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**Space and Place in Alejandro Galindo's 1950 Film Adaptation of  
Benito Pérez Galdós's *Doña Perfecta* (1876)**

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**Abstract**

In his 1950 film adaptation of Galdós's 1876 novel *Doña Perfecta* the Mexican director Alejandro Galindo transferred the action from the imaginary Spanish city of Orbajosa to Santa Fe in Mexico. To date critics have focussed largely upon assessing the 'Mexicanism' of the film, coming to the conclusion that the film, like the novel, is an overblown melodrama. This article will now pay close attention to the artistic qualities of the film, specifically its use of space and place, and will seek to demonstrate how Galindo, responding as a reader of Galdós's novel, produces a work that not only invites new ways of reading *Doña Perfecta* but highlights its timelessness and universality.

**Resumen**

En su adaptación cinematográfica (1950) de *Doña Perfecta* (1876), novela galdosiana, el director mexicano Alejandro Galindo trasladó la acción desde la ciudad imaginaria de Orbajosa, en España, a Santa Fe, en México. Hasta la fecha, los críticos han centrado su atención en examinar la 'mexicanidad' de la película, y por lo general han llegado a la conclusión de que la película, como la novela, es un melodrama exagerado. Este artículo, al contrario, analizará las cualidades artísticas de la película, específicamente el uso del espacio y el escenario, e intentará demostrar cómo Galindo, como lector de la novela de Galdós, ha conseguido producir una obra que no sólo invita al lector a responder de nueva manera a *Doña Perfecta*, sino que también destaca la atemporalidad y la universalidad de la novela original.

Galdós's 1876 novel *Doña Perfecta* is rarely regarded as one of the writer's best works. Penuel (1976: 86) writes that 'It is art of an uneven and often immature quality' and Galdós, himself, admitted,

la comencé sin saber cómo había de desarrollar el asunto. La escribí a empujones, quiero decir, a trozos, como iba saliendo, pero sin dificultad, con cierta afluencia que ahora no tengo. (Cited in Alas 1912: 27)

This statement, and particularly his uncertainty as to how to 'desarrollar el asunto' is evident up to the very end (as he reworked the novel's original ending [Jones 1959 and Ribbans 1990]), and suggests that the author regarded writing during this period as a process of trial and error. This is reinforced somewhat by critics' opinions that the work inflates what might be regarded as trivial tensions, that its plotting is over-elaborated and incoherent, and that the novel's characters lack both complexity and credibility (Correa 1962, Gullón 1970, Penuel 1976). All this might lead us to the conclusion that this novel should be regarded, above all, as an experiment at a time when Galdós did not possess a fixed set of ideas or rules in mind, but was eager to try out new approaches, to test out styles and techniques, characters, themes, plots and structures (Varey 1992). Nonetheless, despite its classification as a 'thesis novel'<sup>1</sup> and accusations that it consists primarily of a simplistic melodrama that is largely devoid of artistic worth, *Doña Perfecta* is one of Galdós's most popular works. It was widely translated<sup>2</sup> and in 1896 the author adapted it for the theatre. Ernesto Caballero's stage production of the work (2012-) demonstrates that its popularity has not declined in recent years.

Film adaptations of literary works have also received a mixed reception in the past. Although attitudes have now changed, they were often perceived to constitute inferior products that were secondary in importance to the original works that inspired them. Melodrama, too, was once underrated and it was only in 1991 that López noted, 'Recently, melodramas and their study have been rescued from the dust bins of negative evaluations by critics who have analyzed the melodrama as a significant form with a hidden radical potential.' (López 1991: 596). This might account for the scant critical attention that has been accorded to Galindo's *Doña Perfecta*. Dapena (2004: 313) notes that

two adaptations of Galdós were made in Mexico. *Nazarín* is justly regarded as one of Buñuel's masterpieces, but [...] Galindo's *Doña Perfecta* [...] never achieved

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<sup>1</sup> These works 'are dominated by ideological - largely religious - conflicts that threaten to turn the plot into an allegorical struggle between good and evil' (Labanyi 1993: 5).

<sup>2</sup> Hernández Suárez's *Bibliografía de Galdós* (1972) includes details of 32 translations of the novel produced up until the early 1970s.

the same popularity, despite the fact that Galindo was one of the most prominent figures of Mexico's Golden Age of Cinema, and the director of such classics as *Campeón sin corona*, *Esquina baja* and *Espaldas mojadas*.

For Dapena (2004: 314), the 'Mexicanism' of Galindo's *Doña Perfecta* 'lies in the text's shift from a "novela de tesis" into a full-blown melodrama, a genre quintessentially associated with the Mexican cinema of the Golden Age'. He argues that it functions as a melodrama on various levels, noting the 'heavy characterization' in both novel and film and the presence of 'a journey toward the discovery of evil and the unearthing of a hidden moral truth' (Dapena 2004: 316). He concludes that the film constitutes a 'maternal melodrama', where 'matriarchy sabotages what patriarchy had yielded to, and romantic fulfilment fades into necrophilia, as Rosario leaves with Pepe's corpse' (Dapena 2004: 321). Sinnigen, for his part, argues that 'Galindo hace una película fiel al argumento galdosiano con las debidas condensaciones y los cambios necesarios para representar la vida rural del México de aquel entonces' (Sinnigen 2011: 804). He also comments briefly on the melodramatic aspects of the film and its reception.

