

# **'PERCY' GALDOS AND HIS BRITISH READERS, 1870-1920**

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The Victorian and Edwardian Galdós was a man with an identity crisis. When he first appeared on the British literary scene in the 1880s, the British journalists and critics charged to write about this hitherto unknown Spaniard, unfamiliar with the Spanish language and perplexed by even more unfamiliar Spanish naming practices, sought creative solutions to their problem. As a result, we find poor Galdós rendered for British readers in various interesting ways, including Peres-with-an-S, Valdo-with-a-V-and-no-S, the truncated Galdo, the doubly truncated Pere Galdo, and even, on numerous occasions, transformed into a faintly exotic British gentleman by the name of 'Percy' Galdos (e.g. 1889, 1903, 1914).

Galdós was by no means the only foreigner or even the only Spaniard to receive this treatment. As I'm going to explain in this paper, however, the specifics of his reception and representation in the British media provide a fascinating window on to British reception and understanding of Spain, its language and culture, during a period of profound transformation in the two countries' relationship. Galdós's emergence as a novelist during the 1870s and the consolidation of his career during the 1880s and 1890s coincided with a boom in British commercial investment and tourist travel to Spain. If early C19 Spain had been the preserve of hardy adventurers, Orientalist artists and wealthy expatriates, late C19 transformations in the fields of transport, publishing, journalism and education brought unprecedented numbers of ordinary Britons into direct contact with Spain and Spanish culture. As a result, British audiences experienced a renewed interest in the 'real' Spain as opposed to the French-mediated, Romantic, Orientalizing version of Spanish culture that had circulated with the works of Bizet and Théophile Gautier. And for many British readers and commentators, Galdós and his works became the privileged representative of that contemporary Spanish reality.

### **The 1870s: First Steps**

While there are a smattering of references to Galdós and his novels in the British media during the 1870s, British audiences got their first proper introduction when in 1879 one Nathan Wetherell published his English translation of the novel *Gloria*, just two years after publication of the original Spanish version.<sup>1</sup> Wetherell, who was by all accounts something of a character,

seems to have carried out the translation while in the sin-bin – literal and metaphorical – after some really bad behaviour; and indeed, one senses that Galdós would have rather relished the colourful set of circumstances that gave rise to *Gloria's* first English incarnation. I think it's worth repeating the story of Wetherell's translation in detail, not only because it's a good one, but because it demonstrates the extent to which the acquisition of an international readership depends on chance and coincidence.

So, who was Nathan Wetherell? Well, he was a junior member of a wealthy mercantile family with strong ties to Spain, whose paternal grandfather, also Nathan, had moved to Seville in 1784 and founded Spain's largest tannery, the *Fábrica de San Diego*.<sup>2</sup> Although the family maintained a base in Seville, and 'our' Nathan's older siblings had been born in the city, the family returned to England before Nathan's birth in 1845, and he was brought up in genteel Hampstead. At the time of the 1871 census, Wetherell was the picture of respectability: a married twentysomething merchant with three small daughters, living in Marylebone and trading with Spain, South America and Japan. This was not to last. By the time his translation of *Gloria* was published in 1879, he had been bankrupted, sued by his landlord after doing a moonlight flit from his rented house in St John's Wood,<sup>3</sup> brought up at the Old Bailey on a charge of conspiracy to defraud, and spent two months in prison, emerging in May 1877 by order of the Home Secretary, to whom his supporters had presented a petition.

The conspiracy case was gleefully reported by the London and provincial press with appropriately Galdosian headlines such as the *Western Mail's* 'Revelations of the Aristocracy: "The Way We Live Now"'.<sup>4</sup> It involved Wetherell and two fellow bankrupts industriously grooming a wealthy dipsomaniac at a London hotel in order to extract as much of his inherited fortune as possible (the court report refers to the men quaffing five cups of champagne each before breakfast as a matter of course). Wetherell's contribution was to get the man, deep in his cups, to sign a deed of partnership in a barely functioning wine business, and to 'ask him to go to Spain to buy horses'. At some point after his release from prison in May 1877, now presumably with no job and no money, it seems to have occurred to him to put his Spanish skills to good use. The result of this baroque and largely self-inflicted course of events was Galdós's first appearance in English-language translation.

The translation, in two volumes, was published in the summer of 1879 and marketed at the not inconsiderable sum of 21s. It didn't attract a great deal of critical or media notice,

although the *United Services Gazette* described it as ‘One of these works which soon gain European reputation’ and predicted that it ‘will be read with close interest’.<sup>5</sup> A brief review in *The Graphic* notes that the novel was translated ‘with the sanction of the author,’ perhaps through the intervention of Wetherell’s brother Horatio, at that time temporary Bolivian Vice Consul in the Canary Islands – a post he would hold for some fifteen years.<sup>6</sup> The review is fairly lukewarm – while the novel ‘is certainly original, and written with no little power ... It is too high-flown for English tastes, and its leading incident ... is no doubt somewhat repulsive’, and it concludes laconically that ‘some of its representations of Spanish society give one the impression of being accurate’.<sup>7</sup>

Whether it was down to the reviews or not, *Gloria* appears to have been Wetherell’s one and only venture into publishing. As far as I can tell, he moved to Spain soon afterwards, settling in the village of Águilas near Cartagena, and was dead within five years.<sup>8</sup>

### **The 1880s: Consolidation**

Wetherell’s 1879 translation of *Gloria* may have been the product of chance, coincidence and not a little desperation, but it nonetheless opened the door for subsequent translators, almost all of them professional women. During the 1880s and 1890s, Anglophone readers gained access to a handful of Galdós’s novels, as a limited selection of titles were translated, sometimes repeatedly, into English. There are three translations of *Doña Perfecta* (1876), in 1880, 1892 and 1896; three of the 1878 novel *Marianela* (1883, 1892, 1893), another one of *Gloria* (1882), and one each of *Trafalgar* (1884), *The Court of Charles IV* (1888), *Leon Roch* (1889), *The Battle of Salamanca* (1895) and *Saragossa* (1899). In the next part of today’s talk, I’m going to look at the emergence and reception of these translations as a window onto Galdós’s journey in the British imagination, from chronicler of Spanish landscapes and character flaws, to fixture of the Anglo-European literary canon.

