White Rose Research Online

eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk
Universities of Leeds, Sheffield and York

Deposited via The University of Sheffield.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/114368/

Version: Accepted Version

Article:
Davies, R. (2019) The meaning of words: the art (or artlessness) of communication in Galdós' Torquemada en la hoguera (1889). Bulletin of Spanish Studies, 95 (9 - 10). pp. 121-134. ISSN: 1475-3820

https://doi.org/10.1080/14753820.2018.1556540

© 2019 Bulletin of Spanish Studies. This is an author produced version of a paper subsequently published in Bulletin of Spanish Studies. Uploaded in accordance with the publisher's self-archiving policy.

Reuse
Items deposited in White Rose Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the White Rose Research Online record for the item.

Takedown
If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS
University of Sheffield
UNIVERSITY of York

The Meaning of Words: Language and The Art (or Artlessness) of Communication in Galdós's *Torquemada en la hoguera* (1889)

In *Creatividad textual e intertextual en Galdós*, James Whiston, the pioneer of research on Galdosian manuscripts, wrote of

> nuestro continuado interés por un aspecto de la creación literaria galdosiana: la misteriosa relación entre el escritor y su entorno, y las consecuencias que esta interacción de sus ideas con el ambiente intelectual, artístico o social que respiraba el novelista tenía en su obra literaria.[1]

Focussing in detail on specific novels, he demonstrated that Galdós 'estaba dispuesto a corregir, enmendar, agudizar, humanizar, "naturalizar" minuciosamente toda palabra, frase o párrafo de sus escritos que él juzgara necesitados de ello' (p.215), concluding,

> La verdad es que el estudio de lo textual y lo intertextual en Galdós revela que son dos caras de una misma moneda artística: su conciencia de la necesidad contemporánea de estar abierto al diálogo histórico-literario europeo [...] - y al mismo tiempo su conciencia del deber de dar al mundo de las letras creaciones "esmeradamente corregidas". (pp.215-16)

Seeking to build upon Whiston's assertions and taking into account Galdós's constant quest to find the 'precise word' required for the context, together with his acute sensitivity towards contemporary concerns, this article will examine language and the theme of communication with specific reference to the novel *Torquemada en la hoguera* (hereafter *TH*).[2]

Although some critical attention has been devoted to the subject of language in *TH*, such studies have concentrated primarily on its artistic

[1] (Ottawa: Dovehouse Editions, 1999), p.9.
[2] All quotations relate to the first-edition text (Madrid: *La Guirnalda*, 1889).

aspects, notably the connection between characterization and language, or its importance in relation to Galdós's narrative technique.[3] Few have considered the effectiveness of language as a vehicle for (or, as we will see, a barrier to) communication in the context of nineteenth-century literature and society. This article, then, will highlight Galdós's role as an innovator and underline the close connection between his use of language and his reflections on Spanish society. In some respects, notably regarding non-verbal communication, it could be contended that, in addition to responding to contemporary theories, the author anticipated future developments in psychological research.

Illiteracy rates were high in the nineteenth century and communication within Spanish society was based on a strong oral tradition. The power of oratory was highly esteemed and many attended *tertulias*, where they could discuss their views with others, and listened avidly to legal trials, political debates and speeches at the *Real Academia* and *Ateneo*. Wadda de los Ríos-Font references Pierre Bourdieu's article 'The Force of Law' (1987), which reveals 'how the juridical field' 'is quite literally made of language', not only as a 'written code' built upon argument, but as 'an effect of grammar' with 'its own specialized vocabulary' and 'symbolic power'.[4] The same could be said of the political arena; according to Sánchez Agesta, 'con la sola excepción de los generales que acaudillaron los partidos, nadie ocupó en el siglo diecinueve una posición política que no fuera suelto y elegante de la palabra.'[5] The Republican politician Emilio Castelar was highly revered for his command of language and, when he died, articulacy and eloquence were noted as his distinguishing features. According to Emilia Pardo Bazán,

> ¿Cómo podría desconocerse el influjo ejercido por esa misma oratoria y por los escritos del primer orador de nuestra época en

[3] For example, H.B. Hall, 'Torquemada: The Man and his Language', in *Galdós Studies*, ed. John Varey (London: Tamesis, 1970), pp.136-63; Douglass Rogers, 'Lenguaje y personaje en Galdós (un estudio de Torquemada)', *Cuadernos hispanoamericanos*, 206 (1967), 243-73; Diane Urey, 'Identities and Differences in the *Torquemada* Novels of Galdós', *Hispanic Review*, 53(1) (1985), 41-60; *Creación de una realidad ficticia. Las novelas de Torquemada de Pérez Galdós*, ed. Yolanda Arencibia (Madrid: Castalia, 1997).