In contrast to these critics, my main attention will not be accorded to the 'Mexicanism' of the film nor to its melodramatic qualities. I will take as my starting point Robert Stam's view 'Every text, and every adaptation, "points" in many directions, back, forward and sideways' (Stam 2005: 27), together with Sally Faulkner's assertion that we should centre our attention upon the "'mutual illumination" between the Galdós source texts and the films, whereby each text throws light on the other, inviting newly enriched re-readings, or re-viewings' (Faulkner 2011: 2). My aim, then, is to explore how Galindo's adaptation of *Doña Perfecta* 'actualizes the virtual through specific choices' (Stam 2005: 14) and transforms Galdós's original work, adding another dimension to discussions surrounding the novel and challenging accusations that it is devoid of complexity and artistic merit. In order to do this, I will focus primarily on the presentation of space and place, which was of paramount importance to Galdós, yet is often overlooked. Longhurst, writing of *Misericordia*, rightly notes that 'Galdós the artist seems to revel in the picturesque quality, the photogeneity almost, of the world he is describing.' (Longhurst 2003: 81). I will consider the extent to which the film version corresponds to the original novel version of *Doña Perfecta*, introduces new elements and raises questions that might not have been initially apparent to the reader of the Galdosian text. As we will see, the film questions claims that the novel is an inferior and immature work, and encourages us to reassess its value.

The adaptation of *Doña Perfecta*, Galindo's 26<sup>th</sup> film,<sup>3</sup> appeared in 1950, 'a time of immense expansion and popularity in the Mexican film industry, when it came to enjoy dominance over Latin American and other Spanish-language markets comparable to the world dominance of Hollywood' (Tierney 2007: 1). Galindo, 'the greatest realist' (García 1995: 160), had a reputation for 'socially conscious subject matter depicted in a realist vein' (Dapena 2004: 313). This suggests that his interests would align closely with those of Galdós, the master of realism, who sought to reproduce Spanish society in his works and, thereby, encourage his readers to consider contemporary problems and reflect upon potential solutions. However, as Sinnigen has noted, when directing *Doña Perfecta*, Galindo diverged from his usual tendencies to avoid adapting international literature and focussing upon history. *Doña Perfecta* also differs from many of his other films, which highlight the issues associated with mixed-race marriages (*lo mestizo*) and life in the slums since it is based in a *hacienda*, rather than in a working-class district. The decision to adapt the work of a major Spanish author did, nonetheless, correspond to a Mexican tradition of this period (1940-), when

a good number of the films systematically adapted novels and plays written by prestigious European and South American writers. [...] All these films were super-productions intended to give the national industry a cosmopolitan flavour by way of adaptations for which, thanks to the war, no copyright fees had to be paid. (Vega Alfaro 1995: 88)

The question of fidelity is frequently discussed in connection with Adaptation theory, with many recent critics agreeing with Hutcheon's contention that 'to be second is not to be secondary or inferior; likewise, to be first is not to be originary or authoritative' (Hutcheon 2013: xv). Stam also notes a paradoxical fact: 'A "faithful" film is seen as uncreative", but an "unfaithful" film is a shameful betrayal of the original.' (Stam 2005: 8). Hutcheon proceeds to observe that 'adaptation is an act of appropriating and salvaging, and this is always of double process of interpreting and then creating something new' (Hutcheon 2013: 20), whilst Stam, who also refutes the notion that literature is superior, suggests that films both adapt and evolve:

Do adaptations 'adapt to' changing environments and changing tastes, as well as to a new medium, with its distinct industrial demands, commercial pressures, censorship taboos, aesthetic norms? And are adaptations not a hybrid form like the orchid, the meeting place of different 'species'? (Stam 2005: 3).

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<sup>3</sup> It was produced by Francisco Cabrera and its première took place on 10 October 1950. The protagonist *Doña Perfecta* is played by Dolores del Río, who received an Ariel (award) for best actress in that role. Her nephew, Pepe, is played by Carlos Navarro and her daughter, Rosario, by Esther Fernández.

According to Dapena (2004: 314), ‘in essence the film’s plot and characters remain truthful to Galdós’s vision, given the numerous analogies between nineteenth-century Spain and Mexico.’ However, as we will see, Galindo not only introduces several key changes in the process of adapting the novel for the screen, but builds upon the presentation of space and place in the novel, transforming them into a much more dramatic force and highlighting themes pertaining not solely to Mexico but to a broader, universal context.

The most crucial changes include the transfer of setting from Orbajosa to the Mexico of the Porfiriato, the different profession accorded to Don Inocencio (who is a lawyer, rather than a priest)<sup>4</sup> and, more dramatically, the ending, which, as Sinnigen notes, was more optimistic than the original novel.<sup>5</sup> In his view, hope is expressed through Rosario’s rebellion, which corresponded to the director’s own hopes for the future of Mexico, despite the fact that the country had experienced a ‘period of scarcity and setbacks’ in the 1940s (Vega Alfaro 1995: 88). In this way, although sharing Galdós’s social concerns, Galindo’s *Doña Perfecta* transforms the negative ending and displays a characteristic trait of Mexican cinema that ‘unleashed imagination and creative potential which would stimulate intellectual debate in the country’.<sup>6</sup>

The black and white film begins with name of the starring actress, Dolores del Río, followed by the title of the film and the names of the other actors and credits, accompanied by melodramatic 1950s music. Viewers are informed that ‘Esta historia ha sido situada en el México del último tercio del siglo XIX’, in other words that the action has been transferred from Orbajosa, an imaginary Spanish city during a period of conflict between liberals and conservatives, to a setting in Santa Fe, Mexico, during the presidency of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1910). This was a period of progress and modernization that saw the boom of the Mexican economy, but it was also a time of dictatorship and hardship for the working-classes. Interestingly, the choice of words ‘ha sido situada’, rather than ‘está situada’ immediately implies a sense of harking back to the past and assumes that viewers would be familiar with the original novel and its setting.<sup>7</sup>

The initial panning shot of the Mexican city and its cathedral is superimposed with the words of St Paul, which do not appear in the novel but complement the novel’s final words (‘Es

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<sup>4</sup> In Dapena’s view (2004: 314), ‘he retains the same cunning, scheming nature of the original character. This shift allowed Galindo to maintain Galdós’s antiderical stance without the risk of presenting a dergyman as a villain’.