As the 1880s began, Spain was still a distant and unfamiliar destination for the majority of British readers. While independent-minded travellers, clutching their Murrays or Bradshaws or O’Shea’s Guidebooks, took advantage of Spain’s growing railway networks to follow in the footsteps of adventurers such as Richard Ford and George Borrow, mainland Spain was not regularly incorporated onto the itineraries of European holiday tour specialists such as Thomas Cook until well into the 1890s. Similarly, while British investment in Spanish mines

and wines boomed in the last third of the century, Spanish language was not generally taught in British schools and colleges, and knowledge of Spanish literature was restricted to *Don Quixote* and (among connoisseurs) a handful of other Golden Age classics. Meanwhile, British feelings of anxiety over the ‘insidious’ influence of the Roman Catholic Church came to a head with the patriotic (jingoistic?) nationwide commemoration of the tercentenary of the Spanish Armada in 1888, while a year later, the great Spanish Exhibition at Earl’s Court that was intended to showcase Spanish industry and empire to the British public came to a stuttering halt in the face of the nationwide sense of British superiority over Spanish imperial and commercial decline.

In a context where few had direct access to Spain, its language and culture, it is unsurprising that Galdós swiftly became identified as a spokesman for his country, while his works were received largely as an utterly transparent window onto contemporary Spain. The question of ‘accurate’ depiction of Spanish society raised in the *Graphic’s* review of Wetherell’s *Gloria* sets the bar for reception of Galdós’s work throughout the next two decades. Indeed, while there are some honourable – if largely anonymous – exceptions, the majority of British commentators during the 1880s and 1890s responded with no little impatience to Galdós’s having had the temerity to fill his novels with plotlines and characters that got in the way of their hunger for real information about real life in Spain.

That publishers were aware of the likely market for Galdós’s works is evident from the explanatory subtitle given to the first ‘post-Wetherell’ translation to appear. This was the Samuel Tinsley edition of the 1876 novel *Doña Perfecta*, which was published in 1880 as *Dona Perfecta, a Tale of Modern Spain* in a translation by somebody *The Critic* magazine would describe 25 years later as ‘a mysterious and modest DPW’.<sup>9</sup> DPW’s ‘Tale of Modern Spain’ was widely received as a useful means for British readers to acquaint themselves with what, in their reviews of October 1880, *The Graphic* described as ‘so imperfectly known a country as Spain’ and *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper* called ‘a country as yet practically unknown to the world at large’.<sup>10</sup> As *Lloyd’s* reviewer continued,

A translation from the Spanish is a rarity as yet among us, and [this novel] will be interesting to the mass of people not so much on account of its story, as because of the incidental view it gives of the details of Spanish life, which details seem almost incredible to the Englishman accustomed to the civilisation and comforts of England ... No one should fail to look into Senor Perez Galdos’s story ... if it be only for the sake of acquiring some knowledge of Spanish life and customs.

*The Examiner's* reviewer agreed, describing the novel as 'a most valuable acquisition to those who have any desire for gaining good practical information'.<sup>11</sup>

Expectations of the novel were thus fairly straightforward – readers should be able to gain a good and, crucially, 'realistic' knowledge of contemporary Spain. The author's temerity in actually including a plot and other fictional elements was roundly chastised, most notably by the critic of *The Graphic* (again), who grumbled that: 'either the author or the translator – or more probably both together – must be held accountable for a certain spasmodic incoherency which makes this tale of modern Spain decidedly difficult to comprehend'.<sup>12</sup> The same critic objected to the language ('quite impossible to suppose that ... the people commonly talk in that high romantic style which DQ was the only man of his own day to apply to everyday uses, and which in our own country is only to be found in a sort of fiction that is by no means worth the trouble of translation') and to the plot ('unless it be true that priests and ladies conspire, quite as a matter of course, to hire assassins in order to get rid of people whom they happen to dislike, however causelessly, then DPG and his English translator have combined to paint a decidedly slanderous picture of modern Spain'). All in all, *The Graphic* was profoundly unimpressed: 'the plot of the novel is exceptionally uninteresting and the characters excessively stagey and unreal'. They considered the final paragraph 'about as lame a bit of English prose as we have seen anywhere'.<sup>13</sup>

Galdós's British fortunes were transformed between 1882 and 1889, with five translations published by the professional translator Clara Bell: *Gloria* (1882), *Marianela* (1883), *Trafalgar* (1884), *The Court of Charles IV* (1888; subtitled 'A Romance of the Escorial') and *Leon Roch* (1889). As far as I can tell, no other English-language translations appeared during this decade, and so it is Bell whom we can credit with establishing Galdós's English-language voice. But who was Clara Bell? Unlike Nathan Wetherell, she was an accomplished professional translator with a long record of publication in hand before tackling Galdós. Born Clara Poynter in Westminster in 1834, she began her career as a translator only in her forties, collaborating with her sister on a romance by the German writer Wilhelmine von Hillern. Working primarily from German, but also from French and Dutch, Bell translated around one hundred works of both fiction and non-fiction. However, the only Spanish author she translated besides Galdós was Palacio Valdés, whose *La Espuma* she rendered for Heinemann's International Series in 1891 as *Froth: A Novel*, working from proofs provided by the author to

ensure almost simultaneous publication in both languages.<sup>14</sup> Her achievements were publically recognised in 2010 when she was included in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.<sup>15</sup>

