ON THE CREATION AND EXECUTION OF "PECADO" IN GALDÓS'S *LA DESHEREDADA*

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Although Galdós scholars have recently begun to research the novelist's intriguing portrayal of Mariano Rufete in his 1881 novel, *La desheredada*, several important aspects still warrant additional critical attention.[1] This essay will look at both the original manuscript and the published version of *La desheredada* in order to identify and explain more completely the intricacies and vicissitudes involved in the presentation of this memorable character.[2]

Even early in the original manuscript it is apparent that Galdós is intensely aware of how the presentation of Pecado will impact on other characters, the plot, and the general tone of the entire novel. The published version of *La desheredada*, for example, shows only a minimal link between Rufete and Melchor Relimpio. In the manuscript, however, the novelist attempts to underscore the negative dimension of Mariano through his unbridled admiration for Relimpio, the quintessential trimmer: "Así fijando las miradas de alma en Melchor, hizo de este la meta de sus ambiciones de niño errante y sin familia: hízole también su modelo. Ser Melchor, escalar la altura de aquel individuo y asaltar su posición, eran los términos de su deseo" (MS II: 215).[3] Perhaps even more significant is that Galdós nearly involves Pecado in a scheme of Relimpio's with serious political overtones, that is to say, the fake lotteries of 1880-81. The street-smart Rufete harbours no illusions about the legality of his idol's scam: "Dice [a Madrid newspaper] que V [Melchor] y otros señores están haciendo un negocio con las rifas....que es negocio sucio" (MS II: 200). Nevertheless, the operation fascinates Mariano: "al verse en presencia de aquel potentado [Relimpio], de aquel Dios, de aquel fabricador de oro, tuvo un rasgo de osadía y le dijo secamente: 'Empléeme V en eso'" (MS II: 215). It is not by happenstance that by mid-1880—precisely when Galdós was gathering data for his novel—the Spanish newspaper, *El Imparcial*, was launching a hard-hitting investigation into the abuse of national lotteries during the Cánovas regime. On July 23, 1880, the newspaper published a harsh editorial about the lotteries and about corruption in the Cánovas government. Too many illegal games, contends the editorial, "disfrazados con capa de beneficencia y á títulos diversos, apuran las pequeñas economías de las laboriosas" (No. 4, 717). The article goes on to state that: "La Prensa tiene el deber de no cesar en sus clamores hasta conseguir que se adopten garantías para poner á cubierto los rentistas de asechanzas y á nuestra administración de ese desprestigio que raya en doloroso escándalo."

In addition to the unmistakable political connotations, Galdós's portrayal of Mariano in the original manuscript underscores the youth's harsh environment and, by extension, the naturalistic content of the original version. The Juan Bou of the manuscript, for example, proves to be a severe taskmaster. Furthermore, both Isidora and Miquis suggest that the lithographer treat Mariano sternly. Isidora sees no need to spare the rod: "Para conseguirlo [Mariano's rehabilitation] no debía omitir el maestro ni las reprimendas ni los golpes" (MS II: 86). Miquis's

advice to Bou is similar: "y por último autorizó al citado dueño para que le tratase con rigor, castigándole á su arbitrio, no perdonándole ninguna falta, hasta ver si lograba un laborioso (y por que no una persona decente) de aquel muchacho levantisco" (MS II: 86). For his part, Bou quickly responds to their suggestions: "Aceptó tan delicada obligación Juan Bou, que así se llamaba el litógrafo, y desde el primer día empezó á poner en práctica sus funciones educativas" (MS II: 86). By modifying the Mariano/Melchor connection and excluding Bou's painful lessons in the published text, Galdós does reduce the socio-political dimension of the portrayal of Rufete. This does not mean to say, however, that the novelist's presentation of Pecado in *La desheredada* lacks complexity or that it contains no politically caustic message. Previous research has already linked Mariano to important events outside the novel's textual chronology (1872-77). Brian Dendle (53) and Peter Bly (20) have both demonstrated how Pecado's actions and fate parallel that of Juan Oliva and Francisco Otero, the two would-be assassins of Alfonso XII, whose high-profile executions gave rise to heated debates.[4] What critics have failed to see, however, is how Galdós uses this intimate connection between history and fiction to make a bold statement about yet another controversial topic in contemporary Spain.