<sup>5</sup> ‘[...] el optimismo manifiesto en la rebeldía de la que fuera obediente hija, parece representar la esperanza del director en un México en que las fuerzas vitales se rebelen contra unas instituciones y unos valores sociales y familiares.’ (Sinnigen 2011: 804).

<sup>6</sup> Durán Loera, ‘Preface’ to *Mexican cinema*, in Paranaguá 1995: ix.

<sup>7</sup> According to Sinnigen, ‘Después del rastreo que hemos completado de numerosos periódicos y revistas literarias entre 1874 y 1908, consideramos que Galdós fue probablemente el escritor extranjero más editado y, por tanto, uno de los más leídos en México en el siglo XIX [...]’.

cuanto por ahora podemos decir de las personas que parecen buenas y no lo son' [*DP* 1876: 319]):<sup>8</sup>

en lo que condenas a otro, te condenas a ti mismo: haciendo, como haces tú, aquellas mismas cosas que condenas.

Vosotros sois la causa, como dice la escritura de que sea blasfemado el nombre de Dios.

Romans (Epistle of St Paul to the Romans) Chapter II, v. 1 & 24

Corresponding to tradition, these serve to situate the film in a clear moralistic framework.<sup>9</sup>

The transfer of setting from Spain to Mexico immediately establishes links with a new audience. However, as with the case of Luis Buñuel's *Tristana* (1970), where the action is transferred from Madrid to Toledo, this change is not as crucial as it would have been in the case of novels such as *Fortunata y Jacinta*, where the streets and locations are accorded both physical and symbolic significances (Anderson 1985, Condé 2000a). Orbajosa was an imaginary location, intended to represent the provinces within '[un] mapa moral de España', as conveyed in a letter that Galdós wrote to the painter Aureliano de Beruete, thanking him for his oil-painting 'Vista de Orbajosa':

Veinte años ha que fue sacado este castizo y turbulante poblachón y muy lejos de extinguirse su fama y de oscurecerse su historia, han crecido una y otra, a tal punto que ya no hay en España provincia ni capital que no sea más o menos 'Orbajosoide'. Orbajosa encontrará usted en las aldeas, Orbajosa en las ciudades ricas y populosas. Orbajosa revive en la cabañas y en los dorados palacios. Todo es y todo será mañana Orbajosa, si Dios no se apiada de nosotros, que no se apiadará... Madrijosa... marzo de 1896. (Hoar 1974: 15)

Galdós's novel conveys the hostile attitude of the provinces towards the capital, which is suspiciously portrayed as a distant, shadowy hive of corruption. This is expressed through the words of Don Inocencio:

Bien lo sabemos todos. En aquel centro de corrupción [Madrid], de escándalo, de irreligiosidad y descreimiento, unos cuantos hombres malignos, comprados por el oro extranjero, se emplean en destruir en nuestra España la semilla de la fe... (*DP* 1876: 115)

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<sup>8</sup> All references to the novel will be taken from the first-edition (1876) version of *Doña Perfecta* (henceforth *DP*).

<sup>9</sup> 'Between 1930 and 1950, the culture industry [...] offers plots full of reprimands and moral exhortations so as to avoid too many problems with the dominant morality.' (Monsiváis 1995b: 150).

This same tension is relevant to Mexico and is conveyed through the symbolically loaded choice of the name of the location, Santa Fe, in Galindo's film.<sup>10</sup>

In terms of the historical context, Galdós's *Doña Perfecta* 'has traditionally been interpreted as depicting the conflict between liberalism and reaction which led to that war [the Second Carlist war]' (Rodgers 1987: 53). The political developments and intellectual climate described in this novel were so similar to those in Mexico during the *Porfiriato*, with liberal and conservative tensions, in addition to problems with the Church and Army (Dapena 2004: 314) that, as Sinnigen has noted, in the Mexican liberal daily *El Siglo Diez y Nueve* on 5 September 1896, the writer Manuel Sariñana wrote:

parece al leer esa obra [...] que Pérez Galdós ha viajado en nuestra República, que ha permanecido en algunas de nuestras ciudades de segundo o tercer orden, y que, al escribir en su *Doña Perfecta*, criticando y poniendo en relieve las ridículas costumbres de algunos pueblos ibéricos, hace sangrienta, aunque disimulada alusión a... los nuestros! (Cited in Sinnigen 2008: 125-26)<sup>11</sup>

In spite of its new setting, Dapena (2004: 314) has observed that 'there is little trace of Mexico on screen', largely because the film 'unfolds mostly in indoor spaces, within the confines of an upper bourgeois household'. However, as we will see, there are elements that clearly link them to other Mexican films.

Galdós's novel begins with Pepe's arrival at Villahorrenda station. His mode of transport (by train) on this occasion can be seen to symbolically emphasise his association with liberalism, modernity, industrialization and modern city-life, which contrasts with his subsequent journey to Orbajosa on horseback, the primitive mode of transport, representing conservatism and traditional provincial life. In other words, Pepe journeys backwards in terms of both time and progress. The first action scene of the film, by contrast, focusses upon the conversation between Don Cayetano (Doña Perfecta's brother-in-law) and the judge, Don Pedro, who are discussing the project to write the history of Santa Fe. The scene is set in the patio, which highlights the relationship between the public and the private spheres. The large fortress-like gate through which Doña Perfecta enters, once opened is immediately locked to shut out the outside world, thereby cocooning the characters within a kind of ivory tower that is 'safe' from the corruption of the capital and the outside world, and enclosing a space into which the other characters, including María Remedios and the soldiers, can gain entry only by knocking. To a degree, this

<sup>10</sup> It is also apparent in other Mexican melodramas, which focussed on 'the opposition between utopian province (the land of hard-working Christian people who respect mother and family and are in touch with Nature) and the city (a chaotic universe leading to vice, immorality, sensuality, venereal disease and death)' (Garúa 1995: 153).