Bell's first foray into Galdosian fiction was, perhaps surprisingly, another version of *Gloria*.<sup>16</sup> Published simultaneously in New York and London, *Gloria: A Novel from the Spanish* came just three years after Wetherell's version, although the *Morning Post*'s comment that the translation 'has the charm of novelty' suggests that the earlier translation may not have found the audience it hoped for. As before, the reviewer found the work's central interest to be 'as a sketch of Spanish life,' with 'real and fascinating ... word-pictures', grumbling that this made it 'difficult not to condone the one fault of his book [which] consists in his having made religious antagonism the pivot on which the whole story turns'.<sup>17</sup>

The following year, Bell's translation of the 1878 novel *Marianela* appeared in New York, with the publisher's description of Galdós as 'author of "Gloria," etc.,' and the opening statement of Bell's 'Translator's Preface' to the effect that 'Those who have read "Gloria" will ... hail with pleasure another work by the same writer' indicating both were conscious of the need to cultivate a committed readership for their author.<sup>18</sup> Tantalisingly, it seems that Bell's may not have been the first attempt to translate *Marianela* for an Anglophone readership. The *Times* for Boxing Day 1882 has a long article on 'Spanish Novels,' which includes a brief and extremely lukewarm review of the Spanish edition of *La Desheredada*, which states dismissively that 'in his passion to be real Señor Galdós has for the time ceased to be interesting.' A better work, according to the unnamed journalist, is *Marianela*, described as a 'village sketch', which he says 'gives us evidence of his power in an unexpected field and makes us hope that Señor Galdós's literary future will not be wholly filled with novels of the "Desheredada" type.' The second half of the piece is a lengthy extract in English describing Nela's first meeting with Golfin, which begins with the line "'Poor little thing," said Golfin, "God has not been generous to you."<sup>19</sup> This is not Bell's translation, which renders the same line as "'Poor little body!" he said. "Providence has not been over-generous to you."<sup>20</sup> The author gives no bibliographical information, and I've not yet been able to put this extract together with an existing translation, but it isn't inconceivable that this was a project put aside when Bell's appeared a few months later.

Like her *Gloria* the previous year, Bell's translation of *Marianela* seems not to have made much of an impression in the British literary press. Nonetheless, in rare evidence of more

popular readerships, we do know that in the autumn of 1883, both books were added to the collection of the Coventry Book Club, an organization focused on ‘the circulation of High Class Books’ which had been established in 1874 as an auxiliary to the Free Public Library – so we can assume that they were read by at least one person in Coventry, if nowhere else.<sup>21</sup>

After *Marianela*, Bell turned for the first time to Galdós’s historical series, the *Episodios Nacionales*, translating *Trafalgar* in 1884<sup>22</sup> and then, in 1888, *The Court of Charles IV*, which appeared with the subtitle *A Romance of the Escorial*.<sup>23</sup> For critics growing familiar with Galdós as a portrayer of contemporary Spain, the introduction to his historical novels was somewhat perplexing. *Trafalgar* was a relatively easy sell to a British audience fond of patriotic reminiscence; as the *Morning Post* noted in June 1884, ‘the battle of Trafalgar, described from the Spanish point of view, is a novelty for most English readers.’ Nonetheless, as with the contemporary novels, *Trafalgar* was praised above all for its didactic content: ‘United to [much] that will be of interest to the students of Spanish history, there will be found in Senor Galdo’s new tale a romance which throws a graphic light on life in Spain during the early part of this century.’<sup>24</sup> The *Morning Post* reviewer was disappointed to find that ‘none of the characters display the intensity of passion that distinguished the principal personages in some of the author’s previous tales,’ although his disappointment pales in comparison with that of the *Boston Post* reviewer of *The Court of Charles IV* in 1888, who observes sniffily that the author’s ‘desire to present historical intrigues has rather got away with his ability to write a novel’.<sup>25</sup>

Bell’s final published Galdós translation was an authorised edition (according to the frontispiece) of 1878’s *La familia de Leon Roch*, published in two volumes as *Leon Roch, A Romance* in 1888 – although there may have been an earlier, 1886 edition with the literally translated title *The Family of Leon Roch*.<sup>26</sup> The review in the *Morning Post* was published in February 1889 when the country was still coming down from the excitement of the Armada Tercentenary the year before, and it bears the traces of the fervent discussions about Roman Catholicism and the terrors of the inquisition that had formed a central part of the commemorations [e.g. one of the most popular public spectacles was August Harris’s inquisition-themed chamber of horrors in the saloon of the Drury Lane Theatre]. According to the *Post*, ‘[Galdós’s] theme will find a ready sympathy among a majority of readers in this country, especially those well acquainted with the actual degree of influence exercised by the Roman Church and its ministers on the members of the Latin races in general’.<sup>27</sup>

### **The 1890s: Resistance**

By the 1890s, then, Anglophone readers had been introduced to several of Galdós's contemporary novels (including two versions of *Gloria*) and just two of the *episodios nacionales*, most of them in the voice of Clara Bell. Although the novels themselves had not made a particularly great splash in the literary press, Galdós – and contemporary Spanish literature more generally – had begun to attract the attention of critics intrigued by what they were beginning to learn about Spain's hitherto little-known contemporary literary scene. During the 1880s, a handful of articles and extracts of Galdós's work appeared in literary journals, including a cluster in the Spring of 1884 in the *Whitehall Review* (March 1884), the *Revue Internationale* (April 1884), and the *Quarterly Review* (July 1884). In 1889, one Miss FL Shaw even contributed a two-part piece on Galdós and *Gloria* to Oscar Wilde's monthly magazine *The Woman's World*, which, in a nod to the emerging tourist scene, was enticingly titled 'Holiday Excursions in Foreign Literature' (March/Oct. 1889).