Capital punishment in the Spain of 1880-1881 was, to say the least, a polemical issue, primarily because Spaniards had witnessed an alarming number of executions in the previous two years. In *Los verdugos españoles* Daniel Sueiro paints a grim picture of the killing that was taking place across the country:

> A comienzos del año 1879, inaugurado con la ejecución del exaltado tonelero tarraconense Oliva, después de haber atentado sin éxito contra la vida de Alfonso XII, cuando una publicación de la época expresa dramáticamente su alarma ante el panorama de muerte que parece dominar al país: "Llevamos una semana que nuestro hermoso país se ha trasladado a los sombríos dominios de Dahomey. Los periódicos, las conversaciones, las noticias no tienen más objeto que las sentencias de muerte; el patíbulo está levantado en casi toda España; los verdugos están de enhorabuena; el telégrafo solo nos transmite partes referentes a ejecuciones desde Galicia a Ceuta; los instrumentos de suplicio no descansan, y los aficionados a esas fuertes y horribles emociones que proporciona un reo habrán visto colmada su afición o su manía." (73)

In July 1880 the liberal and strongly anti-Cánovas newspaper, *El Tío Conejo*, expressed outrage at the more than twenty inmates that had already been condemned to death that year: "la luna va á esconder, por no ver tantísimo patíbulo como se está construyendo. ¡Hermanitos! ¡Vaya un viento patibulario que corre!" Eventually, not long before the publication of the first instalments of *La desheredada*, the heated controversy over the death penalty reached the Spanish Congress: Deputy José Carvajal y Hué led a fierce Liberal attack against the executions:

> ¿Se va á convertir España en matadero de reses humanos? (Grandes rumores en los bancos de la derecha.) ¡Veintitrés sentenciados á muerte! ¡España convertida en un matadero! El eco de la construcción de esos tablados en Valencia, en Zaragoza, en Cataluña, en Madrid, cruzándose los unos con los otros dentro de los ámbitos de la Península! (*Diario* [1880]: 2893)

In early 1881, Galdós's close friend, Deputy León y Castillo, was still sarcastically questioning the morality of capital punishment in Spain. "¿Qué importa," he asked in the Sala de Diputados, "que el cadalso sea el espectáculo diario de los españoles?" (*Diario* [1881]: 53).

Galdós's references in *La desheredada* to this ongoing controversy over capital punishment are both overt and covert. In Part 1, Mariano's interior monologue, which takes place as he cowers in a drainage sewer after knifing Zarapicos, serves as a reminder of recent scenes in Madrid and provides a macabre foreshadowing of the fate that awaits the youth some five years later. "Era criminal," he concludes, "y sus perseguidores tenían razón en perseguirle, y aun en matarle atándole en un palo y estrangulándole. Esto le hizo estremecer de espanto, ¡á él que había visto una y otra ejecución en el Campo de Guardias sin conmoverse!" (1: 1113). Given the political interest in this topic in early 1881 and the fact that more than 50,000 people had packed this same Campo de Guardias to witness the execution of Francisco Otero less than a year before, one can justifiably assume that Galdos was intentionally drawing the attention of his first readers to this contemporary controversy (García Venero 211).

In Part 2, there are two overt references to the death penalty and executions. The first comes in straightforward fashion from Encarnación Guillén. "El día en que te den garrote," she tells Pecado, "iré a verte" (1: 1154). The second reference recalls the heated rhetoric used by Carvajal, León y Castillo, and *El Tío Conejo*:

> quiso Dios que fuese aquél uno de esos días lúgubres que anublan la perpetua alegría de los meses de Madrid, uno de esos días, por desgracia no muy raros, en que el vecindario está tristísimamente impresionado por una terrible solución de la justicia humana, y encuentra, a su paso por ciertas calles, manifestaciones patibularias que llevan el pensamiento a otras cosas y personas de edad muy remota. (1: 1176)[5]

Galdós alludes to the executions of a remote past, probably with a wink and a nod, but it is unlikely that his contemporary readers failed to make the obvious connection between his comments and the inordinate number of "manifestaciones patibularias" to which they had grown accustomed in the previous two years.

Galdós also provides a considerably more subtle reminder about the rash of executions in Spain and about the fate in store for Rufete through a series of complex and well-integrated images that mark the youth's inexorable journey to the gallows. When the reader first sees Pecado—hard at work in the rope factory—Galdós is already making subtle insinuations about what lies ahead for him. The "Diente" is what Chad Wright would call a "charged symbol" (76), that is to say, it carries added chacterological information. The "portal oscuro" of the factory leads to a lugubrious area with portentous overtones. Described as an "extraño local" and "cavidad fría," this is a shadowy structure with a low ceiling; what little light there is comes from an elevated "abertura" (1: 1001) As they search for Mariano, Isidora and Encarnación stumble along a "cisterna horizontal" accompanied by ominous sounds that seem to protest their presence (1: 1001). For a long while, neither of the women can find a "ser vivo" (1: 1001). But they soon discover themselves covered with a "pelusa áspera," a cascading dust that floats through the air like "espectros muertos" and "almas de mariposas muertas" enveloping all who dare enter (1: 1001).[6] Ironically, when the women do finally find Pecado they can not see him

until he emerges from one tomb, the hated "rueda," into yet another, the "Diente" rope factory.[7]