[4] 'El crimen de la calle de San Vicente: Crime Writing and Bourgeois Liberalism in Restoration Spain', *MLN,* 120(2) (2005), 335-354 (p.336).

[5] Cited by María Cruz Seoane, *Oratoria y periodismo* (Valencia: Castalia, 1977), p.13.

> la literatura general? La pompa y el ritmo de su período soberano influyen sobre nuestra lengua y nuestra prosa dondequiera, donde menos supondríamos quizá.[6]

Nowadays, in a society where oral virtues are less highly-prized, Castelar's oratorical style, filled with rhetorical flourishes and exploiting the sounds and rhythmic qualities of words, is still powerful but a modern-day reader might feel that it possesses little by way of substance. The following passage, from one of Castelar's articles, is inflated and dramatic:

> [...] cuando vemos la energía de nuestra voluntad colectiva, el heroísmo de nuestra sangre nunca estancada por el hado adverso, los holocaustos ofrecidos á la nación hasta por las clases menos participantes, de su poder y de su grandeza, los tesoros escondidos en sus entrañas, y desentrañadas por un patriotismo inextinguible tantas y tan colosales fuerzas como se patentizan por todas partes, el arrojo más inverosímil junto con la paciencia más inagotable, la tenacidad y el entusiasmo, debe creerse que no le faltará, no, á España, en los cielos el Dios de su epopeya, ni en los tiempos el premio de su pujanza.[7]

Galdós expressed his opinions on this oratorical tradition in his press articles. Although he admired the style of politicians such as Castelar and Cánovas,[8] he conveyed his frustration with the (in his view) excessive importance attached to it, writing, 'la ola oratoria sube y todo lo ahoga' (p.197) and 'todos hablan por los codos, todos ceden a la fascinación de ese Congreso, que parece ser el único ejemplo educativo de nuestro genio nacional' (p.198).[9]

---

[6] Carmen Bravo-Villasante, *Vida y obra de Emilia Pardo Bazán* (Madrid: Magisterio Español, 1973), p.122.

[7] 'Crónica internacional', *LEM*, 107 (November 1897), 185-200 (p.199-200).

[8] 'Los tres oradores: Salmerón, Castelar y Cánovas' (15-8-1886), *Obras inéditas,* ed. Alberto Ghiraldo, 10 vols (Madrid: Renacimiento, 1923-30), *III (Política española),* pp.169-83. The articles' dates correspond to their publication in *La Prensa*, recorded in William Shoemaker, *Las cartas desconocidas de Galdós en "La Prensa" de Buenos Aires* (Madrid: Ediciones Cultura Hispánica, 1973).

[9] 'La ola oratoria' (17-1-1884), *Obras inéditas, II* (*Arte y crítica),* pp.197-200.

The term 'ahogar' implies a stifling of natural creativity and the repetition of 'todos' highlights the engulfing power of this fad, whilst the term 'genio' is applied ironically. He even regarded the tradition as a national vice; in his view,

> Si fuera posible a las naciones cambiar lo que les sobra por algo de que carecen, ¡qué bonito negocio podría hacer España trocando algunos oradores por un poco de flema inglesa, o de paciencia alemana, o de laboriosidad flamenca! (p.199)

He also vented his anger against the tendency to 'talk' rather than 'act' in 'Época de confusión' (17-1-1884), where the destructive power of words that render their listeners helpless, is conveyed through war imagery: 'Pronto empezará la batalla con tiroteo de palabras, metrallas de alusiones, y el humo de una retórica inútil envolverá a los combatientes durante muchos días, cegándolos.'[10] This reference to 'humo' had previously been employed in 'Régimen representativo' (22-6-1882) to highlight the number of promised reforms that turned out to be empty words: 'Estamos ya muy acostumbrados a estas ampulosas piezas de oratoria oficial, llenas de promesas y desarrolladas en términos siempre juiciosos; pero que pierden su valor desde que los hechos los desmienten.'[11]

Later, in 'Arte oratorio' (14-2-1884), Galdós observed, 'Sabe Dios lo que nuestra capital perdería el día en que no fuera teatro de estas resplandecientes funciones de elocuencia, el día en que los desocupados no tuvieran este aliciente de las ruidosas sesiones de Cortes.' (p.8)[12] Here he describes the real city of Madrid as a 'teatro', a space designed for entertainment that transports its audience into a fictional realm. Thence he underlines the speeches' euphuistic qualities that detach them from real life, whilst the term 'resplandecientes' matches this by recalling the opulent, dazzling setting of theatres such as the Teatro Real that Jacinta attends in *Fortunata y Jacinta*, a fitting location for her drift into a dream state.