Despite these early publications, the critical position as the 1890s opened was still one of professed – although by now much more self-aware – ignorance of Spanish literature, particularly in its contemporary form. Despite Bell's sterling work during the previous decade, the *Leeds Mercury* could still write in 1894 (in a review of Rachel Challice's translation of Palacio Valdés's *The Grandee*) that 'The imaginative literature of contemporary Spain presents a rich and almost unworked field for the translator'.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, in an 1893 review of *Spanish Literature: An Elementary Handbook*, by Oxford's Taylorian Teacher of Spanish Henry Butler Clarke,<sup>29</sup> the *Manchester Guardian* lamented the lack of critical attention hitherto paid to Spanish literature by British critics, observing that if 'the names of Caballero and Galdos are ... now and then heard of,' this was nothing to do with British critics, but entirely 'thanks to French reviews'.<sup>30</sup> That said, any readers inclined to take their steer on Galdós from Butler Clarke himself would be unlikely to read much further – according to the *Handbook*, which mentions only the *Episodios Nacionales*, Galdós's historical fiction is 'dull reading' and, in sum, 'he would probably find more readers if he would descend to the level of those who consider that a plot is an essential part of the novel'.<sup>31</sup>

If readers were not generally reading Galdós's novels nor critics much critiquing them, the author himself was beginning to appear to British audiences as a persona in his own right.

Between 1891 and 1893, a handful of articles in both local and national media outlets picked up on the subject of the author's eccentricities. For example, the *Hull Daily News* asked in a rather belated response to Galdós's election to the Spanish Cortes: 'Why should any man desire to become a member of Parliament?', going on to report that 'the most curious reason has been discovered by a Spanish novelist. Senor Galdos has become a deputy to study life and manners'.<sup>32</sup> (When I say that this was a belated response, I mean that it came four years after Galdós's election and in the same year that he lost his seat). Stranger still are a cluster of articles picking up on Galdós's apparent preoccupation with sewing, which seem to have originated with an article in *Blackwood's Magazine* in the spring of 1891, and then travelled rapidly around the UK and US regional press.<sup>33</sup> The nub of the story is that Galdós, 'as soon as his last sheets are in the printer's hands ... works as a sewing machine!' and 'has a special fondness for hemming handkerchiefs'.<sup>34</sup> The story was still circulating in somewhat embellished form more than two years later, when the *Shields Daily Gazette* informed its readers that not only does 'Senor Galdos, the Spanish author, [find] no relaxation from toil like that to be found in working a sewing machine,' but that 'all the folk in his neighbourhood send along their handkerchiefs to be hemmed by this eminent novelist and model husband'.<sup>35</sup>

A second wave of English-language translations of Galdós's novels appeared during the 1890s, by translators including the Americans Helen Lester, Mary Jane Serrano, Rollo Ogden – a rare male name – and Minna Caroline Smith, and Britain's Mary Wharton. It's peculiar just how many of these translations were duplicates, most patently the two versions of *Marianela*, by Lester and Wharton, which appeared in Chicago and London in 1892 and 1893, only a decade after Clara Bell's translation.<sup>36</sup> In this context, there is some irony in the *Manchester Guardian's* pronouncement in its review of Wharton's version that 'Modern Spanish fiction is not well known to English readers, and there is consequent freshness in *Marianella* [sic]'.<sup>37</sup>

*Doña Perfecta* also came in for repeated treatment during the 1890s; having been first rendered by the mysterious DPW in 1880, it now appeared in versions by Wharton (London, 1892) and the prolific Mary Jane Serrano (New York, 1896).<sup>38</sup> Having been received in 1880 as a valuable window onto Spanish contemporary life, this time round the novel met with a rather different response, especially in British reviews of Wharton's English version with its acutely domesticated title, *Lady Perfecta*. The *Manchester Courier* considered the story 'very disappointing',<sup>39</sup> while the *Pall Mall Gazette*, which subtitled its review with the cri de coeur 'Spare, oh, Spare Us,' roundly rejected the whole enterprise:

Are there not enough third-class novels written in our own tongue that a Spanish addition to the ever-increasing ranks should be sprung upon us? We cannot but advise Miss Mary Wharton to leave the rest of PG's works to the enjoyment of his countrymen ... Extreme mental exertion is required to comprehend the plot at all; we find neither humour, pathos, nor interest in the book, on which the translator, as it seems to us, has wasted her time and talents.<sup>40</sup>

The *London Standard* was equally scathing, even questioning Galdós's status in his own country: 'We do not see that anything is to be gained from an intimate acquaintance with the novels of Senor PG. His reputation in Spain is hardly sufficient to justify his introduction into a foreign country, unless it be among those who are able to read him in his own tongue'.<sup>41</sup> The only resoundingly positive review I've found was from *The Scots Magazine*, a lone voice in the wilderness who considered it 'A capital novel, vividly translated,' although the reviewer's closing observation that 'it is sure of a wide acceptance' suggests he may not have had his finger entirely on the nation's critical pulse.<sup>42</sup>