Galdós uses this work space to foreshadow or suggest Mariano's eventual death in a second curious way. It is not difficult to make the connection between hemp, the basic product of the "Diente," and the hangman's noose, especially if one recalls that Charles Dickens, one of Galdós's acknowledged masters, used this type of imagery on more than one occasion. In *Dombey and Son*, for instance, one finds an excellent example. In order to harass a frightened Grinder, Mr. Carter makes an unequivocal prediction: "There's hemp seed sown for you, my fine fellow" (323). Inasmuch as this is one of the books found in Galdós's personal library, one could argue that the latter, following his English mentor, was issuing a similar warning about Pecado in *La desheredada* (Nuez 128). Although Galdós's novel has no Mr. Carter to verbalize the hemp/noose connection, Pecado is continually linked to hemp in one form or another.[8] The "torsión violenta" of the stretched rope and especially the sound produced by the slow winding—"estremecimiento de cosa dolorida y martirizante que irritaba *los nervios del espectador*"—are meant to prefigure those "manifestaciones patibularias" that shock the citizens of Madrid in Part 2 of *La desheredada* (1: 1001; my emphasis).

Galdós also uses hemp imagery to establish a curious, suggestive connection between Mariano, Tomás, and Isidora Rufete. Pecado's daily dusting of "pelusa" along with the noose that he is forced to wind for himself are the most obvious examples, but Isidora is also covered with hemp fiber and she too feels "horribles dogales" (1: 1002) tightening around her neck during her visit to the "Diente" rope factory. Tomás Rufete, from his cell in Leganés, sees the world as if it were "bordado en cañamazo" (1: 988). And the imaginary tie that he dons almost daily in the asylum, described as a "negro dogal sobre la carne desnuda del estirado cuello" (1: 988), certainly calls to mind the various nooses tied for his son, Mariano. Ironically, Encarnación, the Rufete's reluctant provider, feeds "cañamones" to her "pajarillos presos (1: 998).

Virtually every detail pertaining to Galdós's portrayal of Mariano Rufete points in the direction of failure, disappointment, and death. Even his toys, a traditional symbol of youth and freedom, seem to suggest Pecado's ultimate fate. It is not enough that his playthings are of dubious quality ("desechados, por inútiles, en la liquidación de un bazar de juguetes" [1: 1019]); they have also been unceremoniously and haphazardly pitched into a dirty, labyrinthine space where only spiders, cockroaches, and rapacious friends dare to trespass. Majito crawls and climbs through the dirt with the hope of pilfering two of Mariano's prized possessions, the "sable" and the "ros." Before travelling too far, the scavenger spots what, at first glance, appears to be a closed toy chest ("cofre"). The desired booty, however, is not inside. On the contrary, Majito spies the toys piled carelessly in one of those "negros abismos que parecían *arcones abiertos*" (1: 1019; my emphasis). The difference here between a securely closed and guarded chest and an open, vulnerable one is significant. In *Poetics of Space* Gaston Bachelard contends that closed wardrobes, boxes, chests, contain the "daydreams of intimacy" and that as such they represent an "intimate space not open to everybody" (78), something that clearly does not apply to Pecado. Not only have his toys, youth, and daydreams of military glory been pushed aside, they have been plundered and violated, initially by Majito but subsequently by others as well.[9]

As Mariano's execution approaches, the text literally begins to pulsate with ominous

overtones. When he goes to work for Juan Bou in Part 2 Mariano toils in the most dimly lighted section of the shop. Imagery of enclosure begins to dominate the description of the workshop and as a result Mariano seems already imprisoned in what Galdós alternately refers to as "bodega," "laberinto," "sótano," and finally "mazmorra" (1: 1100). Even more allusions to Pecado's fate soon appear: the "máquina," compared to a "desgranadora de maiz" with "quejidos de herido y convulsiones de epiléptico" (1: 1100) affords the reader a kind of impressionistic preview of Mariano's health problems and of the day of the attempted assassination when he barely manages to fight off an epileptic attack before he is swarmed under by "un engranaje de brazos y manos" (1: 1167).[10] But the most intriguing aspect of Bou's print shop may be the undeniable sense of death that it imparts. The workers' "anécdotas de patíbulo" fill the air; the "precisión de la Mecánica" leaves Mariano dizzy and confused; and all the while, that chilling reminder of nineteenth-century political executions, the "horrible guillotina," with its enormous blade capable of slicing either paper or a "cabeza humana," stands menacingly in the corner (1: 1100). Given its lack of ambiguity and proximity to the actual day of Rufete's execution, this charged description of Bou's shop provides the novel's most explicit warning that Mariano will soon be forced to climb the steps of his own scaffold in the Campo de Guardias.