<sup>11</sup> However, Galdós would not have been familiar at the time of writing the novel, since *Doña Perfecta* was published in 1876, at the very beginning of the *Porfiriato*.



corresponds to the traditional portrayal of the *hacienda* in Mexican melodramas, ‘a closed, feudal, authoritarian space, with internal laws; its harmony depends on the fact that everyone, from the *patrón* to the *peóns* knows his place in the system’ (García 1995: 156). However, with time, it becomes clear that this space is far from a refuge. As we later discover, it is a prison in which Pepe, in particular, and also Rosario are trapped and the ensuing impression is one of claustrophobia, being cut off from reality.

This inner space attempts to compensate for its exclusion from the outside world of Nature through the incorporation of manmade elements that seek to reproduce that natural environment. Thus, within the four walls, there is a garden. However, mirroring the impact of Doña Perfecta’s harsh autocratic regime, Nature is very carefully controlled and, building upon Galdós’s descriptions, Galindo not only illuminates the theme of claustrophobia but focusses on Power, the relationship between Man and Nature and the pointless attempt to tame the latter for the sake of personal pleasure. The gardens in the film are clearly manufactured to look beautiful, but the fact that the majority of the plants are in pots, which restrict the space within which their roots may grow, emphasises the sense of repression, as well as the theme of appearances (‘las personas que parecen buenas y no lo son’). In one of the new scenes in the film that is not taken from the original novel, Galindo focusses on Doña Perfecta’s ‘gardening’ skills and her statement, ‘Para cada bicho hay un veneno’, extends not solely to the greenery that she rigidly controls but to other characters, notably Pepe Rey, who will be ‘exterminated’ at the end of the film, just as Don Cayetano’s books are burnt and destroyed in an inquisitorial fashion towards the beginning.<sup>12</sup> The floral pattern on the wallpaper and on the upholstery inside her home emphasises the manner in which she both controls and manipulates Nature, whilst it is not insignificant that the flowers are described as faded in the original novel.<sup>13</sup> However, as we will see, her ability to assert her control is dramatically reversed at the end, when the wind blows savagely and contributes to the disruption of the perceived harmony in the household.

The untamed, physical natural setting, for its part, is represented outside the home in the countryside scenes. This backdrop is rustic, savage and dangerous since it is the bandits’ homeland. A hostile atmosphere is expressed almost immediately as Pepe, journeying on horseback to Santa Fe with Tío Licurgo, is initially portrayed as a small, insignificant figure as both the camera and the soldiers observe him looking downwards from a high point on the

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<sup>12</sup> This new scene also builds upon Pepe’s reference to Doña Perfecta’s inquisitorial imprisoning of her daughter in the novel: ‘Vd. ha mortificado a su hija con un encierro inquisitorial’ (DP 1876: 190).

<sup>13</sup> ‘[La estancia] [e]ra esta, vasta y dara, cubierta de antiguo papel, cuyas flores y ramos, aunque descoloridos, conservaban su primitivo dibujo, gracias al aseo que reinaba en todas y cada una de las partes de la vivienda.’ (DP 1876: 47).

hillside. He is subsequently ‘ambushed’ by those soldiers, who then escort him to their camp.<sup>14</sup> As well as corresponding to Galdós’s original description of a desolate land whose extravagant names do not live up to reality,<sup>15</sup> such scenes raise questions about progress, which is alluded to in Pepe’s outburst in Chapter 19 of the novel:

‘Era razonable y soy un bruto, era respetuoso y soy insolente, era culto y me encuentro salvaje. Usted me ha traído a este horrible extremo, irritándome y apartándome del camino del bien por donde tranquilamente iba. ¿De quién es la culpa, mía o de Vd.?’ (*DP* 1876: 200)

These words also convey the tension between the ‘modern’ city (whence Pepe has come) and the ‘backward’ countryside,<sup>16</sup> and recall the Latin American conflict between Civilization and Barbarism, which

encapsulates an anxiety about the state and direction of the relatively newly independent Latin American nations as they sought to consolidate a precarious sense of order, progress and modernity (usually associated with the emerging urban metropolises) in the face of a perceived threat of instability from the supposedly wild, untamed, chaotic, native masses (associated largely with the undeveloped interior). (Swanson 2003: 69)<sup>17</sup>

Although Pepe’s words refer primarily to the detrimental impact that the human inhabitants of Orbajosa have had upon him, the scenes of the surrounding lands beyond Doña Perfecta’s home, together with the fact that in the film Doña Perfecta is pricked by a thorn on one of the rose bushes she is tending, draw our attention to the presence of an external threat posed by natural forces, one of which Galdós was acutely conscious.<sup>18</sup> This might justify Doña Perfecta’s attempts to battle against such forces and to set up her own fortress wherein she can reign as

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<sup>14</sup> This links to other Mexican melodramas where the countryside is ‘the epic site for settling accounts’ (García 1995: 156), although it is certainly not a case of good triumphing over evil here since Pepe is the innocent victim.

<sup>15</sup> ‘La desolada tierra sin árboles, pajiza a trechos, a trechos de color gredoso, dividida toda en triángulos y cuadriláteros amarillos o negruzcos, pardos o ligeramente verdegueados, semejava en cierto modo a la capa del harapiiento que se pone al sol.’ (*DP* 1876: 15).

<sup>16</sup> It is not insignificant that Orbajosa is described as ‘una horrible bestia que en él davaba sus feroces uñas y le bebía la sangre.’ (*DP* 1876: 110).