---

[10] *Obras inéditas, III,* pp.7-17 (p.13).

[11] *Obras inéditas, III,* pp.19-26 (p.23). Indeed, according to Jaime Vicens Vives, only c.30 of the 296 practical plans proposed were implemented. *Coyuntura económica y reformismo burgués, y otros estudios de la historia de España*, 4th ed. (Barcelona: Ariel, 1974), p.203.

Galdós's condemnation of overblown, meaningless speeches is also conveyed in fictional form. In the *velada* episode of *El amigo Manso* (1882) he highlights the distinction between Manso's speech, concentrating on substance and meaning, and Peña's, which made style its key ingredient, and notes the public's contrasting response. Manso's speech, 'una disertación breve y sencilla',[13] is greeted with 'un aplauso mecánico, oficial, sin entusiasmo pero con bastante simpatía y respeto' (p.164). By contrast, Peña's speech leaves the audience 'fascinado y sorprendido' (p.170) and they applaud him enthusiastically. The reader's attitude is likely to be influenced by Manso's reaction, which probably would have been Galdós's, taking into account the aforementioned articles and the biographical similarities.[14] On the one hand, Manso admires Peña for his command of language and manner of delivery: '¡Qué admirable estructura de frases, qué enumeraciones tan brillantes, qué manera de exponer, qué variedad de tonos y cadencillas [...]' (p.172). At the same time, he cannot but note the speech's lack of substance and escapist nature:

> ¿Y de qué hablaba? No lo sé fijamente. Hablaba de todo y de nada. No concretaba, y sus elocuentes digresiones eran como una escapatoria del espíritu y un paseo por regiones fantásticas. (p.171)

Through this episode, and later through Torquemada's banquet speech in *Torquemada en el purgatorio* (1894), where the protagonist is similarly applauded for a speech that is essentially hot air, Galdós highlights the superficial and shallow nature of many of the speeches which swayed the public so dramatically.

Galdós was rarely praised for his style during his lifetime but it can be contended that there were specific (and conscious) reasons why he wrote in this manner. Firstly, it is noteworthy that, in addition to producing novels and

---

[12] *Obras inéditas, IV (Política española),* pp.7-17.
[13] *El amigo Manso* (Madrid: Aguilar, 1994), p.164.
[14] See Walter Pattison, 'El amigo Manso and el amigo Galdós', *Anales Galdosianos*, 2 (1967), 135-53.

plays, Galdós wrote for the press, which despite accusations that it corrupted language,[15] counteracted the orators' penchant for logorrhoea. Echegaray maintained,

> En toda labor humana la división del trabajo es ley suprema, y en la elaboración del lenguaje, si hay quien tiene la misión de velar por su pureza, hay quien tiene la misión de darle movimiento y vida y fluidez para que circule libremente.[16]

In his view, the press fulfilled the latter 'mission'. Journalists, often obliged to write quickly under pressure, were unable to devote a great deal of attention to stylistic elaboration and thus concentrated on producing articles which were clearly written. They frequently reflected the language of the masses, thereby attracting a larger, less-educated public and it is likely that Galdós approved of their provision of an alternative to the oratorical tradition.

Secondly, Galdós's novels may give the appearance that they were written quickly, not only because he was acutely aware of the need to meet deadlines and accustomed to producing literary works under similar conditions to those of journalists, but because he probably favoured the apparently hasty journalistic style over the bombastic style adopted by many orators. Moreover, he was not only able to adapt his style to the needs of the genre in which he was writing (for instance to produce detailed literary descriptions in *Fortunata y Jacinta*), but extend his talents to producing short, documentary-style articles or short stories. It is likely, then, that what Peseux-Richard termed 'négligences de style'[17] were not the result of carelessness or lack of talent, but rather an essential part of Galdós's particular style, which was quite different from fashionable styles of the period.

---

[15] Gómez de Baquero stated, 'Es muy común la idea de que los periódicos están mal escritos y corrompen el idioma.' 'Crónica literaria', *LEM*, 103 (July 1897), 120-32 (p.129).

