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Résumé de l'article

Benito Pérez Galdós's Misericordia (1897) represents two opposing models of providing care for diseased, disabled, or degenerate subjects: custodial care aimed at controlling social deviance and caregiving that takes into account the needs of the care recipient. I propose that, through the caregiving model, the protagonist, Benina, establishes a powerful stance against medical and economic discourses that devalued the lives of marginal subjects. This analysis examines the relationship between the categories of disease, disability, and degeneration; the role of custodial care and caregiving in the nineteenth-century Spanish economy; and how both models respond to the possibility of contagion, as well as the political implications of these responses.

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ERIKA RODRÍGUEZ

Care and Cultural Exclusion in Restoration Spain: Transgressive Caregiving in Galdós's *Misericordia*

Misericordia *(1897) de Benito Pérez Galdós representa dos modelos opuestos de asistencia para sujetos enfermos, discapacitados o degenerados: la asistencia custodial cuyo objetivo es controlar las desviaciones sociales y el cuidado afectivo cuyo objetivo es tomar en cuenta las necesidades y preferencias del paciente. Este artículo propone que, a través del modelo de cuidado afectivo, la protagonista, Benina, establece una posición en contra de los discursos médicos y económicos que devalúan las vidas de los sujetos marginales. Se examinan las relaciones entre las categorías de enfermedad, discapacidad y degeneración; el papel de la asistencia custodial y el cuidado afectivo en la economía finisecular; y la manera en que ambos modelos responden a la posibilidad de una enfermedad contagiosa, tanto como las implicaciones políticas de estas contestaciones.*

Palabras clave: *discapacidad, degeneración, asistencia, contagio, caridad*

Benito Pérez Galdós's Misericordia *(1897) represents two opposing models of providing care for diseased, disabled, or degenerate subjects: custodial care aimed at controlling social deviance and caregiving that takes into account the needs of the care recipient. I propose that, through the caregiving model, the protagonist, Benina, establishes a powerful stance against medical and economic discourses that devalued the lives of marginal subjects. This analysis examines the relationship between the categories of disease, disability, and degeneration; the role of custodial care and caregiving in the nineteenth-century Spanish economy; and how both models respond to the possibility of contagion, as well as the political implications of these responses.*

Keywords: *disability, degeneration, contagion, care, charity*

Benito Pérez Galdós's *Misericordia* (1897) opens with a detailed representation of beggars outside the church of San Sebastián in the winter. While many of Galdós's novels deal with the working class, *Misericordia* is the only one of his works that represents the social structure, living conditions, and practices of what may be termed the begging class. By

representing an assembly of bodies in a public space, Galdós draws attention to the bodily demands (the need for shelter, food, medicine) that fall outside the domestic sphere. At the time the novel was written, increased urban poverty and the consolidation of bourgeois conceptualizations of the nuclear family raised the question of who would care for subjects who fell outside legal and blood relations (the elderly, orphaned children, and people with illnesses or disabilities).[1] The social question, therefore, haunted the perimeter of the family as an institution of control: who is responsible for the unproductive members of a population?

Misericordia picks up this debate by contrasting the compassionate nature of the elderly beggar Benina with the often-violent forms of institutional and performative charity. Through her mendicancy, Benina provides food and medicine to members of the impoverished middle class, including her employer, Doña Paca, as well as other beggars, such as Almudena, her blind Jewish Moroccan friend. Conversely, for Don Romualdo, a priest in charge of a charitable asylum for the elderly,[2] and Juliana, Doña Paca's daughter-in-law, charity is a means of maintaining order. Drawing on language from disability studies, we may think of this contrast as *caregiving/caring labor* and *custodial care*. Benina's attention to Doña Paca and Almudena's physical and emotional states when they are ill constitutes caregiving, which takes into account the needs and preferences of each care recipient.

