairs, as in *Miau.*

## *Fortunata y Jacinta:* Narrative Consciousness and Self-definition

Almost everyone in *Fortunata y Jacinta* makes up fictions. In effect, their thoughts and actions, the very stuff of the narrator's own story, derive from a self-invented, novelistic consciousness, spelled out in the early pages of part 1: «Y sale a relucir aquí la visita del *Delfín* al anciano servidor

amigo de su casa, porque si Juanito Santa Cruz no hubiera hecho aquella visita, esta historia no se habría escrito. Se hubiera escrito otra, eso sí, porque por doquiera que el hombre vaya, lleva consigo su novela; pero ésta no» (40). In turn, people's lives are viewed as fictions, as texts to be read or deciphered, in the myriad, metaphorical links that are made between day-to-day existence and the art of word-making and novel-writing: Barbarita sees in «aquella ignorada página» of her son's youth an amorous escapade or two (44). Jacinta wants to pry into «ciertas paginitas» (49) of her husband's past and evinces «tal expresión en sus ojos y en su sonrisilla picaresca, que casi, casi se podía leer en su cara la palabra que andaba por dentro» (54). Maxi must draw veils over disparate «página[s] fea[s],» «letras, párrafos y capítulos enteros» (175) of Fortunata's past life. At Feijoo's behest, Fortunata becomes the «narradora» of «algún capítulo de la historia de su vida» (336), whereas Feijoo advises her to turn over a new «leaf,» keeping the book of life open: «Dobla la hoja,» he says (336). Ballester «reads» her face; conversely, the narrator cannot «decipher» the «hieroglíficos» of the inscrutable doña Lupe. For Juanito, pushed and pulled by voluble appetites, women are simply texts to be read, reread, and discarded periodically: «Así lo muy antigo y conocido se convierte en nuevo. Un texto desdeñado de puro sabido vuelve a interesar cuando la memoria principia a perderle el respeto y la curiosidad se estimula» (84).

The notion of inner texts, of people's lives as written stories, makes the characters the tellers as well as the makers of their lives; they are left free to grow and change according to their own inner law. It follows that their «novelas» are not equal in moral value. Some fictions—Jacinta's imaginings, Maxi's dreams, Moreno's insomnias, Fortunata's visions—are plotted along a path toward knowledge and enlightenment; overall they promote life and liveliness, even in the moment of dementia or death. An example occurs on the Santa Cruz honeymoon, where Jacinta probes, imagines, and dreams into existence the figure of her husband's former mistress. Fortunata, a presence through absence, presses in upon the page as a series of narrative images, surfacing in «puntos negros,» in a name fitfully articulated, in the chapter of a story told through the filtered, fictive memory of a husband whose half-truths are countered and surpassed by the novelistic imaginings of a young and untried wife: «Anoche me acordé, ¿cuándo creerás? cuando apagaste la luz. Me parecía que la llama era una mujer que decía: ¡Ay!, y se caía muerta» (56).

Jacinta's words depict the novel in miniature: its triangle of social relationships set within a moral context and evoked—enacted and told—through an act of memory and of the imagination. It reflects, in capsule form, the whole story and brings into play the same, retrospective, fiction-making mode that distinguished Galdós's own novelistic consciousness, as described in his *Memorias de un desmemoriado.* [2] Jacinta's evocation is a part that sums up the whole, a beginning that prefigures the end. It represents both a reproduction and a recreation. It sums up plot while signifying a particular way of creating that plot, retelling it, shaping it toward certain ends, qualifying it with moral value. As Agnes Gullón has noted, Jacinta's summary is «less

a reproduction than a recreation» (51), for Jacinta develops in accordance with the truths her «novela» has invented and disclosed.

Similarly, Fortunata imagines «novelas,» replete with settings, dialogues, commentaries, and glosses on reality. However, she travels farther than her rival, not only disclosing truths but creating them in a continuous process of self-definition. Novel-making and the creation of character converge to configure the sublime, for she reaches and maintains that dovetailing coincidence between fiction and reality, which conjoin to stamp out, «con sencilla fórmula, el perfil más hermoso y quizá menos humano de su carácter, para dejar tras sí una impresión clara y enérgica de él» (536). The fit between form—«molde»—and content—«todo lo bueno que ella podía sentir y pensar»—is a shining instance of that elusive art of life and of the novel, that «ilusión de vida» (Menéndez Pelayo 101) wherein, according to Galdós's own statement in his 1897 speech to the Spanish Royal Academy, «debe existir perfecto fiel de la balanza entre la exactitud y la belleza de la reproducción» («La sociedad» 322).

Other fictions are lies, either comically delusional or tragically deceptive. Salient examples of the former occur in the Rubín family: the gubernatorial pretensions of doña Lupe, *la ministra,* the gusts of ambition that blow two or three times a day through Juan Pablo's empty brain, «haciéndole decir *si yo fuera poder*» (300), or the gaseous eruptions of that hairy priest, Nicolás. In the Rubín household, at least, inflation—the airy stuff of novelistic dreams spun upon an inflated, unstable bourgeois economy—assumes progressively degraded forms. «Highs» reverse into moral «lows» as we descend from the magisterial «ínfulas» and «humos» of doña Lupe to the frothing egg whites of Juan Pablo's scarce ideas, to receive at last, and full in the face, that «metro cúbico de gas» (211) belched sonorously by the prideful cleric.