Galdós, however, foreshadows Pecado's actions and fate in still another more implicit fashion. La Sanguijuelera, as Martha Krow-Lucal has demonstrated so convincingly, represents more than a volatile shopkeeper; she is also a bible-spouting prophetess, whose frequent religious references serve as reliable indicators. "In this novel," writes Krow-Lucal, "the bible is equal to the absolute truth" (28). It is safe to assume, therefore, that the four biblical names applied to Mariano by Encarnación—Anás, Caifás, Iscariote, and Holofernes—carry with them some sort of charged characterological information.

The significance of Iscariote is clear enough; it is the surname of Christ's betrayer (Matthew 27: 3-5). Caifás was the high priest who conducted the ensuing trial and attempted to incite the crowd against Jesus (John 11: 47-53). He was supposedly urged toward this action by his father-in-law, Anás. Holofernes was the Assyrian general who laid siege to the Israelites in the Old Testament even though God had promised to protect them [the Israelites] as long as they remained faithful. In the second part of the book, Judith rebukes the Israelites for losing their faith during the struggle. She goes to the Assyrian camp, manages to get Holofernes drunk, and then decapitates him while he sleeps. Encarnación's name-calling, thus, subtly, yet forcefully, connects Mariano to betrayal, murder, and, eventually, execution.

Galdós reinforces the impact of these references with other curious details. The rooster or cock has long been a symbol of Peter's denial of Christ (Matthew 26: 74-75). Ironically, Pecado is also known as the "gallito del barrio" and is once referred to as a "gallo herido" (1: 1025-26). Rope, used to bind Christ and hang Judas Iscariot, is yet another Christian symbol of betrayal (Matthew 27: 5). Mariano, as previously demonstrated, is intimately linked to hemp and hemp products. Likewise, the coins that consistently bring a glimmer to the eyes of young Rufete also recall Judas and those infamous thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26: 15). Furthermore, Mariano turns out to be a traitor; he too would kill a king, Alfonso XII, the Spanish sovereign whom Encarnación refers to as the "Niño-Dios de España (1: 1177). Of course, the climax to La Sanguijuelera's predictions comes when Mariano meets a fate similar to

that of the Assyrian general, Holofernes.

In conclusion, if one reads Galdós's comments on executions and scaffolds in *La desheredada* in the context of the previous criticism (Bly, Dendle, Schnepf) that explains how contemporary socio-political events filter into the 1881 novel and, more importantly, in the context of the heated death-penalty rhetoric of 1880-81 (Sueiro, Carvajal, León y Castillo, *El Tío Conejo*), one can readily grasp the importance of this novel for Cánovas and other proponents of capital punishment in 1881. Although *La desheredada* contains Galdós's most overt stance against the death penalty, he was adamant about his opposition from the very outset of his literary career. In "Crónica de Madrid," he wrote the following in June 1865: "Esta semana ha sido fecunda en acontecimientos fúnebres. Cuatro desgraciados criminales han sido ajusticiados en Colmenar Viejo y en Alcázar de San Juan, presentando a estos pueblos el espactáculo de la última pena en toda su repugnancia" (3: 1287). By the end of his career, it was obvious that his hatred of capital punishment had not diminished and that the spectacle of incessant executions had taken its toll on the novelist. "Si tantos años de patíbulo," he complains, "no han amansado a los asesinos, declaremos el fracaso del verdugo, aberración y espanto de la naturaleza" (quoted in Solana 120). These pronouncements reveal Galdós's persistent dismay over the use and abuse of capital punishment in Spain, fully evident too in the first chapter of *La desheredada*: "El día en que la ley hace desaparecer al verdugo será un día grande si al mismo tiempo la caridad hace desaparecer al loquero" (1: 988). It is apparent, then, that Mariano Rufete is much more than just a peripheral naturalistic figure. Quite the contrary, now more than ever, readers can see to what extent Pecado serves as an important component of Galdós's campaign against both Cánovas and the death penalty in 1881, precisely when the Spanish Prime Minister was under heavy attack by an impertinent press corps and anxious political adversaries.[11] As this essay has demonstrated, close analysis of Galdós's portrayal of Rufete reveals another part of the impressive, but still not completely understood, complexity of *La desheredada*, the first of the *Novelas contemporáneas*.

