

Galdos's Novel of the Historical Imagination: A Study of the Contemporary Novels (Liverpool Monographs in Hispanic Studies)

Peter A. Bly

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The Spanish writer Benito Pérez Galdós (1843-1920) was a prolific novelist, and ranks with Balzac and Dickens as a chronicler of nineteenth-century society. His 46 historical novels (the episodios nacionales) dealt with the major events of Spanish history in the first half of the nineteenth century. From about 1870 he began to publish contemporary social novels, and in 1881, with La desheredada, he inaugurated what he himself saw as a new style of writing. The novels from 1881 to 1915, his serie contemporánea, are the subject of this study. Professor Bly argues that in them Galdós created a special type of historical novel which, by drawing subtle parallels between fictional action and political events, allegorised the political history of the recent Spanish past. In the earlier novels of the series, the relationship between the fiction and its contemporary background has an allegorical dimension. Historical detail both provides a precise setting for the narrative, and indicates that the fiction represents the national reality, while the leading fictional characters symbolize public figures. The later novels, however, increasingly show disenchantment with Spanish politics, reflected in a diminishing use of historical material and in the emergence of characters who renounce social involvement in favour of the almost mystical pursuit of Christian values. In arguing for this approach to the serie contemporánea, Peter Bly offers perceptive interpretations of all the novels, but devotes particular attention to the masterpieces La de Bringas, Fortunata y Jacinta and Miau. Because the novels relate to the major political trends and events of the period, a brief historical survey of the years 1860-1910 is provided as an appendix.



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