<sup>17</sup> Interesting parallels can be drawn between *Doña Perfecta* and Gallegos’s *Doña Bárbara* (1929), which was adapted for the screen by Fernando de Fuentes in 1943. Shaw (1972: 25) has noted that Gallegos was inspired by Galdós (and specifically *Doña Perfecta*) and ‘resolves optimistically the antithesis established by the contrasting ideologies of Pereda and Galdós’. He also observes how Pepe (like Santos), ‘a representative of civilization’ ‘becomes tainted with barbarie’ (1972:27), whilst Sisto (1954: 167) has noted how the eponymous protagonists of both works, ‘are averse to the encroachment of civilization within their respective domains.’ However, unlike in Gallegos’s novel, where, as noted by Gollnick (2005: 45), and in line with the ‘foundational fiction’ model (to use Sommer’s term), the social/national conflict is resolved by romance, Pepe’s and Rosario’s relationship in Galdós’s novel ends in tragedy.

<sup>18</sup> In artides such as ‘Fin del año 1885’ and ‘El mal tiempo y las crisis’ (1888), he wrote of man’s powerlessness in the face of Nature. (See Galdós 1924 and 1923).

supreme mistress, if not master.<sup>19</sup> It is apparently endorsed by her brother, D. Juan, who told Pepe,

[...] en esa remota Orbajosa [...] se pasa la vida con la tranquilidad y dulzura de los idilios. ¡Qué patriarcales costumbres! ¡Qué nobleza en aquella sencillez! ¡Qué rústica paz virgiliana! [...] ¡Qué admirable lugar para dedicarse a la contemplación de nuestra propia alma y prepararse a las buenas obras! (DP 1876: 32-33)

The theme of the relationship between the individuals and their environment or space is linked to the characters' discussions about the farming of the land and the pruning of the trees, where we discover that Pepe's views are, once again, at odds with those shared by the inhabitants of Orbajosa. The conflict is also conveyed spatially in the scene when Pepe disputes with the local mayor and others about boundary rights, as the character finds himself, in spite of the open-air setting, literally crowded out of his controlling place in the scene (as he would be in an indoor setting).

In Galindo's film the patio setting of the Mexican *hacienda* perhaps hearkens back to the 'increased idealisation of the world of *haciendas*, ranches, and small towns', seen in Mexican films such as Fernando de Fuentes's *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (1936) (Monsiváis 1995a: 118). At the same time, the symmetrical columns supporting the roof (which are also present in the inner space in the hallway) symbolically suggest a sense of simplicity, uniformity and rigidity and allude to the tendency to recall the old traditions that many of the characters are so anxious to preserve. The literary connotations of the place (conveyed, above, in D. Juan's reference to 'idylls') and its sense of heritage can also be related to the references to and links with Greek mythology in the novel (Rodgers 2006 and Zahareas 1976). The height of the walls in the central patio also represent the extent of the characters' hostility towards modernization, and their attempts to erect a barrier against change. This opposition, portrayed symbolically through the contrast between light and darkness in the novel (Varey 1972), is further illuminated in the film through Doña Perfecta's use of a parasol to shade her body from the oppressively blazing heat and the sun's light, which complement the mounting atmosphere of oppression. This 'barrier' is, of course, challenged and ultimately destroyed at the end of the film, when the camera's superior position presents us with a high-angle, bird's eye view over those same walls, thereby giving us, as viewers, a sense of power and superiority, which is matched by the spirit of Rosario's rebellion. The wide shot that dwarfs the character, making her seem engulfed by her

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<sup>19</sup> The extent of Doña Perfecta's governance is conveyed through the words of characters such as Ramos, who tells her, '[...] Vd., que es mi madre, más que mi madre, mi señora, mi reina...' (DP 1876: 214) and her portrayal in military terms ('Doña Perfecta les miró como mira un general a sus queridos cuerpos de ejército.' [DP 1876: 153]).

environment, dramatically exposes Doña Perfecta's vulnerability and weakness, expressed in the novel through her words, '[...] no estoy segura en mi casa' (*DP* 1876:217). The visual presence of the walls enclosing the courtyard within this frame, too, reminds us that, despite her power, not even she is immune to the claustrophobia and imprisonment that the other characters suffer.

In terms of the indoor spaces in the film, our perspective is largely governed by Pepe's viewpoint and thus we share his emotions and experiences as he enters Doña Perfecta's home as the outsider. The sense of opulence in the house, which is well decorated, parallels the outward appearance and clothes of the characters, who are equally well groomed and, to all appearances, wealthy. This home is undoubtedly a status symbol which reflects the spirit of its inhabitants. It is also reminiscent of the fixed setting of the bourgeois mansion that appeared in Mexican melodramas, 'the space of insensitivity, commercial calculation and hard-hearted evil. [...] Luxury was an expression of dehumanisation' (García 1995: 156). The decoration and furnishings in the downstairs rooms indicate that this is a space that is principally designed for entertaining and these luxurious settings symbolically assert Doña Perfecta's high-ranking position in society and her status as a magnate. As Galdós said in his inaugural address to the Real Academia (1897: 8), 'las viviendas [...] son el signo de la familia'.