Conversely, the key figure of tragic lies, the arch deceiver, is Juanito Santa Cruz. The analogy between his proper name and divine authority —«Santa Cruz es como hay Dios» (535), declares Segunda, Fortunata's scabrous aunt—suggests how the word of this «creator,» venerated «oráculo de la familia» (86) and progenitor of fictions, governs the novel-making world of the two protagonists. But from the outset, Juanito's fictions and half-truths set in motion a process of inversion, a covert system of vice versas that unites eventually the two women, linking them in that imagined, sororial «abrazo,» raising them up to look down, with pity and scorn, upon el *Delfín,* «ese falso, mala persona» (544).

Three characteristics distinguish the nature, mode of operation, and effects of Santa Cruz's mental behavior: masks, multiple levels, and subversion. At the hand of this «ilustrado joven» (280), words, like capes, turn inside out; they conceal, deceive, and, recalling Jacinta's insight on the honeymoon, they put out the light. They do not illuminate or give life. Instead of imaginative constructs, we have engineered artifices, built up from paper («someras lecturas» [63]) and decribed as «triquiñuelas de artista de la vida» (84). In a word, although the narrator's story had depended upon Juanito's «novelas,» novels have in fact given way to melodrama, to the slick skills of acting, gamesmanship, and the carnival. Bending back like a tumbler

to rely upon his glib tongue, this supple, clever mind confects fictional shapes with the dice cups of reason.

The image of the dice cups of reason—«Hacer pasar de un cubilete a otro las ideas» (314)—points to a perversion of the bourgeois mentality of monetary exchange. In a series of images the narrator depicts how Santa Cruz's cerebration, his storytelling imagination, has crossed with counterfeit coins, cloth coverings, and the prestidigitations of a master magician. Now things invert; they are not what they seem. Reason, which plays with dice cups, is not reason but something else: a random, solipsistic mode of operation that uses the appearance of logic to mask illogical, psychic states. Having assumed the mis-taken shape of the dice cups, reason itself has changed. Thus, what the image offers is not reason but its corrupt form, a basic, two-tiered conceit, an alloy of logic and chance in which the former is stained or qualified by the latter. What the narrator draws, then, are mixed or polluted images for reason, configured as an «arte tan sutil y paradójico» (64) or as the «sortilegio de su imaginación» (86); «imaginación» itself stands qualified as «dañada» (156).

Such impure mixtures defy recognition or definition. They cannot be spelled out, identified, or known, and hence their insidious power is rooted in the disorder of «holgazanería dichosa» (84), appetite, and whim. Even the narrator does not see clearly. He must resort to oblique figures like the image of the dice cups or a diseased imagination to project in his own fiction the sense of something morally askew—that gaminess of Santa Cruz's «reasoning,» its improvised nature and mechanical dexterity, as well as its ill effects. In response to Jacinta's direct, enlightened view of his past affair with Fortunata, the paradoxical «reasoning» of this «ilustrado joven» deliberately obfuscates: «ponía en funciones toda la maquinaria, más brillante que sólida, de su raciocinio, aprendido en el comercio de las liviandades humanas y en someras lecturas» (63).

Juanito's thinking is slickly multiple, exercised in various «funciones,» founded upon commercial exchanges and upon desultory readings. Random selection undergirds thought; «logic» is built upon the paper forms of books; «brilliant» surfaces disorient and obscure. The narrator's use of an entwined set of images points to the difficulty of apprehending such sequined twistings and turnings of the mind. Moreover, many such images are needed—«cubiletes,» «maquinaria,» and, in other descriptions, «rincones,» «callejuelas,» «cavernas»—and they are patterned into serpentine chains that tie together the motifs of money-making, cloth-making and word-making: «Todo era convencionalismo y frase ingeniosa en aquel hombre que se había emperejilado intelectualmente, cortándose una levita para las ideas y planchándole los cuellos al lenguaje» (64).

Cloth, coins, and shopworn cloches: this is the currency of substitution and exchange. Metaphorical crossings between thinking and dressing, speaking and costuming, acting and managing money—«A fuer de hábil financiero, sabía pasar por generoso cuando el caso lo exigía» (85)—draw the interleaved, serpentine shape of deception. Galdós patterns this shape into a vertical structure that aptly qualifies the man's thinking and imagining as artifice. As we have seen, thoughts are built up and layered, placed at successive

removes from the real; the mind moves behind masks and façades, confecting fictions from conventional, rehashed versions. Even the scarce truth of these versions is a bad imitation, «una verdad refundida, como las comedias antiguas» (62).

Moreover, each entwined figure of speech, plotted on a vertical axis, reiterates in a visible, self-conscious way the whole notion of *image*, as Santa Cruz's intellect preens before the mirror of vanity. He himself, reflected in that mirror, is a reflexive, self-invented personage, an imitation, a parody, a verbal artifact, thrice removed from reality, since he inheres in the narrator's rendition of his own rendition of what he sees in the mirror: «Estaba satisfecho, cual si se hubiera creado y visto que era bueno» (86). This character, like the images that depict his way of thinking, is a plural entity: «En fin, me parece que... somos algo» (90) is the smug declaration of one of those «soliloquios íntimos» (90) entertained before the looking glass. In turn, plurality overlaps with the notion that, as a reflection of a reflection of a reflection, the man exists at several removes from the real. Each remove compounds distance and abets distortion; once reflected in the mirror, this character, so real in his own eye, is an unreal presence, a fictional image, an aberration of the senses and of the social text. The parodic pairing of Santa Cruz's self-created image in the mirror with that of a man created in God's image («cual si se hubiera creado y visto que era bueno») subverts the analogy between name and divine authority, making a mockery of Santa Cruz's social power and prestige.