The round rejection of Wharton's *Lady Perfecta* appears to have hit its target, as Wharton's was the last British translation – as opposed to edition – of a Galdós novel published during the author's lifetime. This is not to say, of course, that Wharton's was the last English-language Galdós translation available to late Victorian readers. On the contrary: across the Atlantic, the mood was very different. The Spanish-American War that dominated Anglo-Hispanic relations in the second half of the decade had the unexpected consequence of a surge in US interest in Spanish literature, and especially in Galdós. As well as Serrano's translation of *Doña Perfecta*, which came with a preface by the eminent US Hispanist William Dean Howells, versions of two *Episodios Nacionales* appeared, both – emphasising their perceived status as part of the historical record – by professional journalists. *The Battle of Salamanca* appeared in the Philadelphia-based *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* in 1895, in a translation by future editor of the *New York Times* Rollo Ogden, who had learned Spanish as a missionary in Mexico and had also translated works by Bécquer and Alarcón.<sup>43</sup> British readers did have access to *Lippincotts*, and the existence of the translation was picked up on in several of the provincial press's regular summaries of periodicals' contents pages, but I've so far found no substantive commentary on it.<sup>44</sup> Four years later, shortly after the war's end, the Boston journalist Minna Caroline Smith (1860-1929) published her 'authorised translation' of *Saragossa*.<sup>45</sup> Interestingly, this translation – with its provocative subtitle *A Story of Spanish Valor* – is categorised by Google Books not as fiction, but as 'history'.

At the very end of the century, and despite the poor reception afforded to Wharton's *Lady Perfecta* and the subsequent transatlantic shift in promotion of his work, Galdós's status as the supreme representative of contemporary Spanish literature in Britain was cemented by his inclusion in the 20<sup>th</sup> and final volume of *The Standard* newspaper's *Library of All the World's Great Literature*. Launched in December 1899 and heavily promoted throughout 1900, the collection included extracts from works by a range of international authors; Galdós was represented by an extract from *Gloria*, described – in almost unrecognisable terms – as 'a dramatic contest between passion and creed in a wild background of storm and flood,' which appeared alongside similarly 'representative' extracts from Bret Harte, Daudet, Gladstone, Black, Besant, and 50 others.<sup>46</sup>

### **The 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Investors and Academics**

As the new century dawned, British interest in Spain, and with it Galdós's British readership, took a new turn, thanks to a boom in Anglo-Spanish activity in two closely interlinked arenas: industry and education. By the spring of 1901, British investment in Spain and South America had grown to such an extent that the British commercial attaché at Madrid was able to report that 'the UK now holds the first place among nations dealing with Spain, which has until now been in the hands of France'.<sup>47</sup> This was all well and good (especially the bit about overtaking France), but Britain had a problem: while there was a huge and growing demand for Spanish-speaking clerks and salesmen, Spanish was not widely taught in British schools and colleges. The absence of enough personnel with the linguistic and social skills to navigate Spanish commercial networks created great anxiety in the UK's chief manufacturing centres, such as here in Sheffield in 1901, when in the context of this ongoing discussion, the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* reported that 'a member of a well-known Sheffield firm engaged in the steel and tool trades' had visited Spain and described with trepidation how he had found 'everywhere ... increasing evidence that the Spaniards are meeting the requirements of their own market'.<sup>48</sup> The year before, the Sheffield Chamber of Commerce had petitioned the Sheffield School Board not only for Spanish language classes, but also for greater attention to 'instruction in the weights and coinage used in the various Republics [of South America], which are such large customers of our manufacturers today, and with whom active commercial correspondence goes on in this district to a large extent'.<sup>49</sup> Within a couple of years, enthusiastic learners in

Sheffield had set up a Spanish society, which met monthly at a city-centre café to discuss literature, culture, and occasionally commercial subjects as well.<sup>50</sup>

The Sheffield case is a good example of how commercial necessity created the possibility for many more people not only to learn Spanish, but to learn about Hispanic cultures as well. Glasgow, at least, appears to have had an audience for Galdós's novels, if we take seriously the complaint of a correspondent to the *Glasgow Herald* in 1899 on the subject of Spanish clerks, who wrote that: 'I come across them in bars, in trains, reading modern Spanish novels, and have no doubt the supply is far in excess of the demand'.<sup>51</sup> In this context of increased investment and equally increased anxiety, Galdós contrived to endear himself quite comprehensively to the British public when at a dinner at a military club in Cartagena in October 1903, he 'declared himself in favour of an alliance between Spain and the United Kingdom'.<sup>52</sup>

In parallel with the expansion in commercial education in Spanish that helped create a British audience for Spanish fiction, another form of knowledge was emerging: the academic field known at the time as 'Spanish Studies.' Spanish Studies was as much a consequence of the economic boom as commercial Spanish, but was deeply concerned to conceal its commercial roots in order to aid its absorption into the formal infrastructure of scholarly knowledge. Spearheaded by James Fitzmaurice Kelly, successively founding Chair of Spanish at Liverpool University (1909) and King's College, London (1916), the establishment of Spanish Studies created a forum for professional discussion of Spanish literature in which, for the first time, Spanish authors and works could be discussed in the same terms as their French, German and Italian peers. Surviving syllabuses and scholarship show that the emphasis was very much on medieval and early modern works, but there was still a place for guided readings of contemporary literature.