In Galindo's film, numerous luxurious chairs, which are often symbolically unoccupied, are strategically placed in the centre of the frame. They often clutter the scene and obstruct the actors' movements, thereby highlighting the sense of superficiality and the pointlessness of grand gestures. The portraits of solitary individuals, who have been cut off from their social counterparts, also mirror the characters' isolation and their desperate and futile attempts to hold onto and venerate the past, even though it is far from glorious (Don Cayetano, for example, informs Pepe that his brother 'nos dejó en la ruina'), together with their determination to maintain the appearance of wealth. Building on the novel's thesis that the Orbajosans are backwardly clinging to the past, the portraits emphasise the notion that time, as far as the characters are concerned, is effectively static and it is significant that Doña Perfecta, in Pepe's opinion, has not changed over the years. The fact that they merely capture one moment in time contrasts sharply with the dynamic medium of the film and the action within it. The inclusion of mirrors in the film (from Rosario's hand mirror to the mirror in the dining room)<sup>20</sup> further illuminates the characters' obsession with appearances and the theme of hypocrisy, which is conveyed through the names of characters and places, as well as the final words in both the film

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<sup>20</sup> The mirror appears only once in the novel, in Don Cayetano's letter at the end, where it is associated with self-reflection: 'Creo que dentro de algún tiempo ha de estar nuestra pobre España tan desfigurada, que no se conocerá ella misma ni aun mirándose en el darísimo espejo de su limpia historia.' (*DP* 1876: 311).

and the novel: ‘Es cuanto por ahora podemos decir de las personas que parecen buenas y no lo son.’ (DP 1876: 319). Additionally, and implicitly, in a *mise-en abyme* mode, the mirrors and portraits question the extent to which both they and the realist novel can claim to capture real life. Pepe’s comment in the film, shortly after his arrival at Doña Perfecta’s home, ‘No cabe duda que mi padre tiene un don especial para escribir’ (as he describes the essence of Doña Perfecta’s home) is thus charged with meaning. As we will see, the camera also dictates what we, as viewers, see and this weaves another layer of meaning over the original novel.

Although it is not accorded particular attention in the novel, in the film the staircase is the house’s centerpiece. It further emphasizes the opulence of the home and is reminiscent of the grand sweeping staircase in *Gone with the Wind* (1939), which also acquires a symbolic significance. As well as serving as a clear division between the downstairs public entertaining areas and the upstairs private bedrooms within the home, this staircase is a place of transition and it is often the setting for events and encounters that will have a dramatic impact upon the characters’ lives. Thus it is on the staircase that Doña Perfecta receives and reads the letter informing her that Pepe will be coming to Orbajosa, it is on the staircase (rather than in the orchard, as in the novel) that the lovers have their first encounter and it is significantly here that Rosario collapses after her ‘marriage’ to Pepe. In the scene when Rosario plans to make her escape, the barred spindles on that same staircase, emphasised through the presence of carefully orchestrated shadows and low-key lighting in this very dark scene, ominously repeat the motif of the cage, which is mentioned only twice in the novel but represented at numerous points throughout the film. We recall, for example, the presence of the caged bird at the beginning, which reminds us of Galdós’s later novels, notably *Tristana* (1892), where Don Lope refers to the protagonist as ‘pobre muñeca con alas’, as well as Buñuel’s adaptation of that work, and the cage-like bars on the windows of the Troya girls’ windows in Galindo’s film. Our obstructed view through some kind of barred gate, as we watch María Remedios and Caballuco pursue Pepe towards the end of the film, serves as a stark reminder that the characters are imprisoned and repressed by their physical space, by the environment in which they live and by social norms.

Even the private spaces that the characters occupy (for instance Rosario’s bedroom, Don Cayetano’s library and Don Inocencio’s office) fail to serve, in the ways their occupants hope, as places of refuge from the hostile external reality. Rather, they illuminate the inner drama that the characters are constrained to live out. The books piled high on Don Inocencio’s desk, for example, symbolically indicate that he feels overwhelmed by the external pressures and the situation in which he finds himself. These spaces are sometimes represented as sources of confinement or imprisonment, as characters such as Don Cayetano are cut off from the rest of

the world and the single window in Don Inocencio's home is often covered with a curtain. Even the spaces and doors that are 'open' rarely allow us to gain a glimpse of the outside world. On one occasion the camera even retracts into Pepe's room, which increases this sense of claustrophobia. In a contrasting visual strategy, the houses of Don Inocencio and the Troya girls are brought into close proximity in the film so that the 'respectable' characters can see what is happening in the less respectable households, thereby illuminating the theme of gossip and 'el qué dirán' in the novel.

In line with the 'Mexican ideological imperatives' described by Tierney (2010: 87), 'firstly the institutionalized Revolution's post-1940 rejection of anticlericalism and secondly the promotion of national unity (hence the de-Mexicanisation of bad white characters)', Galindo was anxious to tone down the anticlerical tone expressed in Galdós's novel and it may be for this reason that the cathedral, after appearing in the opening panning shot, does not play a prominent role in the film. In the novel, for instance, we read that Pepe's room has two views: one of the orchard and one of the cathedral. This undoubtedly has a symbolic significance and can be related to the novel's 'thesis', as it corresponds to our witnessing of the conflicts between religion and Nature, liberalism and conservatism, good and evil and so forth. However, it is clear that the religious space of the chapel, as portrayed in Galindo's film, is far from a refuge and it is accorded greater significance than in Galdós's novel. It acts as a kind of cage and the notable absence of any sense of spiritual comfort is reinforced through the use of shadows and low-key lighting, which relate to the symbolic use of light and darkness in the original novel (Varey 1992), together with the presence of symbolic objects. The space is sparsely decorated and these objects are strategically placed within each frame, including the candles that barely emit any light and thus condemn the characters to be consumed in a darkness that is both literal and metaphorical. When Doña Perfecta visits the chapel, the statue of the crucified Christ stresses the anguish and the torture that she is experiencing. It is notably effectively 'mutilated' by the camera itself since, at one point in this scene, the camera zooms in so it is only the legs that we see. This could be seen as symbolically representing the character's confusion and lack of clear vision, and ensures that we, too, experience that sense of restriction resulting from the narrow viewpoint. The statue significantly towers over Doña Perfecta, who is, as a consequence, rendered inferior and powerless, yet she still insists on ominously seeking support from her religious faith to help her to press on with her fanatical determination to exert her power and stamp out what she perceives to be evil. Such scenes reinforce the motifs of imprisonment and accentuate the sense of stagnation. Thus a sinister, foreboding shadow is immediately cast over the lovers' relationship when Rosario chooses this as the place in which to declare that Pepe is

her husband. The fact that we initially view the couple as they enter the chapel (as a couple about to be married) from outside the ‘cage’ heightens the nature of their imprisonment.