Most ironically, then, the idle Juanito is an appropriate image of the self-made man of his age. He fulfills don Baldomero's unwitting prediction that such a son will be but a reflection of the times: «Cada cual en su época. Juanito en la suya, no puede ser mejor de lo que es» (15). Juanito's mind conforms admirably to this notion of a reflected life, a life that inheres in images, in a deceptive, fiction-making imagination and that, as a result, remains at several removes from the real. The various reflections, exchanges, and edifices trace out the pattern of a layered, stratified thing, vertical in structure, empty and full at the same time: «el ramaje vistoso de ideas» stands counterpoised to «la seca desnudez de su pensamiento» (320). This mind must be fathomed or plumbed; secretive pockets honeycomb that «arcano escondidísimo del alma de Juanito Santa Cruz» (156). The truth of his feelings lies deep down in «cavernas más hondas que el fondo del mar, y no llegara a ellas la sonda de Jacinta ni con todo el plomo del mundo» (156).

As the novel progresses, Santa Cruz's «imaginación dañada» (156) invents fictional images not only of himself but of others; Jacinta, for example, stands in his mind's eye as a fantasized Fortunata. For as Juanito endeavors to recall —that is, «rebuild»—Villalonga's «visión inverosímil» (155) of Fortunata, the narrator must use reflexive constructions to display how his way of imagining bends back, how it pleats over itself to form a layered image, one built up upon a previous rendition (Villalonga's) and upon the figure of his wife. That is, in order to respond to Jacinta, Santa Cruz «necesitaba apelar a su misma imaginación dañada, revestir a su mujer de formas que no tenía y suponérsela más ancha de hombros, más alta, más mujer, más pálida... con las turquesas aquellas en las orejas» (156).

Ultimately these fictions corrupt the inventor. As early as the honeymoon, even what he himself might have recognized as a truthful response lies discarded at the bottom of his soul, «como existen los trapos de colorines en algún rincón de la casa del que ha sido cómico, aunque sólo lo haya sido de afición» (64). The carnival image frames the presence of inauthenticity and deceit, comfortably lodged among discarded disguises in the corner of the house of an amateur actor. It is, of course, a mode of self-deception. Such are the distances, distortions, and façades of his mind that Santa Cruz cannot see or know his responses for what they are. Reflexive habits have split off his mind from itself; reflecting deflects recognition and images invert. To meditate «profundísimamente» (45) is merely to act out the unreflective and reflexive role of a comedian: «Todo esto era comedia y querer echárselas de hombre reflexivo» (45). Now, the notion of reflexivity dovetails with play-acts and punning; it creates paradox about its meaning by encapsulating two referents, one matched to the other in a concordance of sound and shape that signals discordance.[3] The word «reflexive» turns inside out: it points to itself to show that it does not mean what it would mean in another context. The reflection of this strutting «hombre reflexivo» does not mean thought but the absence of thought; absence results from a reflexive reliance upon old scripts, comedies written by his mother and by the social context. Inversion comes full circle, pinching Santa Cruz between thumb and forefinger, for to assert before the mirror that «somos algo» is only to confirm that «no somos nada.»

Santa Cruz's self-deception grows until, toward the end of the novel, the exchange of knowledge for ignorance is complete. This cognitive vacuum overlaps with a spatial one: Juanito's absence from the pages of the novel. At the outset he had capped that novel, overtopping its opening chapter; social entitlements had found apt expression in the placement of his name as title and in the explicit mention of his particular fiction as the genesis of this «book of life.» At the end Juanito Santa Cruz exits from center stage. No longer a household word nor even a verbal sign in the text, he ceases also to exist in the mind of Jacinta, who has reimagined the episode of Fortunata's baby, «*el hijo de la casa*» (521), and rewritten the story: the baby's tiny features are those of Moreno, «Aquel corazón que la adoraba y que se moría por ella,» and not those of a fictive, unreal husband, «el *Delfín,* ese falso, mala persona...» (544). In *Fortunata y Jacinta*, certain truth-telling fictions —Moreno's impassioned insomnias, Maxi's exalted dreams, Mauricia la *Dura*'s visionary acts of rebellion, even Ido's novel of the false Pituso, eventually rub out a powerful man's lies and half-truths. Yet Santa Cruz's novelistic fictions do reappear, in a «second edition» like his own «verdad refundida,» to define the topsy-turvy, mental configurations of *Miau.*

## *Miau:* Minds in Exile

Consistent with his practice of listening within his own fictional world, Galdós in *Miau* deftly palms large parts of the storytelling to his characters. In *Miau*, as if to take a cue from *Fortunata y Jacinta* where Villaamil appears,

most wretchedly, as *Ramses II*, people also act out their lives according to socially determined, literary contexts, fabricated from within by the spoken and written word. The narrator, as before, relies upon such inner texts, anchoring his novel from the outset in the reiterated epithet «Miau.» Although he feigns omniscience, opting for descriptive commentary in the third person, minimal linguistic signs—a diminutive, a dot, a dative of interest—are in essence plural. They conjure up a babble of voices, blurring distinctions between the printed and unprinted page. *Miau's* opening paragraphs provide examples of this «experience speech» or *style indirect libre* at its best, for, as Sánchez Barbudo has shown in his analysis of the novel's breathtaking *vulgaridad*, «Galdós como autor, más que invisible Dios parece un personaje de Galdós, con bufanda incluso y botas de botones» (56).