Conversely, "Misericordia," the asylum run by the priest Don Romualdo, exemplifies custodial care in that its primary aim is the regulation or removal of dependency from the public space. While I draw from feminist disability studies because it is a field that has centered on the relations of power between caregiver and care receiver,[3] critiques of the function of custodial care are not anachronistic to nineteenth-century Spain. The difference in the objectives and practices of caregiving and custodial care is evident, for instance, in Concepción Arenal's criticisms of the prison-like charitable asylums, about which she wrote "El bello ideal de la caridad es que no haya dolores; el de la Beneficencia que no se vean. Quita, pues, al pobre de la vista del público" (19).

Scholars who have paid particular attention to the novel's moral and economic worldview alternately celebrate Benina's moral success or conclude that her financial ruin cautions against excessive generosity.[4] A reading from the perspective of disability studies extends these claims by drawing out the political implications of Benina's caregiving to characters with diseases and disabilities. As I hope it will become clear over the course of this article, Benina's caregiving is a creative, and even transgressive act. By valuing the lives of people who are systemically undervalued by medical,

ethnographic, and economic discourses, Benina challenges the reader to probe established norms about the act of caring for and about others. This essay is comprised of three main sections. The first examines the interlocking ideas of disease, disability, and degeneration in *fin-de-siglo,* Spain.[5] From there, I turn to the rhetoric of disease and degeneration in custodial care and the economic aspects of caregiving. This section elaborates on how *Misericordia* represents custodial care as defined by a distance between the custodian and the care recipient, while caregiving is rooted in intimacy and interdependence. The final section focuses on how both models of care approach issues of disease and contagion, using Almudena's leprosy to interrogate imperial and domestic anxieties about racial proximity.

DISABILITY, DISEASE, AND DEGENERATION[6]

In nineteenth-century Spain, the category of *impedido* or *inválido* was generally thought of as a stable bodily condition, whereas the category of *enfermo* was viewed as an alteration in health, which could be chronic or acute.[7] This distinction points to what disability studies scholar Susan Wendell refers to as people who are "healthy disabled" and "unhealthy disabled" – that is, the idea that a person could be disabled but not require medical attention (19). Though the categories of healthy and unhealthy disabled are helpful, Wendell notes various points of overlap: persons with impairments may become ill, illnesses may cause disabilities, and chronic illnesses in many ways function as impairments (19-21).

In *Misericordia*, Doña Paca and Almudena illustrate these distinctions and slippages between disability and disease. At the beginning of the novel, Benina struggles to collect money to buy medicine for Doña Paca, who suffers from persistent headaches, blurred sight, and weakness in her legs. Though the novel does not specify an etiological cause for her distress, we can contrast her chronic discomfort with Almudena's status as a healthy disabled character. No sooner is Almudena introduced than Benina compliments his resourcefulness and self-reliance, noting the ease and precision with which he can thread a needle and sew his clothes. Not only can Almudena take care of himself, but he also helps Benina acquire the money to buy medicine for Doña Paca, provocatively reversing the expected direction of the charity. In short, while Doña Paca habitually requires medical care, Almudena does not. However, when Benina and Almudena are arrested for begging, Almudena develops skin sores and fever in the municipal asylum. When he becomes an unhealthy disabled person, Almudena requires care and assistance, which Benina provides. One might expect that a disability studies approach to *Misericordia* would focus on

Almudena's blindness. However, for an analysis of caregiving, his visual impairment is only significant insofar as its intersection with the general pathologization of beggars puts him in a more vulnerable position when he falls ill. For this reason, this article focuses on the treatment of pathologized members of the begging class in both models of care before focusing on Almudena's illness as a site of negotiating the political values in caregiving and custodial care.

