

*Rich and Poor in Nineteenth-Century Spain: A Critique of Liberal Society in the Later Novels of Benito Pérez Galdós.* By Inma Ridao Carlini. Woodbridge: Tamesis. 2018. 224 pp. £65. ISBN 978-1-85566-330-5.

Winner of the 2017 Peter Bly Award of the Asociación Internacional de Galdosistas for the best Ph.D. thesis on Galdós, this monograph examines the author's fictional representation of wealth and poverty through his critical engagement with 'some of the fundamental social transformations brought about by the development of a liberal political system and a capitalist economy in Spain' (195). It focuses on seven *Novelas Contemporáneas* from the 1880s and 1890s: *Lo prohibido* (1884–85), the four *Torquemada* novels (1889–95), *Ángel Guerra* (1891) and *Misericordia* (1897).

Each of the book's four main chapters analyses socio-historical discourses relevant to the chosen texts. The first examines the financial world in *Lo prohibido*, concentrating on the author's portrait of bourgeois aspirations for wealth and social status. Chapter Two analyses the functions of monetary lending through its focus on the rapid social and economic ascent of the eponymous usurer of the four *Torquemada* novels. Inma Ridao Carlini explores the ways in which *Torquemada* symbolises the development of a new financial elite that acquired wealth at the expense of the impoverished aristocracy. The third chapter contributes to socio-historical readings of *Ángel Guerra* by arguing that in this novel Galdós critiques 'contemporary debate on the effects of the *desamortización* on Spanish society, and in so doing, he raises questions over the country's new liberal values' (p. 101). Finally, Chapter Four turns to the *cuestión social* in *Misericordia*, the changing concept of poverty in the late nineteenth century, including the use of the term *pauperismo*, and the role of charity in relation to this perceived threat. Here Ridao Carlini tackles the ways in which Galdós's fiction responds critically to prominent debates about wealth distribution and social justice.

*Rich and Poor in Nineteenth-Century Spain* is a well-informed and evidence-based study of the ways in which the novels of Galdós represented and critiqued the economic policies of the liberal State alongside the consequences of capitalist development. Carefully citing sources on historical context and literary analysis, the book engages ambitiously with a large body of existing scholarship. At times, the literature review format that informs each section retains a Ph.D. thesis style that tends towards a degree of over-dependence on previous studies. That said, the critical engagement with scholarship gains confidence as the book progresses. The final chapter on *Misericordia* makes a subtle but convincing case for emphasising Galdós's use of humour and irony in his referencing of public discourses about the *cuestión social*, the concept of charity as a social right, and notably the representation of poverty as disease.

The focus on the author's critical engagement with the socio-economic realities brought about by the liberal system leads to detailed scrutiny of the behaviour of both men and women in relation to the accumulation of wealth, including the ambitious business sense of the female characters of *Lo prohibido*. Whilst the successful analysis of women's roles is central to the argument, a theoretical framework for the study of gender in relation to socio-economic contexts could

productively be drawn out further. The chapter on the *cuestión social* in *Misericordia* outlines the text's representation of female characters who are reliant on begging and other forms of charity; however, further development of Galdós's contradictory response to contemporary debates, including the ways in which bourgeois discourses about the indigent masses presented women as a particular threat, would be welcome here. Similarly, the study of lending and social advancement could usefully draw out existing academic paradigms about gender and the exchange economy through a crucial focus on the treatment of the female body.

Minor caveats aside, this highly informative and well-researched book is a welcome addition to scholarship on how we read Galdós's fiction in response to the rapidly changing society in which he lived, a time characterised – as Ridao Carlini asserts – by a perception of socio-economic uncertainty. *Rich and Poor in Nineteenth-Century Spain* enhances understanding of Galdós's critical representation of the socio-economic developments that shaped both his novels and late nineteenth-century Spain.

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