The nature, representation and role of the various settings in the film is complemented by the symbolic way in which the characters relate to and occupy the different spaces. The characters’ movement and positions on the staircase corresponds to their quest to assert their dominance, which, in Doña Perfecta’s case, is aligned to her desire to maintain, if not gain a higher social status. The staircase serves to highlight her power as she (and also Rosario) walk down the stairs in order to make a grand entrance. Doña Perfecta has a strong physical presence in the film and she always commands the space that she occupies. Del Río’s performance is crucial here since, as Stam (2005: 23) has noted, ‘While literary characters are like ghostly, hologrammatic entities cued by the text and projected (and introjected) by readers, filmic characters are at once projected and embodied.’ She is often strategically positioned in the centre of the frame, which emphasises her power and her important social position, and frequently leads the way, regularly strutting across the various spaces, habitually followed by her ‘disciples’, who sometimes respectfully bow to her (for instance towards the beginning of the film when Don Inocencio, María Remedios and Jacinto visit the household). Despite her gender and size, which would normally predispose her to being visually presented as inferior to her male counterparts, she even towers over tall, stocky characters such as Cristóbal Ramos (described in the novel as ‘la colosal figura del Centauro’ [DP 1876: 307]) from a higher step on the staircase at one point in the film. Spatial references, thus, question and challenge notions of male and patriarchal authority, which Dapena has observed, is a key theme in Galindo’s film. As well as pointing to Galdós’s mature novels, they also counter the traditional representation of women in Mexican cinema:

Women were looked at with scorn, affection, veneration or lust, but until very recently, they were never able to look for themselves. Women were never on the other side of the camera, and spectators, consciously, mechanically integrated women into the landscape and believed that she could not be individualised. (Monsiváis 1995a: 121)

As Monsiváis (2000: 81) wrote, ‘[In *Doña Perfecta*] *Dolores* is commanding, cruel, not the humiliated but the humiliator, the inverted apology of *machismo*, the woman whose fancy takes her in the opposite direction to traditional femininity.’

During the lovers’ first encounter on the staircase, Rosario is also significantly placed on a higher step than Pepe so that in visual terms she appears to be taller than him. Galindo, thus, accords her a sense of power and superiority, even though she behaves with unease and often

bows her head, looking downwards in submission. In doing this, he diverges from the original novel, where Rosario is represented, albeit largely through Pepe's eyes, as sweet and innocent but lacking in intelligence. Pepe tells her,

‘Desde que se te ve, desde que se te mira, los nobles sentimientos y la pureza de tu corazón se manifiestan. Viéndote se ve una vida celeste que por descuido de Dios está en la tierra; eres un ángel y yo te adoro como un tonto.’ (DP 1876: 72)

The softness of the lighting, Rosario's feminine lace-trimmed dress, her perfectly arranged hair, her innocent facial expressions and shy, submissive performance (she frequently casts her eyes downwards in the early scenes with her mother and speaks with a soft, child-like voice) convey a similar impression of angelicness and purity at the beginning of the film. By the end, however, it is clear that Galindo's new Rosario represents a kind of *femme fatale* and it is not insignificant that the expectation of male dominance is subverted through the framing of these shots. Hence it is Rosario, not Pepe, who is depicted first in a close-up. In Dapena's words,

In accordance with the unwritten rules of melodrama, the usual terms of cinematic scopophilia are reversed. The woman initiates the look; the man becomes the object of erotic contemplation. (Dapena 2004: 319)

Rosario's superiority was hinted at towards the beginning of the film, where she stood on a higher step to her mother, whilst the servant was significantly placed on a lower step. This symbolically forecasts her rebellion at the end of Galindo's film and interestingly changes the dynamic presented in the novel, where we read that Pepe ‘bien podía pasar por un hermoso y acabado símbolo, y si fuera estatua, el escultor habría grabado en el pedestal estas palabras: inteligencia, fuerza’. (DP 1876: 34).

The close relationship between the theme of power and spatial occupation in this scene prepares us for the film's ending, which is, again, transformed in a manner that is dramatically different from the original text. In Galdós's novel *Don Cayetano* announces that ‘La pobre Rosario [...] está ya perdida de la cabeza’ and informs the recipient of his letter that she has been declared ‘un caso incurable’ and placed in an asylum (DP 1876: 315). On the contrary, in the film we are presented with a melodramatic scene in which the defiant Rosario, depicted in a close-up, with a dramatic performance that conveys resolute resilience, valiantly raises her head and, with aggressively direct eye contact, assertively informs her horrified mother (whose emotions are conveyed in a parallel close-up), ‘Me voy, me voy con mi esposo’ to the accompaniment of discordant organ tones and high violin notes. This builds upon the scene in the original novel



where Rosario tells her mother, ‘-¡Me voy, me voy!’ (DP 1876:304) and half rises from her sickbed. However, in the novel these words are expressed ‘con la exaltación del delirio’, whilst in the film Rosario shows no signs of any mental debility. Galindo’s Rosario then departs in an act of rebellion, through the main entrance, which up until that point had only seen arrivals, accompanied by a raging wind and the liberal army on a dark evening. All the elements apparently revolt against Doña Perfecta, who is left alone amidst the swirling leaves. Later, when she runs indoors to seek refuge, she is accompanied by hauntingly ghost-like billowing curtains that seemingly reach out to try to catch her and highlight her human solitude and helplessness in the face of superior natural forces. On this occasion blood ties and Doña Perfecta’s assumptions concerning notions of maternal superiority and filial obedience are certainly not stronger than love.