[16] 'Del periodismo en España', *Discursos leídos ante la Real Academia Española en la recepción pública de D. Eugenio Sellés el día 2 de junio de 1895* (Madrid: Imprenta de la *Revista de Navegación y Comercio*, 1895), p.61.

[17] In his review of *Torquemada en la cruz*, Peseux-Richard wrote, 'Quant à la langue, elle est toujours claire et nerveuse, mais certaines négligences de style tendraient à faire que le livre a été écrit un peu vite.' *Revue Hispanique*, I (1894), p.96. Cited by Rogers, p.243.

Thirdly, Galdós's political sympathies and stance as a realist writer would have favoured the inclusion of the language of the 'pueblo', along with the depiction of life as a whole, right down to its sordid aspects. He recognised that there was an unnecessary gap between spoken and written language; in *TH* we read, 'Bailón hablaba de muy distinta manera de como escribía. Esto es muy común' (p.66), and he wrote, 'Hay que tener en cuenta que lo que más vive en literatura es lo que se inspira en la naturaleza humana con independencia de todos los artificios que el arte o la moda imponen a los escritores.'[18] Hence, as Ricardo Gullón has noted, 'el idioma de Galdós es el lenguaje corriente, sencillo, lenguaje impregnado de las inflexiones, el tono y las resonancias de la palabra hablada'.[19] The author shared the artistic belief that language was a flexible and far-reaching tool, which ought to be used to its limit. However, this attracted criticism from his contemporaries, especially those with conservative sympathies, and he was condemned for his incorporation of working-class language and colloquialisms. Responding to Galdós's Academy Speech (1897), Menéndez y Pelayo proclaimed that Galdós's works contained 'la copia fiel, a veces demasiado fiel, del lenguaje vulgar, sin excluir el de la hez del populacho',[20] whilst Valle Inclán branded him *Don Benito el garbancero*.

Notwithstanding such misgivings, it cannot be denied that *TH* displays Galdós's command of language. Despite its brevity, the novel is filled with a wealth of different styles, ranging from the grandiose, heroic diction of the opening paragraphs to the familiar, intimate tone the narrator adopts when addressing readers, from Torquemada's coarse rants or the tenants' speeches to the oratorical, mock-religious style of Bailón's writings, this last mirrored in Torquemada's corruptive use of Biblical language as he mangles the Beatitudes for the benefit of Martín and Isidora, and curses Tía Roma. As well as incorporating colloquialisms (notably in Tía Roma's speeches), the gap between spoken and written language is bridged by the use of Free Indirect Discourse and, on occasions, it becomes impossible to distinguish between the narrator's language (the written word) and the characters' thoughts (usually considered to be the spoken word). *TH* thus highlights the far-reaching possibilities of

[18] 'Las letras' (3-3-1886), *Obras inéditas, II,* pp.37-48 (p.46).
[19] 'Lenguaje y técnica de Galdós', *Cuadernos hispanoamericanos*, 80 (1958), 38-61 (p.42).

language, showing its expansive range, rather than restricting it to the confined, pretentious style adopted by many orators.

As a stylist, Galdós was aware of the depth and breadth to be achieved through the use of an individual word. The surviving manuscripts and galley proofs of *Torquemada en la cruz,* as of other novels (notably *Lo prohibido* and *Fortunata y Jacinta*, which Whiston has scrutinized), reveal how much attention Galdós paid to revising his work. He was particularly sensitive to sounds and rhythms, to time sequences and tenses, and to the significance of words in particular contexts. The breadth of language is displayed in the multiple associations evoked by individual words in *TH* and, in this regard, Galdós's language proves itself to be a powerful, flexible tool.

As the 1884 *DRAE* indicates, the verb *ahogar* can be used in various contexts: 'quitar la vida á alguno impidiéndole la respiración'; 'hablando del fuego, apagarlo, sofocarlo con las materias que se lo sobreponen y dificultan la combustión'; 'aguar las plantas y perderlas la demasiada agua'. In its figurative sense, it is connected in *TH* with Torquemada's role as victimiser, executor or Inquisitor and his desperate attempts to convince others that 'yo no ahogo al pobre' (p.46). It is also employed in a more literal sense to refer to Tía Roma's choked voice as she reflects on Valentín's suffering (p.64) and to Martín and Isidora's attempts to drown their sorrows (p.88). It can also be associated with three of the main elements (air, fire and water), and the fact that it relates to both excess (too much water drowns the plants) and lack (a lack of oxygen leads to death) reinforces the themes of contrast and ambiguity, wealth and want present in the novel. That dichotomous relationship is affirmed too by the interchangeability of terms with positive and negative connotations: hence Valentín is described as both 'santo' and 'mónstruo'. This not only undermines any claim that the novel has a clear moral, but draws upon contemporary concerns regarding the extent to which initial interpretations or assumptions can belie the true reality. (This was the case in questions concerning criminal responsibility, aptly conveyed in the title of *Locos que no lo parecen* [1880-81] by the psychiatrist Dr Esquerdo, a friend of Galdós.) It also obliges readers to