In *Miau* this kind of experience speech designates a strange, paradoxical fit between teller and tale, specifying a narrative focus that mixes internalized, close-up views with ironic detachment. The narrator's story, honeycombed with voices, coincides in form and content with Miau's «beehive of boredom» (Mulvihill and Sánchez xxiii). Like Villaamil, Víctor, and Abelarda, Galdós's narrator exploits a system of retrospection in order to represent the real. Thus his «rendition» of *Miau*, overtly construed as an act of memory and self-consciously staged as a story already told, calls attention to itself as artifice, as something doubly fictional in nature. Moreover, the story, divided into three main strands, each connected by a narrative line that folds one strand over the other, stands oriented on a vertical axis. This tripartite, vertical structure and sinuous verbal design duplicates the storytelling figures executed from within by the characters. The narrative consciousness of both author and character draws similar imaginative shapes, reminiscent of Santa Cruz's «comedias antiguas.»

This coincidence in narrative pattern and point of view exerts two equal but opposite effects. On the one hand, the parallelism emphasizes the vertical patterns of fiction-making characteristic of *Miau*'s paper world. It also throws into relief the pattern of truth and deception as a twin shape, all the while inducing the reader to identify and distinguish one from the other. On the other hand, multiple points of view within the story, continuously shifting within the same consciousness, whether that of Villaamil, Víctor, or the narrator himself, confound the possibility of securing conclusive knowledge about people and their society—that mobile, maddening «*país de viceversas*» (600). One supreme irony among the many in *Miau* is the apparent, visibly patterned, unreliability of a truth-telling narrator. For here is someone in control who mixes voice polyphonically, subverting almost every mode of storytelling by some degree of ambiguity, absence, or alienation and whose narration duplicates in pattern the shape of deception. As Rodgers has observed, irony, analogy, and patterns of interconnectedness have conferred extraordinary complexity upon ordinary lives (18). Too often these lives are not what they seem, since in addition to fabricating fictions, people (including the narrator) in *Miau* also harbor secrets, compounding with silences and partial truths the ambiguity and irony that attend their exalted, unstable, manipulated, or detached points of view.

The vertical configuration of Santa Cruz's mind provides the model for fiction-making in *Miau*. In effect, we may say that his fictions encapsulate in embryonic form a murderous evil, which, like the Devil, will assume the various shades and shadows, shapes and silhouettes of *Miau*'s operatic world. It is no exaggeration to say that the Devil, glimpsed fleetingly in Juanito's «sonrisita diabólica» or in the red borders of his cloak, in truth has climbed into the pulpit of the Church of Monserrat, as Abelarda imagines: she, like the narrator in *Fortunata y Jacinta*, has sensed the presence of Satan in the corrupted don Juan figure of Víctor Cadalso. In *Miau*'s topsy-turvy world, God and Satan have changed places, writing the scripts of Víctor's melodramas, giving rein to the grotesque appetites of *la nenita*, blessing the machinations of the Minister of Finance and distorting the divine signature, now debased to serve the State—«su seguro servidor, Dios» (565). The diminutive *Juanito* implied that his lies could be effaced, whereas Víctor plainly triumphs as Satan: «Cuando le sentí la voz,» declares Villaamil, «creí que el infierno se nos metía por las puertas» (580); and Abelarda says, with prescience, referring to Víctor's startling appearance at the door: «Has entrado en casa como Mefistófeles, por escotillón, y todos nos alteramos al verte» (581). Juanito Santa Cruz caused death and dementia. Víctor Cadalso, by name, literally symbolizes the triumph of death and dementia.

In both novels, the deceptions of Santa Cruz and Cadalso—two names that refer to structures of sacrifice, human and divine—reduce others to obedient automatons or to animalistic behavior. Subject to her husband's dice cups of reason, Jacinta regresses to a child-like, powerless state, «bruscamente desarmada... como el combatiente de los cuentos de niños, a quien por obra de magia se le convierte la espada en alfiler y el escudo en dedal» (311). Anger and indignation typically find expression in «las cosquillas de aquella infantil rabia» (130), in that «furor de paloma» (130), a repetitive image («paloma con rabietinas») that works in concert with the novel's bird motif, which is a visible counter for society's (and Santa Cruz's) patriarchal views of women, their helplessness and child-like dependencies. Over and over Santa Cruz sees Fortunata as an «animalito muy mono» and brushes Maxi aside as an insect («—Si no te callas, cucaracha, te aplasto» [286]). In *Miau*, overwhelmed by Víctor's cruel charades, Abelarda sinks to murderous rages and Villaamil puts a bullet in his brain.

The diminutive *Juanito* points to another process linked to deception: infantilization, a specifically regressive, child-like behavior that emerges, full-blown, in *Miau*. The Santa Cruz heir possessed «en grado altísimo las triquiñuelas de artista de la vida» (88); he exploits these cunning «dodges» (Ribbans 82) to get his way, gratify voluble appetites, suck out the last drop of pleasure—«Ninguno sabía como él *sacar el jugo* a un billete de cinco duros o de veinte» (89). In *Miau*, a confused and abject Villaamil resorts to a different form of childish behavior: the magical thinking of his «diabólica teoría» (649), that superstitious system of viceversa invoked to cope with failure: «no esperes y tendrás; desconfía del éxito para que el éxito llegue» (640). Infantilization runs rampant in Hacienda, cued by that childish faith in «faldas benéficas» (628), in «credenciales,» in «la nómina de los cielos» (617), and by envelopment in cocoon-like capes, that obsessive motif