In this context, the change in Galdós's fortunes during this decade is perhaps less surprising. After the flurry of English-language translations during the 1880s and 1890s, translation of Galdós's works seems more or less to have ceased with the new century. Instead, we find a series of Spanish-language teaching editions with introduction and notes in English by British or American scholars. The earliest teaching text I have located is an 1897 edition of what else but *Doña Perfecta*, which was compiled by the Harvard Professor of Comparative Literature AR Marsh, and included a vocabulary by the anarchist linguist and bible scholar

Steven T Byington.<sup>53</sup> This was followed in 1902 by editions of *Electra* – notorious at the time thanks to the riots that surrounded its performances in Madrid – and *Marianela*,<sup>54</sup> in 1903 by another edition of *Doña Perfecta*,<sup>55</sup> and two years after that by the historian Frederick Alexander Kirkpatrick’s edition of *Trafalgar*, cannily contrived to coincide with the centenary celebrations.<sup>56</sup> Galdós’s writing was not generally considered complicated – indeed, in his introduction to *Doña Perfecta*, Marsh reckoned it perfect for beginners, remarking that in his experience, ‘it is safe to undertake the story in three or four months from the time when the study of the language is begun’.<sup>57</sup>

These developments in both commercial and higher education created a viable market for Spanish literature in the UK, such that in 1912, the Anglo-French publishing house Nelson established a Colección Española, and in 1914, it included as its seventh volume Galdós’s *Misericordia* – at last a new title! That Galdós was by now established in British literary circles is clear from the *Daily Herald*’s advertisement, which asked: ‘What is the proportion of Spanish readers in London?’ and advised such readers that ‘They can secure a recent work of BP Galdos, tastefully produced, for a shilling’.<sup>58</sup> That his fame had not, however, permeated all the corners of the Kingdom is equally clear, since authorship of the novel was attributed by the *Liverpool Daily Post* to Galdós’s perennial British doppelganger, Percy Galdo.<sup>59</sup>

These editions notwithstanding, for the remainder of his life, Galdós’s place in the British public eye was closely tied to the work of Fitzmaurice Kelly, a former journalist who dominated both public and scholarly discussion of Spanish literature in Britain between 1898 and his own death in 1923. Fitzmaurice Kelly’s opinion of Galdós seems to have fluctuated rather, depending on his audience, so that while in his legendarily scathing *TLS* essay on ‘Modern Spanish Novelists’ in 1908, the soon-to-be-Professor dismisses Galdós as having too much ‘discussion of local politics which [lends] a provincial air to much of [his] work’,<sup>60</sup> three years later his entry on Galdós for the 11<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* proclaims that ‘no novelist was ever more thoroughly equipped as regards the details of his period,’ remarking that ‘long before the first series [of *Episodios Nacionales*] ended in 1881, he took rank among the foremost novelists of his time’.<sup>61</sup> Fitzmaurice Kelly clearly did not think too little of Galdós; when he was elected to the Royal Society of Literature in 1916, his first act was to secure an election as Foreign Honorary Fellow for Galdós and his contemporary Palacio Valdés, who joined the RSL’s only existing Spanish member Rafael Altamira, elected almost a decade earlier. The RSL annual report for that year, signed by Arthur Maquarie, but with strong evidence of

Fitzmaurice Kelly's input to the Spanish section, remarks that 'In electing DBPG and his distinguished contemporary DAPV, we are but marking a recognition we have long yielded,' and goes on to declare of Galdós:

Though in every sense a Spaniard, his fine patriotism drives to such depths as render him a true cosmopolite. His work through many years has been a source of pride and of constructive influence for his generation, and it will continue to provide for his country the greatest gift of all literatures: the delight which heightens understanding and engenders spiritual strength (35).

The contrast with the report's citation of Palacio Valdés is striking. Describing the Asturian novelist as 'eminent and lovable', it asks: 'Do we not go to him as to a friend?,' continuing that 'in him we find the Spain of picture books, the Spain of yesterday in all its colour and charm...'. Unsurprisingly, it was Galdós, and not Palacio Valdés, who – alongside Gabriele D'Annunzio and Maurice Barres – was awarded the RSL's first ever Benson Medal, a lifetime achievement award founded in 1916. Conferred on Galdós as 'the most distinguished living representative of Spanish literature',<sup>62</sup> the award cemented his place in the British imagination and finally put to rest the ghosts of those critics two decades earlier for whom, if we recall, his novels were 'third-rate' and 'a waste of [his translator's] time and talents'.

By the end of his life, Galdós's place as a person of significance in Britain was secure. During his final days, the *Times* published daily updates on his condition, his death, and the arrangements for his funeral.<sup>63</sup> Just over a week later, the musicologist JB Trend published a lengthy obituary in *The Athenaeum* which not only places Galdós's life and work into the context of British knowledge about Spain we have been discussing today, but also makes the case for his essential role in the development of an autochthonous British response to Spain and Spanish culture. For Trend, the 'excellent' and 'reasonable' British interpretation of Spain epitomized by the works of Richard Ford in the 1830s and 1840s, has been erased by the 'poetical but distorted vision' of French writers such as Gautier and Mérimée, with the consequence that 'nearly all modern ideas about Spain are secondary emotions'. Galdós 'is important for English readers,' Trend argues, 'because the Spain and the Spaniards he described were reasonable and natural' – that is, that they allowed British readers to cut away the French fluff to get back to the 'reasonable' Spain of Richard Ford or, as Trend put it, 'the novels of Benito Pérez Galdós can be read in the original by anyone with the rudiments of the language and a little application, and they enable one to get to Spain without crossing France'.<sup>64</sup>