[20] Cited by Rogers, p.243.

acknowledge the importance of perspective and the notion of a constantly shifting reality as the preconditions of any possible overall moral vision.

Campo is another word that has far-reaching consequences. It is used in a figurative sense in Chapter 2: Valentín 'se presentó en el campo de la enseñanza como esos extraordinarios ingenios que nacen de tarde en tarde' (p.16). It is employed literally in Chapter 3 when Quevedito advises Torquemada, "Lo que hay que hacer con Valentín es ponerle un cencerro al pescuezo, soltarle en el campo en medio de un ganado [...]" (p.35). It also forms part of a play on words in Chapter 7: Martín tells Torquemada that they should all go to the 'campo' and the moneylender reflects, 'Al camposanto es á donde tú vas prontito.' (p.79) In this context, it is worthy of mention that we were previously told that 'Torquemada odiaba el campo y no podía comprender que en él hubiese nada bueno.' (pp.35-36). Later, however, he forgets his cynical thoughts and prefers to share Martín's optimistic hopes. Hence the word evokes the conflict between idealism, dreams, hopes and reality and that tension between 'querer' and 'poder', which was so problematic in the economic life of the nineteenth century and the period's attempts to achieve a stably-founded humanism.

For the most part, however, the characters only have a restricted vocabulary. This is emphasised by the recurrent images used in the narrative with regard to particular characters. Unsurprisingly, Torquemada the moneylender is regularly associated with terms of financial valuing. He is so obsessed with money that he believes that he is being punished for 'the debt' he has incurred ("He faltado á la Humanidad, y esa muy tal y cual me las cobra ahora con los réditos atrasados..." [p.38]) and can 'bargain' with God for Valentín's life. He sees Valentín's death as a 'robo' (p.57) and even ponders on the financial value of the stars (p.57). Read in this light, words acquire new meanings: the description of Torquemada's children as 'joyas' (p.7) emphasises the protagonist's preoccupation with monetary value and reminds us that Valentín 'si viviese, había de ganar muchísimo dinero, pero muchísimo' (p.52). A less obvious connection is made as he tells Rufina, "[T]e advierto que no habiendo buenas obras no hay que fiarse de la Virgen. Y acciones cristianas

habrá, cueste lo que cueste: yo te lo aseguro." (p.59) 'Acciones' can mean 'shares' as well as 'actions'.

When interpreting words, the characters narrow-mindedly frequently attach restricted meanings to them. Martín and Isidora assume that Torquemada's use of the term 'intereses' refers to his financial gain and he is compelled to correct them: "No me refiero al materialismo del rédito del dinero, sino á mis intereses, claro, á mis intereses." (p.83) This linguistic ambiguity is continued throughout the later *Torquemada* novels, reaching its climax in the protagonist's final word, 'Conversión', which could refer his spiritual conversion or his plan to convert the national debt.

Language, then, instead of being an effective means of communication, embodying pre-existent categories and assumptions, takes on a force of its own. It emerges as an agency of seemingly autonomous control, which pigeon-holes people and can sometimes convey meanings not intended by its users. Torquemada appears to be aware of this. Thus he attempts to clarify his meaning and remove such attachments in an effort to declare the purity of his soul. That seems to be the function of his repeated references to 'el materialismo'.[21]

In this disturbing light, epithets can be viewed not solely as a characterization technique or a 'realistic device - a verbalization consistent with the education. social status, environment and psychology of the character presented'[22] - but as evidence that the characters are aware of the deceptive nature of language. Hence they use (and overuse) particular phrases because they are the only ones they feel safe with. This suggests that they are afraid of language, and sometimes copy the language of those they admire, not only because they lack the necessary creative spirit to develop their own, but because they do not feel sufficiently confident to develop a means of expressing their true natures. Torquemada, for example, is dazzled by Bailón's language as if by some theatrical performance he does not comprehend, and his recurrence to particular stock phrases evidences his propensity to imitate others instead of

---

[21] He tells the tenants, '[...] si las he sofocado otras veces no ha sido por el materialismo del dinero, sino porque me gusta ver cumplir á la gente...' (p.44).