of cradled concealment. Infantilization is at work in Guillén's *aleluyas* and in the presence of Urbanito, a raw, gangling youth who supplants the veteran administrator, Villaamil. Again, proper names, juxtaposed from opposite ends of the spectrum, make their telling point: an infantilized boy-city (*Urb*anito) overlays an older, established civic core (*Villa*amil). Infantilization finally triumphs in the ubiquitous images of those pendulous, monstrous udders of the State, the great Mother, the great Whore, ruling *la Casa* in the grotesque personage of *la momia*, Víctor's aging, libidinous lover, and charting human destiny in the guise of *la señora Materia* (633). Just as Juanito, enfolded within the Santa Cruz house, had cried for «teta» (131), so in *Miau* the mass of *cesantes* rushes to suckle the State. Thus, while Villaamil's story ostensibly begins in the cafés of part 3 of *Fortunata y Jacinta*, the Devil's deceptions that govern the Ministry of Finance take root in the fictions and sleights of hand of that *niño-hombre*, Juanito Santa Cruz. His mind provides the reflexive patterns of storytelling that link psychology and moral character and undergird the voracious, infantilized world of *Miau*.

In truth, minds in *Miau* may be said to be in exile: they inhabit walled-off spaces, both inside and outside themselves. These spaces appear configured as a series of nested structures—the «cajas,» «cajones,» and «casillas» of bureaucracy, determined by the key verbs «colocar» and «encajonar.» There are the tiered rows of the Teatro Real, source of the injurious epithet «Miau,» the inner sanctum in *Posturitas*'s house, with its folded capes, and the clandestine rooms of the Cabrera household, filled with boxes of religious contraband. In all probability these veneered, smuggled goods mark the origin of Luisito's visions of God. Letters from *la Chacha* lie nested in Víctor's trunk; Villaamil's *cinco sentidos* go sealed in an envelope and the reasoning of a bureaucrat like Ventura Pantoja, «el *probo funcionario*» (613), coincides exactly with the tied-up, pressed pile of papers on his desk; his mind is as mediocre as that «mediano monte de papel sellado» (591). Again we note the parallel pattern: these minds, irrevocably exiled to the paper boxes of *legajo* and *libretto*, also find themselves filed away with the *libro*, the novel *Miau*, «built up» from interleaved, interconnected segments that lie folded over one another, like those «capas dobladas, cada una con su cartón numerado» (623). Moving among them is the mind of the narrator, another «personaje de Galdós,» subject to the same, layered artifacts of his own fictional world and to the speech of that world, laced with operatic terms and administrative clichés.

The *legajos* of the House of Money and *librettos* of the Opera House are two debased literary genres of the House of Fiction that, for the most part, have supplanted *novelas*; they tip the horizontal intertextuality of *Fortunata y Jacinta* on an even more acute vertical axis. All thought and action occur within spatial, psychological, and formal extremes, reiterated in images of highs and lows, light and shadow, also by the pervasive sense of caricature. Now Santa Cruz's «casa del cómico,» replete with «colorines» and «trapos,» has come full tilt toward the carnival and the fun house, with halls of mirrors reflecting back grotesque shapes—«las jorobas» (589) of Víctor's dashing, «gallarda persona» (584), Abelarda as a «pánfila» or «calabaza con boca y manos» (595). There is the hunched back of the gimpy Guillén («cojitranco

de los infiernos» [653]), the picture of that diminutive clown *Posturitas*, liver-lipped in death, or the sideshow of fat ladies: Paca la memorialista, hugely bovine, or Cucúrbitas's wife, a «mole» (557) so monumental that her steps shake the floor like a jackhammer. Ruling from above is the bloated presence of Víctor's paramour, «la tía *feróstica*,» «toda fofa y hueca» (658).

*Miau*'s carnival world exemplifies the esthetic of the *esperpento*, where «los héroes han ido a pasearse en el callejón del Gato» (Valle-Inclán 224). That «callejón del Gato» may be taken as a paradigm for the Miau household, a cage of cats placed opposite *la Cárcel de Mujeres*. In that household, literary models—«los héroes clásicos»—mediate between the «I» and the «Eye,» becoming a chief mode of manipulation and self-deception. Víctor doubles as Mefisto or Manfredo, Luisa sees herself as Juliet, «contando sus alegrones a la luna» (589), and Abelarda unwittingly plays out in reverse the role of her namesake. Villaamil, like Dante, descends to the depths of the Inferno and, like the Faithful Servant or Prodigal Son, returns again and again to «la Casa» in search of the Father—the Minister of Finance.

The distortions and discrepancies traced out by these «layered» highs and lows and by caricature, parody, and play-acting shred a person's narrative consciousness. Thought bends back upon itself in suicidal gestures as one mind sucks at another or feeds upon its own flesh; the verbal locution «sorberle los sesos» becomes an obsessive motif in *Miau*. Such a predatory absence of thinking minds and free will determines a language of gaps and holes that perforates the text: «agujeros,» «negras simas,» «pozos.» Black holes circumscribe thought; threadbare cloths and coverings delineate a half-articulated, stuttering speech. Metaphors of mining, of plumbing, or fathoming the mind, as in the description of Abelarda's limitless «depósito de indulgencia» (594) toward Víctor, reiterate verticality and stress the sense of unrecognized depths, of parts lost to consciousness. Recall that in part 3 of *Fortunata y Jacinta* Villaamil's voice was «cavernous,» issuing darkly from a bottle (297). Now, in the early pages of *Miau*, he inhabits a hole, a «reducida estancia» (554); his sense of himself, his dignity, is, quite literally, an empty word: «El decoro era ya nombre vano, como la inscripción impresa en la etiqueta de una botella vacía» (591). This language of holes provides the non-text of *Miau*'s inner narrations, for people do not fabricate fictions so much as they harbor secrets. In this world, speech inverts to the absence of speech and to the silence of that last hole, the bullet in Villaamil's brain; nothingness rushes in, encoded by those final suspension points.