## Conclusion

This rather whistle-stop tour of the general trends in Galdós's British readership during his lifetime shows how his fortunes can provide a useful insight into the changing reception of Spain and Spanish culture in Britain during a half-century of unprecedented transformation in the two countries' relations. The three main phases of Galdós's reception in Britain after that first, fortuitous entry in 1879 map closely onto the British public's understanding of the country he came to represent. In the 1880s, his novels were welcomed as an easily-accessible and, crucially, transparent window onto everyday life in a nation that for all its exotic familiarity few Britons had ever actually seen. A decade later, with the Armada tercentenary still fresh in the British public imagination, the same novels (in their new translations) met with a sneering resistance, as Galdós's claim to a place within the ranks of contemporary world writers was rejected in the same terms as that of his country, described in one guide to the 1889 Spanish Exhibition as a 'fourth-rate power, despised and insulted by those who had formerly favoured it'.<sup>65</sup> Finally, with the new century and the emergence of academic Hispanism, an intellectual and institutional structure developed within which Galdós and his works could be understood and evaluated, culminating in 1916 with his election into the Royal Society of Literature alongside James Fitzmaurice Kelly. After his death in 1920, it was just seven short years before the appearance of the first full academic monograph devoted to Galdós and his work – but that, you will be pleased to hear, is another story.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Benito Pérez Galdós, *Gloria*. Tr. Nathan Wetherell. London, 1879.

<sup>2</sup> See Martin Murphy, 'El cementerio de los exiliados,' *ABC Sevilla*, 27 Dec. 1993: 82; Jesús Barbero Rodríguez, 'La última voluntad de don Nathan Wetherell...' (Jan. 2010):

[http://www.juntadeandalucia.es/culturaydeporte/archivos/web\\_es/contenido?id=ebd65ef5-0bf2-11df-8f67-000ae4865a5f&idActivo=&idArchivo=d9f0f1ac-58a4-11dd-b44b-31450f5b9dd5](http://www.juntadeandalucia.es/culturaydeporte/archivos/web_es/contenido?id=ebd65ef5-0bf2-11df-8f67-000ae4865a5f&idActivo=&idArchivo=d9f0f1ac-58a4-11dd-b44b-31450f5b9dd5)

<sup>3</sup> *Old Bailey Online* (March 1876): HENRY JOHN GIRDLESTONE. 'I live at 152, Belsize Road, St. John's Wood—in June last I let my house furnished to Wetherall—he continued to reside there until the end of November—I did not know that he was going to leave—he was indebted to me about 37l. odd when he left—I have sued him for that amount—I have received part of it, not all—I had not been paid at the time I was examined at the police-court, I have received it since he was committed for trial; 12l. odd is still due to me—what I did receive I received in one sum, it was about 25th January—it was paid to my solicitor, not to me.'

<sup>4</sup> *Western Mail*, 22 Dec. 1876.

<sup>5</sup> This quotation was used as advertising copy. See, for example, *London Standard* (30 Jul. 1879: 7).

<sup>6</sup> *Guía Oficial de España*, 1875-90

<sup>7</sup> *The Graphic*, 27 Sep. 1879: 14.

<sup>8</sup> *GRO Consular Death Indices* (1881-1885): Wetherall, Nathan, Carthage. Vol. 7, p. 1770. Needs confirmation to check whether this is indeed 'our' Nathan.

<sup>9</sup> *The Critic* 45 (1904): 450.

<sup>10</sup> *The Graphic*, 18 Sep. 1880: 15; *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 3 Oct 1880: 5.

<sup>11</sup> *The Examiner*, 9 Oct 1880: 17.

<sup>12</sup> *The Graphic*, 18 Sep. 1880: 15.

<sup>13</sup> Benito Pérez Galdós, *Doña Perfecta. A Tale of Modern Spain*. Tr. DPW. London: Samuel Tinsley, 1880: 270.