[22] Vernon Chamberlin, 'The *muletilla*: An Important Facet of Galdós's Characterization Technique', *Hispanic Review*, 29 (1961), 296-309 (p.299).

being true to himself. Later, in *Torquemada en la cruz*, this extends to fashion, as he is anxious to obtain 'una levita herméticamente cerrada' like that worn by the much-admired Donoso. This was a natural consequence of an educational system that fostered learning by rote, a problem highlighted by many.[23] It is given literary form in works such as Alas's *La Regenta* and Galdós's *Miau*, as characters spout lines from newspapers in an effort to impress others, and it is noteworthy that solely a year after the publication of *TH*, the French sociologist Gabriel Tarde published *Les lois de l'imitation* (1890). Hence Torquemada's language, which is dull, stagnant and superficial, lacking in subjective import and consisting almost entirely of imitated material, expresses contemporary anxieties.

Even when language is controlled and manipulated by its users, it appears to offer little evidence of sincerity or genuine depth of feeling. Although it can sometimes function as a means of communication through which the characters express feelings, be they of anger, dismay or delight, it is, all too often, a mask to keep up appearances or make oneself agreeable. Hence Isidora tells Torquemada exactly what he wants to hear ("Me parece que Dios le ha de favorecer, le ha de premiar sus buenas obras..." [p.89]) and does not expose her true self. We are also privy to Torquemada's thoughts, which frequently underline his superficiality. Thus when Martín declares that his aunt in Puerto Rico will hasten to his aid when she learns of his predicament, Torquemada reflects, '—Como no te mande tu tía quinientos puñales' (p.83) but does not divulge this. Later he 'acts', adopting what he perceives to be a gentle, fatherly manner as Isidora presents him the IOU:

> miró á sus deudores con expresión paternal, y echó el registro afeminado y dulzón de su voz para decirles: «Hijos de mi alma, no me conocéis. [...]. Cuando yo hago una obra de caridad, allá te va de veras, con el alma y con la vida.» (p.85)

[23] In Revilla's words, it was 'una enseñanza irrisoria que puede formar papagayos pero no hombres'. 'De las reformas necesarias en la instrucción pública española', *Revista Contemporánea*, 25 (1880), 178-187 (pp.181-82). Cited in Anna Homan, 'Education and the genesis of *El doctor Centeno*' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Sheffield, 2009), p.43.

The confusion of genders, conveyed through the reference to 'expresión *paternal*' combined with 'el registro *afeminado*', highlights the incongruous artificiality of these circumstances. Although such situations can arouse humour, on a more serious level they also express the social pressure felt by the characters and the superficiality of nineteenth-century society.

It is much more difficult for the characters to conceal their feelings through another form of language: body language. This had not been widely studied until Darwin published *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), often regarded nowadays as representing the beginnings of scientific studies in this area. Although Freud's work in the area of psychoanalysis was significant, the attention he and others accorded to non-verbal communication was relatively limited. Galdós's interest in body language has both a dynamic and a static dimension, for meaning can be attributed to physical appearances, as well as to actions.

During this century increasing attention was devoted to physiognomy and phrenology, and treatises were published on topics such as the connection between physical appearances and criminal minds, analytical studies of the shape of the skull, and the pronounced differences between male and female natures. Galdós was keenly interested in scientific developments relating to the physical expression of spiritual states and his work displays this in detailed physical descriptions of the characters, which show us their permanent features and leave us to elucidate their significance. It is likely, for instance, that the reference to Valentín's head as 'más grande de lo regular, con alguna deformidad en el cráneo' (p.9) is indicative of his mathematical genius, reinforcing his classification as 'un fenómeno', rather than a 'normal' child. It also relates to phrenological advances and Lombroso's theories of the *genio*, and hints that Valentín's head is a vulnerable part of his body. (Thus the child contracts meningitis, an inflammation of the membranes covering the brain.)