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NOTES

[1] Debra Castillo, for instance, has already concluded that Galdós endows Mariano with a seemingly ubiquitous sense of doom and criminality that includes an "overshadowing presence of the institution," as well as an "imprisoning enclosure" (90-91). Moreover, the author of the present essay has linked Rufete to the embarrassing gambling scandal of 1881 that proved costly to the Spanish Prime Mninster, Antonio Cánovas del Castillo ("The Significance").

[2] The original manuscript of *La desheredada* is housed in the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid. Part 1 of manuscript number 21783 contains 555 numbered pages plus an additional 37 pages of revisions. Part 2 contains 578 pages plus 12 pages of revisions. It is a rich and fascinating document that has aided

greatly the critical understanding of this pivotal novel.

[3] It should be recalled that previous criticism has linked Melchor's activities—especially the illegal lottery—to an 1881 political dimension of *La desheredada* that was highly critical of the Spanish Prime Minister, Antonio Cánovas del Castillo (Schnepf "The Significance," "History into Fiction," and "From Galdós's *La desheredada*").

[4] Two landmark executions took place in the months before the publication of the initial instalments of *La desheredada*. The first was that of Otero, who was executed in the Campo de Guardias on April 14, 1880. The second was that of the notorious "Sacamantecas," Juan Díaz de Garayo, convicted of the rape and murder of six women.

[5] For an excellent description of just this sort of "manifestación patibularia," see Armando Palacio Valdés's two short stories, "El hombre de los patíbulos" and "El sueño de un reo de muerte."

[6] It is worth noting that this is not the only instance in *La desheredada* in which a female character invades a tomb-like enclosure covered with ominous dust. When the Marquesa de Aransis re-opens the long-sealed room where she had literally entombed her daughter, she finds "partículas secas" and a dust that "deslustraba las hermosas lacas, y había tendido sobre todo una neblina áspera y gris que no podía ser tocada sin estremecimiento de nervios" (1: 1044). It is not fortuitous that Galdós describes the room as both a "fúnebre alcoba" and a "tumba" (1: 1043).

[7] The original manuscript of *La desheredada* substantiates this notion of a disturbed tomb. Isidora and Encarnación must fight their way through a "telarañosa penumbra," and Pecado is literally swallowed up by the factory-cum-grave: "La vacilación de los espirales por la dirección de la torcedura en forma de hélice hacía el efecto óptico de un suave movimiento de traslación en sentido de longitud, y parecía cosa lentamente tragada por aquel esófago negro" (MS I: 93). Furthermore, Galdós adds an almost ghoulish element to the dehumanization of the Mariano of the manuscript: "El huso movió bruscamente la cabeza para decir que no, sin dignarse de expresarlo de otro modo porque un huso que hablara podría ser un huso que no torciera. El dueño del establecimiento había inculcado severamente, por este motivo, á los subordinados la idea de la discreción" (MS I: 92).

[8] Even though the "garrote" was still in use in the Spain of 1881 and the would-be assassins of Alfonso XII were executed by it, Galdós's readers would not have failed to grasp the seemingly universal significance of hemp, rope, nooses, scaffolds, guillotines, and executions.

[9] Specific imagery of closed or empty chests associated somehow with Mariano appears on several occasions in *La desheredada*. Trapped in the sewer after knifing Zarapicos, Pecado ponders his losses and concludes that "era como un rótulo escrito sobre un arca vacía, de la cual pieza por pieza han ido sacando los ricos tesoros" (1: 1029). In another scene, Mariano, seated on a "baúl bajo," once again sees "rótulos" and "letreros" and again they point to emptiness (1: 1065). In this instance, however, they refer to Mariano's legacy from Tomás Rufete: packets containing little more than worthless scribbling and hollow rhetoric.

[10] The workshop foreshadows other pertinent aspects of Rufete's destiny. The type cases once used in a clandestine newspaper, with their "aspecto de negra insidia que trama sus actos en la sombra," prefigure Pecado's activities as a "petardista." By the same token, the reader easily finds a connection between the "caos de la palabra humana" created by haphazardly piled print characters and Mariano's own developing linguistic problems.

[11] For additional commentary and details on how the Liberals and the Liberal press laid siege to Cánovas in late 1880 and early 1881, see Antonio María Fabié (127), the Conde de Romanones (366), and Earl R. Beck (130-40).

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