- <sup>14</sup> Edmund Gosse, 'Introduction,' *Froth: A Novel*. Tr. Clara Bell. London: Heinemann, 1891: x.
- <sup>15</sup> Margaret Lesser, 'Bell, Clara (1834–1927)', first published May 2010; online edn, Jan 2011, 828 words
- <sup>16</sup> Benito Pérez Galdós, *Gloria: A Novel from the Spanish*. Tr. Clara Bell. New York: William S Gattesberger / London: Trubner, 1882.
- <sup>17</sup> *Morning Post*, 30 Jul. 1883: 3.
- <sup>18</sup> Benito Pérez Galdós, *Marianela*. Tr. Clara Bella. New York: William S Gottsberger, 1883.
- <sup>19</sup> 'Spanish Novels,' *Times*, 26 Dec. 1882: 5. The same article contains a long extract in English from *Doña Perfecta* that I have not yet matched with a published translation.
- <sup>20</sup> *Marianela*. Tr. Clara Bell: 27.
- <sup>21</sup> *Coventry Herald*, 7 Sep. 1883: 2.
- <sup>22</sup> Benito Pérez Galdós, *Trafalgar*. Tr. Clara Bell. London: Trubner, 1884.
- <sup>23</sup> Benito Pérez Galdós, *The Court of Charles IV. A Romance of the Escorial*. Tr. Clara Bell. New York: William S Gottsberger, 1888. The translation includes a handful of footnotes that indicate the development of a more scholarly readership, such as the note to p.5 which glosses Cañizares and Añorbe as 'poets of the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century' and refers the reader to 'Ticknor's Spanish Literature.'
- <sup>24</sup> 'Trafalgar,' *Morning Post*, 4 Jun. 1884: 2.
- <sup>25</sup> Review cut-and-pasted into the front of the copy of *The Court...* included in the Hathi Trust digital library.
- <sup>26</sup> Benito Pérez Galdós, *Leon Roch, A Romance*. Tr. Clara Bell. London: Trubner / New York: William S Gottsberger, 1888. The Library of Congress record at the front of the book states that it was entered in the year 1886.
- <sup>27</sup> *Morning Post*, 19 Feb. 1889: 3.
- <sup>28</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 13 Aug. 1894: 8.
- <sup>29</sup> H[enry] Butler Clarke, *Spanish Literature. An Elementary Handbook with Indices etc.* London: Swan Sonnenschein / New York: Macmillan: 1893.
- <sup>30</sup> 'Books of the Week,' *Manchester Guardian*, 30 Jan. 1893: 7.
- <sup>31</sup> Butler Clarke, *Spanish Literature*: 253.
- <sup>32</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 6 Feb 1890: 2.
- <sup>33</sup> For example, *Lichfield Mercury*, 3 Apr. 1891: 6; *Wilmington Morning Star*, 24 Apr. 1891: 2; *San Francisco Call*, 4 May 1891: 3; *Glasgow Herald*, 12 Jun. 1891: 7.
- <sup>34</sup> *Lichfield Mercury*, op. cit.
- <sup>35</sup> *Shields Daily Gazette*, 13 Jun. 1893: 3.
- <sup>36</sup> Benito Pérez Galdós, *Marianela: A Story of Spanish Love*. Tr. Helen W Lester. Chicago: AC McClurg, 1892; *Marianela*. Tr. Mary Wharton. London: Digby, Long, 1893.
- <sup>37</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 21 Nov. 1893: 9.
- <sup>38</sup> Benito Pérez Galdós, *Lady Perfecta*. Tr. Mary Wharton. London: T Fisher Unwin Independent Novel Series, 1892; Benito Pérez Galdós, *Doña Perfecta*. Tr. Mary Jane Christie Serrano. New York: Harper, 1896.
- <sup>39</sup> *Manchester Courier*, 3 Feb. 1894: 10.
- <sup>40</sup> *Pall Mall Gazette*, 1 Feb. 1894: 2.
- <sup>41</sup> *London Standard*, 24 Mar. 1894: 2.
- <sup>42</sup> *The Scots Magazine*, 1 Mar. 1894: 341.
- <sup>43</sup> Benito Pérez Galdós, *The Battle of Salamanca*. Tr. Rollo Ogden, *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* (Philadelphia). Vol. 55: Jan-June 1895.  
<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt/search?q1=salamanca:id=mdp.39015022696309:view=1up:seq=7:start=1:sz=10;page=search;orient=0>
- <sup>44</sup> For example, *Manchester Courier*, 3 Jun. 1895: 6; *Dundee Courier*, 5 Jun. 1895: 4.
- <sup>45</sup> Benito Pérez Galdós, *Saragossa: A Story of Spanish Valor*. Tr. Minna Caroline Smith. Boston: Little, Brown, 1899. Smith, who also translated at least two works by Palacio Valdés, nailed her colours to the mast in 1899, when she wrote an article for *The Bookman* arguing for a plaque to be placed at the birthplace of Cuban poet José María de Heredia: Minna Caroline Smith, 'José María de Heredia the Elder,' *The Bookman* (August 1899): 515-517.
- <sup>46</sup> *London Standard*, 18 Oct 1900: 9.
- <sup>47</sup> For example, *Portsmouth Evening News*, 20 Mar. 1901: 3
- <sup>48</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 2 Feb. 1901: 10.
- <sup>49</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 21 Sep. 1900: 2.
- <sup>50</sup> After the first meeting, at Sheffield's Wentworth Cafe, the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* reported that: 'There was a good attendance, and a most encouraging start was made. The society will be conducted on social lines. Conferences will be held, at which papers will be read, and discussions will take place, the whole of the proceedings being carried on in Spanish. The society is not confined to Spaniards. In fact a large percentage of its members are Englishmen, who have either lived in Spain for some years, or are acquainted with Spanish through commercial or other channels. Mr A Rodriguez, a former Professor of the University of Madrid, is the society's

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- president, Mr JM Eagers its vice-president, and Mr W Hall its secretary' (*Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 18 Dec 1903: 4).
- <sup>51</sup> 'Spanish,' *Glasgow Herald*, 10 Jan. 1899: 8.
- <sup>52</sup> Reuter's telegram, widely reported, e.g. *Aberdeen Journal*, 13 Oct 1903: 5
- <sup>53</sup> *Doña Perfecta*, with introduction and notes by AR Marsh. Boston/London: Ginn, 1897.
- <sup>54</sup> *Electra*, ed. OG Bunnell. New York: American Book Co., 1902; *Mariela*, ed. E Gray. New York: American Book Co., 1902.
- <sup>55</sup> *Doña Perfecta*, ed. Edwin S Lewis. New York: American Book Co., 1903.
- <sup>56</sup> *Trafalgar*, ed. Frederick Alexander Kirkpatrick. Pittsburgh: Pitt Press Series, 1905.
- <sup>57</sup> AR Marsh, 'Preface' to *Doña Perfecta*.
- <sup>58</sup> *Daily Herald*, 25 Mar. 1914: 9.
- <sup>59</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, 18 Mar. 1914: 11.
- <sup>60</sup> James Fitzmaurice Kelly, 'Modern Spanish Novelists,' *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 Apr 1908: 107-108.
- <sup>61</sup> James Fitzmaurice Kelly, 'Benito Pérez Galdós,' *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 11th Edition. 1911.
- <sup>62</sup> *Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature of the United Kingdom*. Second Series Vol. XXXV. London: Humphrey Milford/OUP, 1917: 36.
- <sup>63</sup> *Times*, 5 Jan. 1920: 11; 6 Jan. 1920: 9; 7 Jan. 1920: 11.
- <sup>64</sup> JB T[rend]. *The Athenaeum*, 16 Jan 1920: 92.
- <sup>65</sup> *Darbyshire's Guide to the Spanish Exhibition*. London: H Darbyshire, 1889: 4.
- <sup>66</sup> LB Walton, *Pérez Galdós*. London: Dent, 1927.