The non-narrative forms of secrets fit well into *Miau*'s layered world of *legajos* and *librettos*, *casillas* and *cajones*; a Tower of Babel has turned into a Tower of Boxes, empty and desolate, not unlike Borges's «Biblioteca de Babel.» Words either are inserted—«encajonadas»—or leeched away, as brains become sucked up and spirits stand unhinged—«desencajonados.» By means of this solipsistic play of words on imagining minds, the deceptions of *Miau* stand inertly like a giant *cajón*, encapsulating death and dementia in the frozen frames of melodramatic posturing and the dry, inked leaves of bureaucratic clichés. Minds emerged exiled—absorbed in visions, like Luisito's, alienated and self-dramatized, like Villaamil's, supremely self-deceived and sadistic, like Víctor's, or split off, sucked up, and sprung, like Abelarda's.

The narrator's mind, however, maintains ironic distance, even as his responses represent the mixed, linguistic identity, the close-ups, of experience speech. Built into the novel is a covert critique of language, which makes the narrator as well as his characters susceptible to doubts about their reliability. To date, controversy has centered on Villaamil. However, the ambivalent nature of storytelling in this novel—its potential for truth and deception—also directs attention to the much maligned figure of doña Pura.

The equivocations, lies, and verbal cruelties spawned by inner storytelling and gossip suggest, first of all, that doña Pura is not altogether what she seems—a pretentious, petty snob. As a «mujer de gobierno,» a ruling matriarch, doña Pura prompts inquiry into the presence of the female in the novel and the question of power, of who or what governs this unstable, devastated world, in which child-like people such as the «aniñadas Miaus» and Luisito have not real place. They must depend on others, migrate to other households, in order to survive. Nonetheless, doña Pura, while subject to caricature as a «*figura arrancada a un cuadro de Fra Angélico*» (568), represents an identifiable good in *Miau*'s carnival world of clowns and crippled men.

Life and liveliness are manifest in doña Pura's electric hairdo, that «efusión extravagante de los mechones próximos a la frente» (553), in her racy speech, quick movements, and energetic resolution in times of crisis. Life and liveliness shine out in her radiant optimism and in her steadfast devotion to family, to her favorite diva—*la Scolpi Rolla*—above all, in her love of the arts, operatic and social. In a word, Pura lives *apurada*, pressed to the edges of energy and resource; by virtue, then, of this «afán de vivir a tope,» she ceases to be mediocre or *cursi*. In any case, spiteful tongues have invented that image in the nickname «Miau,» repeated insatiably in theater, house, school, and office. For it appears that doña Pura, posturing before the mirror to frizzle her bangs, dress for the opera, or serve muscatel to guests in her «splendid» drawing room, epitomizes for everyone, even for her immediate family, the pretenses of the times: «—Eso sí,» sniffs Paca *la memorialista*, gossiping about the Miau girls, «en arreglar los trapitos para suponer no hay quien les gane» (556). Federico Ruiz's play parodies this fictive stance and reprints the pattern of Pura as a preening spendthrift. His play describes a bankrupt household—«la más tronada de Madrid»—its pretentious family —«cursi, con menos dinero que vanidad»—and its mannish matriarch—«una señora hombruna que trataba de zapatazos a su marido» (601). As *Miau*'s foremost thinker and literary figure, Ruiz sets down a model of fiction-making and literary criticism. His play serves as a model not only for *Miau's* people but, quite ironically, for Galdós himself as he set about composing the novel and for most of his readers' critical approaches.[4]

In *Miau*, Ruiz's mise en scène operates as a kind of *mise en abyme* that toys with the notion of pretense and play-acting. Its hints at interior duplication relate the metafictive mechanism not to metaphysics, as in *Niebla*, but to narrative consciousness and its potential for truth or deception. Given the manifest unreliability of gossips and storytellers, playwrights, and letter writers in this supremely bookish world, the paradox of partially drawn, reflexive structures provides the key: patterns of analogy and interconnection, perceived from without by the reading eye, build more clearly focused views,

whereas within Villaamil's story, the cognitive impact of those same patterns —that «layered look» of veneers and piles of paper—is, as Gilman noted of *La desheredada*, «premised on the art of obscuring vision» (123). Like Santa Cruz, Víctor is an «artista social digno de teatro mayor» (589); his «brilliant» speech—«frases de relumbrón, espigadas sin criterio en diferentes libros» (620) and built upon archaeological layers of buried texts, that «quincalla deslucida de textos olvidados» (598)—exercise the same blinding effect as Juanito's «relumbrones intelectuales» (86), also built upon «someras lecturas» (63). In this way, the very notion of *pattern* points in two directions at once, reflexively pinning lies to truths. Similarly, the analogy between houses ruled by matriarchal figures—the Villaamil household as compared to *la Casa*, the House of Money, governed, step by step, by *la señora Hacienda*, by Víctor's *momia* and by *la señora Materia*—points up Pura as a more positive character.