In line with physiognomic theories, Torquemada's appearance can be said to reflect his inner being. The connection between the moneylender and the symbolic implications of the colour yellow, analysed by Chamberlin, is

significant in this context.[24] Like Darwin, Galdós also shows how certain features change as a result of circumstance, for instance bereavement. Following his wife's death, Torquemada, 'Púsose más amarillo de lo que comunmente estaba, y le salieron algunas canas en el pelo y en la perilla' (p.6). Likewise, the tenants observe his changed appearance and attitude when Valentín falls ill:

> Algo desusado y anormal notaron en él, pues tomaba el dinero maquinalmente y sin examinarlo con roñosa nimiedad, como otras veces, cual si tuviera el pensamiento á cien leguas del acto importantísimo que estaba realizando [...]. (pp.40-41)

Galdós also reveals how a human body responds to different emotions. When told that his son is a genius, '[Torquemada] abrazó al profesor, y la satisfacción le rebosaba por ojos y boca en forma de lágrimas y babas.' (p.19) Tears convey his delight, whilst he probably salivates on account of his satisfaction and the desirable thought that Valentín will make him rich. By contrast, following Valentín's illness, he is a broken man and his voice, 'la voz más empañada y llorosa del mundo' (p.42), reveals his despair. His actions ('Dejóse el afligido casero caer en una silla, y quitándose el hongo se pasó la mano por la amarilla frente y la calva sebosa [...]' [p.46]) suggest that his spirit has been broken, his feeling of power lost. He is little more than a crumpled heap, whilst his sighs highlight feelings of weariness, remorse and helplessness. The most extreme reactions occur in Chapter 9; when faced with Valentín's imminent death, Torquemada fights with Bailón, shouts and eventually has a fit, expressing desperation and his inability to deal with reality.

Sometimes it is for the readers to act as psychologists and draw conclusions from the descriptions. In Chapter 7 we read, 'Torquemada [...] la [Isidora] hizo sentar á su lado y le puso la mano en el hombro'. (p.80) This is ambiguous. On the one hand, the narrator seems to imply that Torquemada puts his hand on Isidora's shoulder to indicate superiority, the weight of his

[24] 'Galdós' Use of Yellow in Character Delineation', *PMLA*, 79 (1964), 158-63.

hand highlighting his power. At the same time, however, this action could convey sympathy and be viewed as an attempt to console her, as his subsequent words suggest. This is mirrored in Chapter 9, as Tía Roma adopts the same gesture: 'Y como la bruja aquélla tenía tanta confianza con el señor de la casa, permitiéndose tratarle como á igual, se llegó á él, le puso sobre el hombro su descarnada y fría mano' (pp.111-12). On the one hand, the narrator implies that the gesture indicates that she is not afraid of him, the weight of her hand indicating that she is powerful and knows best. At the same time, however, such an action could constitute an attempt to console the moneylender in his grief. Despite her professed hatred for Torquemada, she continued to work for him after Doña Silvia's death and it is generally acknowledged that the boundaries between love and hatred are not clearly defined and regularly overlap. The parallel between the two situations also draws our attention to the presence of dichotomies in the novel, for instance Torquemada is both executioner (powerful) and victim (powerless).

Likewise, we might ponder the significance of Torquemada's use of physical actions and objects to assert his power. It could be contended that this conveys a degree of character weakness and reveals his lack of self-confidence. In Chapter 7 he uses the 'rosquilla' to express his dominance and assertiveness[25] and in Chapter 4, 'Enarboló el garrote, símbolo de su autoridad y de su mal genio' (p.43). The fact that a physical object, his stick, has to bear his weight ('apoyado con ambas manos en el bastón, cargaba sobre éste todo el peso del cuerpo, meciéndose' [p.46]) reinforces the idea that he is essentially weak.

Galdós was fascinated with medical theories, hygiene[26] and the artistic possibilities presented by illnesses. In his prologue to *Niñerías* (written by his close friend, the physician, Dr Manuel Tolosa Latour), Galdós wrote,

> El sentimiento de la Naturaleza, la observación y el amor a la Humanidad germinan en el alma del médico que ejerce con

[25] See Peter Bly, 'The Mysterious Disappearance of Torquemada's "Rosquilla"', *Romance Notes*, 18 (1977), 80-87.