The equation of height with superiority is also present in the balcony scenes in both the public and private spheres. Rosario, once again symbolically positioned above Pepe, calls down to him from her balcony, which represents the boundaries imposed upon her freedom as she is only able to access a limited amount of outdoor space. It goes without saying that the choice of the balcony here calls to mind scenes within works such as Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, where the lovers’ relationship is similarly doomed.

Balcony scenes are also used to convey the characters’ false sense of superiority, the distasteful manner in which they seek to dominate their counterparts and engage in acts of voyeurism. This is the case in the first of the scenes when Jacinto and Don Inocencio look down into the street and adopt an unwarranted privileged, self-satisfied and condescending perspective that matches their characters. María Remedios adopts a similar perspective as she looks down into the Troya girls’ home. Even we, as viewers, are complicit in such acts of voyeurism as we peer into the characters’ private lives (notably as we look, initially from a position behind Doña Perfecta and Don Inocencio and then, directly afterwards, from the perspective of the horse that is waiting outside, through the window to watch the Troya girls). Our ensuing sense of unease and guilt encourages us to reflect on the words from Romans and the cruel manner in which the human characters spy upon, persecute and condemn each other. In many instances, it could well be said that Galindo’s film reflects the notion that ‘hell is other people’.

The camera ensures that we are able to live through the experiences of the characters and participate in their state of ignorance or confusion. It is often positioned in such a way that we find ourselves having to look over characters’ shoulders in order to attempt to get a glimpse of the action (for example we are situated behind María Remedios in the scene when Doña Perfecta entertains her guests before Pepe’s arrival at the beginning of the film). On other occasions, for

instance in the scene when Doña Perfecta goes to pray in the chapel, our view is gradually obscured (on this occasion by the statue of Christ). The cramming of a significant number of people into confined spaces that are cluttered with ornaments, heavy draped curtains and fussy wallpapers, which is overwhelming both for the characters and for viewer, who is unsure who or what to observe, reinforces the motifs of confusion and claustrophobia that are frequently expressed in the film. Likewise, Pepe's frustration is conveyed as he prowls around the dining room like some kind of caged animal and his sense of detachment becomes increasingly apparent through his location within the shots. For example, in one of the dining room scenes, his bodily position and performance directly contrasts with that adopted by the others as he remains standing uncomfortably, arms semi-akimbo with his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets, in a vain attempt to assert his dominance, whilst Doña Perfecta and Don Cayetano are seated. The fact that Doña Perfecta orders him to sit down on a number of occasions highlights his inferiority and his obligation to submit to her authority (just as she asserts her control over Rosario, who is physically made to sit down by her mother, who places pressure on her arm at the beginning of the film). In other scenes Pepe appears to be fighting a losing battle as he is surrounded not by supporters (as with the scenes in which Doña Perfecta is presented as the evident leader, accompanied by her 'disciples') but by enemies that encircle him as their prey and threaten to destroy him. The inclusion of close-ups, together with the numerous scenes where he appears as a solitary character emphasise his increasing sense of isolation from Orbajosan society. In the words of Monsiváis (1995: 120), 'The close-up exalts, the mid-length shot hierarchises. The camera can assume the point of view of an outraged mainstream society or of redemptory marginality.' This notion of marginality is also conveyed in the street scenes, where Pepe is seen as a lone figure even when there are others present, either as he walks alone, fails to kneel down like others (as the bishop drives past) or is watched closely by disapproving observers. The director's choice of a light-coloured suit on this occasion reminds us of Rosario's white dress, but whereas in her case the colour positively highlights her innocence and beauty, in Pepe's case, it negatively underscores his singularity and alienation from the other inhabitants. This accentuates his sense of estrangement and points to his subsequent exclusion from Orbajosan society and death. It also illuminates and modernises the Christ-symbol that is attached to Pepe in Galdós's work (Hall 1973). Whereas in the novel such associations may appear to be discordant and inaccessible, Galindo transforms Pepe into a more affable, accessible character in the film. Thus his entrapment and murder further justify Rosario's rebellion and make the moral message more striking.

It is evident, thus, that although Galindo's film adaptation initially appears to be generally faithful to Galdós's novel, as with the case of Buñuel's *Tristana* (Condé 2000b), the resulting film is a new work in its own right, a 'transfer of creative energy' (Stam 2005: 46), the product of the director's rich response as a reader of *Doña Perfecta*. Galindo's film has been carefully crafted in such a way that it becomes apparent that the director has used the novel as a inspirational springboard to highlight themes that are relevant to Mexico, and sometimes of universal relevance, thence dissolving the single, specific temporal references that tied the original novel to nineteenth-century Spain. In addition to using spatial elements for symbolic purposes, the film raises questions about the relationship between individuals and their environment, between city and country and, in a Mexican context, about survival in a repressive regime. Pepe is brutally murdered when he fails to conform but Doña Perfecta's attempts to cocoon herself (and imprison others) are also rendered unsuccessful, as the forces of Nature and arguably liberalism (in the form of the army and Rosario's rebellion) challenge and ultimately rebel against her. Galindo's film thereby confers greater attention to what were secondary themes in the original novel.

Exploiting the artistic potential of the visual medium, then, Galindo encourages viewers to return to Galdós's novel and to re-read it, to engage in a new frame of mind with the questions surrounding the relationship between the individuals and the spaces that they occupy. This adaptation of *Doña Perfecta* testifies to Blasco Ibáñez's claim (1922: 10) that 'la expresión cinematográfica puede proporcionar a la novela la universalidad de un cuadro, de una estatua o de una sinfonía.' Galindo's film transforms, illuminates and brings to the fore the modernity and universality of Galdós's *Doña Perfecta*, a novel that has fascinated readers of all ages, periods and nationalities and will undoubtedly continue to do so for many more years to come.

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