For in the dark, dilapidated house on Quiñones Street, opposite *la Cárcel de Mujeres*, only doña Pura gets things done. Darting like a squirrel, «brincando como un cervatillo» (603), Pura lives engaged in day-to-day survival, exploding with ideas: «Esta era la que resolvía todos los conflictos, como persona de iniciativa, de inesperados golpes y de prontas resoluciones» (567). Just as she lights a fire under a pot, so her brain is a firecracker, «cargado de pólvora» (569). In *Miau*'s beehive of queens and drones, only Pura is a busy bee—industrious, radiant, life-giving: «Era de esas personas que atesoran en sí mismas un arsenal de armas espirituales contra las penas de la vida y poseen el arte de transformar los hechos, reduciéndolos y asimilándolos en virtud de la facultad dulcificante que en sus entrañas llevaban, como la abeja, que cuanto chupa lo convierte en miel» (634). Such images of liveliness and light—«radiante» is the narrator's heroic epithet for doña Pura—deepen the novel's chiaroscuro. She brings a lamp of light to Villaamil's sunken, shadowy cave. The play of light and shadow, which emphasizes the voracious sucking action of minds that feed upon one another, and the taxonomy of insect imagery set Pura's transformative energies over and against the reductive impulse of an anal, infantile social body: the greedy Guillén, «zángano de oficina,» who sucks up Pura's precious bottle of muscatel; Quintina, a buzzing «moscona insufrible» (592); Cucúrbitas and Virginia Pantoja, black, burrowing ants («hormiga de esta casa» [652]).

But the decisive factor is storytelling. The picture of Pura as *cursi* or as a clawing cat takes root in Villaamil's magical thinking and in his penchant for self-pity and self-dramatization. While Pura is a spendthrift, that trait owes much to the human need for self-expression, sounded in the second sentence of the novel as a «himno a la libertad» (551) and surely justifiable in one who lives as a shut-in, «frente a la Cárcel de Mujeres.» The image of a spendthrift also corresponds to don Ramón's own wavering sense of self-esteem and to his child-like abdication of authority within the household: from the day of their wedding he had acted on advice to let his wife wear the pants in the family. In reality, Pura has no power; everything depends upon Villaamil's «destinos.» Her only aggressive act is to rise up, splendidly feline —«como una pantera, badila en mano» (671)—to fight for her grandson, whereas Villaamil gives way to exile and suicide.

Pura also resists the words. Her brain, «cargado de pólvora» and focused purely on the present, confects fictions on only two occasions: at the outset, when the family is starving and she must take recourse to Carolina Pez («'¡Ay, qué trago! Le pinté nuestra situación de una manera tal, que la hice llorar'» [569]) and, at the end, in a last-ditch effort to keep Luisito. Although she paints «horríficas pinturas... del domicilio de Cabrera» (668), these are innocuous, fairy-tale images, «papas demasiado gordas para que las tragase un niño ya crecidito y que empezaba a conocer el mundo» (668). In sum, through the figure of doña Pura, Galdós *apura* to the furthest reach the question of narration itself. Slyly he withholds storytelling from her and shows her «pinturas» as self-conscious fictions that deceive no one, even as he tells his own, thereby disclosing the deceptions of the written and spoken word, of «monólogo[s] desordenado[s] y sin fin» (602). In *Miau*, verbal deception peaks in Víctor's promotion, recommended by his *momia*; appropriately enough, she lives on the *Calle de Relatores*.

In *Fortunata y Jacinta,* fiction-making functions as an aspect of cognition as well as deception. Jacinta, having imagined Fortunata's plight, recognizes the wrong done and lights a small lamp in her heart for her rival. Moreno's yearning, spun out in the illusions of insomnia, changes him from a cynical, frivolous courtier to a sensitive and idealistic person. Maxi traverses the greatest distance, changing through the play of his imagination from mollusk to mystic. Ballester, the least neurotic and most clear-minded of men, entertains the vision of *la casta Susana*, which rouses him to actions of almost heroic proportions. Fortunata dies an angel.

Conversely, those novelistic deceits that Santa Cruz, the master magician, conjures up to manipulate reality—«A fuer de hábil financiero»—in the end only manipulate him. When plotted along the trajectory toward self-realization, his fictions appear to be accelerated the wrong way. The pages flip backwards, folding over that embryonic self, cradling it in infancy, veiling things as they are. Juanito remains forever frozen in childhood, held apart from the flux of life by lies and half-truths, those «verdades refundidas» that bend back over his ego like a cocoon. An arch deceiver he is, ironically, self-deceived rather than self-defined. Those cunning dodges—«triquiñuelas del artista de la vida»—confine him to a bookish world. When we recall his professed anti-intellectual stance, glibly spelled out at the beginning of the novel, this unanticipated bookishness is doubly ironic: the «chuletas» of reality are in fact for others and not for him (see p. 16).

Yet Santa Cruz's novel-making and play-acting—his «comedias refundidas»—do triumph as evil in *Miau*. They triumph in Víctor's melodramas and covert manipulations, in the image of the State as the great, suckling Mother, and in the storytelling language of deceit, absence, and alienation that invents a God who serves the Minister of Finance and a Devil who has climbed into the pulpit of Monserrat. Villaamil's mind lives in exile, trapped in administrative clichés, and dies as a consequence of his own magical thinking, that verbal conjury of vice versas which defines society at large and which this starving man, «hambriento de justicia» (630), mis-takenly has internalized as his own. Víctor's sadistic posturing drives Abelarda insane, and even Luisito's

faith is rendered suspect by having taken root in illicit, veneered religious images, «todo al estilo devoto francés, muy relamido y charolado» (593).