> elevadas miras su profesión, y no pueden menos de producir una florescencia artística que se manifiesta con caracteres diversos.[27]

In *TH* there are graphic details of the human body's response to illness, including descriptions of Valentín as he suffers from meningitis (p.53) and Torquemada's fit, which has all the characteristics of the 'grand mal' strain of epilepsy, namely foaming at the mouth, uncontrolled kicking and involuntary self-harm (p.107). These descriptions were probably checked by Tolosa de Latour to ensure that they were medically accurate.[28]

Although body language is a more reliable means of deciphering essential truths about characters' personalities, there is also evidence of deceit and manipulation, insincerity and play-acting here. What happens with physical gestures is closely analogous to what happens with clothes, now widely recognised as significant forms of non-verbal communication. Sharing society's obsession with appearances, Galdós's characters recognise that clothes can enable them to gain others' respect and self-esteem:

> [Torquemada] se sentía, con la buena ropa, más persona que antes; hasta le salían mejores negocios, más amigos útiles y explotables. Pisaba más fuerte, tosía más recio, hablaba más alto y atrevíase á levantar el gallo en la tertulia del café, notándose con bríos para sustentar una opinión cualquiera, cuando antes, por efecto sin duda del mal pelaje y de su rutinaria afectación de pobreza, siempre era de la opinión de los demás. (pp.13-14)[29]

Strategies of speech and mannerism are closely integrated with sartorial changes, and to some degree flow from them. Galdós, however, implies that

---

[26] Thus Quevedito suggests that Valentín should get some fresh air, whilst Torquemada blames the 'miasmas' for Valentín's illness (p.36). See Teresa Fuentes Peris, *Galdós's Torquemada Novels: Waste and Profit in Nineteenth-Century Spain* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007).

[27] 'Galdós' Preliminary Sketches for *Torquemada y San Pedro*', *BHS*, 44 (1967), 16-27 (p.17).

[28] See Michael Stannard, *Galdós and Medicine* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2015). Weber has also noted that the sketches to *Torquemada y San Pedro* were probably preserved among letters to Galdós from Tolosa Latour.

[29] See also Terence Folley, 'Clothes and the Man: An Aspect of Benito Pérez Galdós' Method of Literary Characterization', *BHS*, 49 (1972), 30-39.

such efforts are superficial and too much importance is attributed to appearance and not enough to true character development. In a closely-related development, Torquemada tries to manipulate non-verbal communication to reinforce the desired effect of his words on his listeners. In Chapter 6 we read: '¡Isidora!....- exclamó D. Francisco, poniendo cara de regocijo, cosa en él muy desusada' (p.71). The use of 'poner cara de' reveals that he is a shallow actor.[30]

The use of language in *TH*, then, invites comment on various levels. Like many of his contemporaries, Galdós was dissatisfied with the political and literary scene in Spain, its lack of creativity and its propensity for imitation.[31] His active concern to reform language and literature can be seen not only in his adoption of a style which was quite different from others', but in his exposition of the language-related problems faced by his characters.

The characters' use of and response to language highlights Galdós's view of nineteenth-century society as a superficial environment which stifles people, failing to encourage them to be open-minded and sincere, and forcing them to attach undue value to appearances. On many occasions, language is not an effective vehicle for communication but an instrument for deceiving others and one which, to the detriment of many, leads to misinterpretations. It is noteworthy that it is not until the later part of *TH* that we find long passages of direct conversations between the characters, which highlights the serious problems in social communication.

Galdós's questioning of language is also relevant to his stance as a Realist. He exposes its artificiality and suggests the impossibility of finding the right word to express certain aspects of reality. Given his awareness of the problems associated with the written and spoken word, it is natural that he should have proceeded to explore another kind of language, body language, and develop an interest in the psychology of interpersonal behaviour, a means of exploring the hidden depths of humankind and reality, long before the subject received the theoretical attention associated with modern times. Even then, however, he shows that there is evidence of unreliability, as non-verbal

[30] It is repeated later: ' -¡Tres mil reales!- dijo el usurero poniendo la cara de duda reflexiva que para los casos de benevolencia tenía; cara que era ya en él como una fórmula dilatoria, de las que se usan en diplomacia.' (p.82).

communication can be employed to deceive others, rather than display one's true self.

Finally, his attitude to, and use of, language stimulates a process of regeneration in his readers. This is conveyed through his demonstration of the characters' problems and also through the process of reading itself. Readers are incited to be open-minded, to beware of taking things at face value, to appreciate the significance of perspective, to read between the lines, to question the identity and possible motives of speakers, and to accept the possibility that there can be various, sometimes radically different interpretations available. Language in *TH*, then, works powerfully in two contrasted ways. Galdós achieves an extraordinarily high degree of particularity – historical, psychological, contextual – in the language which he deploys. He also invites ways of reading it whose relevance extends beyond such particularities to confront some of the issues and uncertainties inherent in any of our human attempts to communicate, to make sense to and for one another.

---

[31] *Clarín* also lamented, '—¡Ay! nuestras medianías no saben más que imitar'. 'Revista literaria', *LEM*, 13 (January 1890), 193-216 (p.211).