In *Fortunata y Jacinta* and *Miau*, the reflex action of fiction-making minds explores the dual nature of words and the moral value of literary structures. It clarifies their potential for consciousness and discovery and identifies their capacity of trickery and deceit. The patterns of truth and deception coincide in shape, yet by virtue of this very coincidence, of the figure drawn by his storytelling, Galdós induces the reader to distinguish one image-making mode from another and to evaluate them. As Rodgers has observed: «Galdós... is keenly aware not only of the capacity of the human imagination for invention, but of the deeply-rooted need to arrange experience into patterns» (13). These patterns make possible that moral ranking of character which Ribbans describes in *Fortunata y Jacinta* (120) and the reevaluation of character and moral value in *Miau*, as suggested by the above view of doña Pura and the duplex function of storytelling.

The crucial difference between the two novels is this: the story of *Fortunata y Jacinta* proposes two basic, competing fictive shapes: an ascendant, horizontal line of interlaced novels set over and against a vertically oriented, deceptive narrative consciousness. The narrator partakes of the former in order to expose the latter. Metaphor and motif thus make this novelistic world intelligible; it can be known. The good does exist, can be perceived and evil thrust aside, even though the fabric of imagining minds may be shot through with temporality and death, suffering and madness. Intelligibility is invoked in the first sentence, which recalls the «noticias» that mark the narrator's act of storytelling. It is voiced at the end in Maxi's lucid recognition of who, what, and where he is, «descifrando, y esto es lo importante, el tejido de mentiras en que se envuelve la sociedad, a la que dedica una sonrisa y un insulto: "¡Si creerán estos tontos que me engañan! Esto es Leganés..."» (548; cf. G. Gullón 102). Even as reason commingles with craziness and palaces reverse into pig styes, Maxi's mind remains enlightened: «"Resido en las estrellas... lo mismo da"» (548). In *Fortunata y Jacinta*, the fiction-making imagination stands confirmed by this final ambivalence.

In *Miau*, however, all storytelling forms, including the narrator's, take that vertical plunge to stand shaped as layered, retrospective artifacts; their topographical configuration is archaeological, as each encapsulated part lies over another. Minds live in exile and, in their hungers, turn inward, feeding upon each other and upon themselves. Non-verbal forms of truth-telling—the positive counterpart to narration withheld in secrets—are manifest in Pura's live action and in Luisito's innocence; yet these non-texts cannot sustain life in a labyrinthine world where words, in the paper forms of «credenciales» and of melodrama, have usurped power, causing dementia and death. From the outset in *Miau*, the repetitive, interlaced lines of storytelling confound cognition; thus knowledge from within that story is no longer possible, nor is the world rendered intelligible.

Here, then, is the covert, reflexive paradox of *Miau*: only the storytelling pattern of an engineered artifice, self-consciously structured to coincide with the shape of deception, articulates intelligibility. For Galdós's patterns place the reader at a distance and on high, a vantage point given further emphasis

by the narrator's own ironic detachment, that is, by the spectacle of *his* mind in exile. From that elevated stance, the tip-top of a vertical, storytelling structure, metaphor and motif dis-cover; visual design now becomes a way of telling truths. The novel is so composed that the play of the eye executed from outside the story and over its visual patterns turns paradoxically upon those very forms of debased play at work in the diseased consciousness of the characters. The epithet «Miau,» simultaneously a place of entry and exit, a storytelling image voiced from within and applied from without, links author, reader, and character; it pins truth and lies together into one fictive image, compressing minds within, like Villaamil's and Abelarda's, while expanding and exalting consciousness without in the continuous paradox of Galdós's «perfecto fiel de la balanza entre la exactitud y la belleza de la reproducción.»

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## NOTES

[1] Some ideas in this essay were presented as a talk to the «Círculo Galdosiano» (Harvard Univ., 1981). I wish to express my thanks to those colleagues in attendance, especially to Rodolfo Cardona, whose comments were invaluable in making revisions. Subsequently, two papers on the topic were given at the MLA convention (1981) and the Galdós Symposium at the Univ. of Wisconsin, Madison (1985).

[2] «Expirando el verano, volví a Madrid, y apenas llegué a mi casa, recibí la grata visita de mi amigo el insigne varón don José Ido del Sagrario, el cual me dio noticia de Juanito Santa Cruz y su esposa Jacinta, de doña Lupe la de los Pavos, de Barbarita, Mauricia la *Dura*, la linda Fortunata, y, por último, del famoso Estupiñá. Todas estas figuras pertenecientes al mundo imaginario, y abandonadas por mí en las correrías veraniegas, se adueñaron nuevamente de mi voluntad» («Pereda y yo» 1663).

[3] The interconnection between reflexivity, play-acts, and punning comes from an unpublished essay by Phyllis Gorfain, «When Nothing Really Matters: The Play of Puns in *Hamlet*» (Oberlin College, 1981). Gorfain bases her ideas on Gregory Bateson's view of play as metacommunication.

[4] Robert Weber, in his study of the manuscript, suggests as a possible source for *Miau* a *costumbrista* sketch by E. Zamora y Caballero, in which a nagging wife hounds a destitute *cesante*. The sketch recalls Ruiz's play and the picture of the «señora hombruna que trataba de zapatazos a su marido.» Mulvihill and Sánchez base their view of Pura on a tattled story from another novel: «Four years earlier [Galdós] seemed to be describing the Miau girls when, in *La de Bringas*, he declared, speaking through one of the characters [Refugio Emperador]: '¡Ay, qué Madrid éste, todo apariencia! Dice un caballero que yo conozco, que esto es un Carnaval de todos los días, en que los pobres se visten de ricos. Y aquí, salvo a media docena, todos son pobres... Conozco señoras de empleados que están cesantes la mitad del año, y da gusto verlas tan guapetonas'» (xxi-xxiii).

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