Beyond the distinctions and slippages between disability and disease, Ann Laura Stoler's concept of "interior frontiers" provides essential insights to understand the broad pathologization of non-productivity in the lower-classes. Ann Laura Stoler uses the concept of "interior frontiers" to indicate how "exclusionary cultural principles" within a nation were constructed in dialogue with colonial and racial boundaries (130-4). In the nineteenth-century Spanish context relationship between interior and exterior frontiers is evident in the racial discussions that pathologized the lower-class population, debates which were rooted in anxieties about the failed liberal revolution and the loss of empire.[8] For example, *La mala vida* (1901), by sociologist Constancio Bernaldo de Quirós, defines a bad life as one led by criminals, prostitutes, and beggars, and uses ethnographic rhetoric to attribute these lifestyles among adults to a "psicología primitiva" (with reference to the figure of the "judío errante") or to one of several "estados patológicos degenerativos" (17-18). Criminologist Rafael Salillas likewise tethered degeneration to mendicancy by explaining that in his view, "degeneración … es perder las condiciones de sustentación económica … perder las condiciones de estabilidad social" (398). A framework of social degeneration, then, denied the possibility of health or able-bodiedness among the begging class. Given how health and productivity were woven together as an interior frontier that cast out and pathologized mendicants, we can see how Benina, Almudena, and Doña Paca are, in some ways, already seen as diseased.[9]

As Teresa Fuentes Peris has shown, the pathologization of non-productive subjects was driven by the rise of utilitarianism in Spain. In her analysis of the utilitarian ethic in the nineteenth century, she traces the uses of economic discourse to devalue non-productive lives. Drawing together examples as varied as politician Rafael María de Labra's celebration of "iniciativa individual" (Fuentes Peris 19) and hygienist Angel Fernández-Caro's lamentation of the loss of human capital through disease (56), Fuentes Peris convincingly demonstrates how profit, efficiency, and self-discipline characterized the utilitarian ethos of nineteenth-century Spain. The economic commentary that tied human value to profit and utility is also evident in the work of Salillas, who compares the social uselessness of

beggars to that of people with physical impairments, arguing that, because they were dependent on others, "el pordiosero … es tan inútil como el defectuoso por carencia de una o varias extremidades, por parálisis, por ceguera. Es más defectuoso todavía, porque es siempre un inválido de la voluntad" (414). Bernaldo de Quirós expounds on this argument, adding that any impairment that prevents work, whether congenital or acquired, "reduce su individualidad" and leads to a "metamorphosis regresiva" (29). As these passages make clear, the devaluation of people who lack money and that of people who lack able-bodiedness is contingent on an ethos of productivity and independence that renders physical impairments as a form of poverty and poverty as a biological flaw.

Given the intersections between disability, disease, and degeneration, disability studies concepts are useful in analyzing representations of stigmatized bodily characteristics, even when they fall outside the definition of disability and into the parameters of disease. The overlap between these categories demands an interrogation of cultural norms in terms of health, ability, class, and race. However, this is not to collapse or conflate the distinct social debates surrounding specific illnesses or impairments. As the subjects of Benina's care, Almudena and Doña Paca, illustrate different examples of subjects who fail to adapt to the burgeoning capitalist society of Madrid, and Almudena's illness, in particular, illustrates the intersection of pathologization with racial and colonial boundaries.

Doña Paca's failing finances, nervous attacks, and her children's poor health, as well as their suicidal and criminal tendencies, indicate that she is a degenerate subject of the faltering upper class. Once the wealthy wife of a quartermaster general, Doña Paca's need for assistance, pushes her into the category of a "parásito social… aquél ser que sin base sustentadora y sin actividad apropiada para formársela, vive de los recursos sustentadores de otro ser" (Salillas 413). Nevertheless, if Doña Paca is a "parásito social," she is, in many ways, an invisible one. Although she lives off Benina's mendicancy, she is unaware that she does so. Benina saves her from shame by making up stories about a generous priest named Don Romualdo, who provides from them. Doña Paca is never at risk of being incarcerated for begging, as Benina and Almudena later are. In fact, at the end of the novel, she receives a significant inheritance, and – although her health does not improve – her class status does, and she is lifted from the pathologization of *parasitismo*.

Despite their shared dependency on the charity of others, Almudena's trajectory of health and social stigma differs significantly from that of Doña Paca. Almudena satisfies Salilla's definition of a "parásito social" but, because he is blind, Almudena is an acceptable subject for charity, "cuyo

parasitismo, es, no sólo tolerable sino obligado," as Bernaldo de Quirós explains (28). Despite this classification, Bernaldo de Quirós promoted the idea that all beggars, whether disabled or not, were in the process of continual degeneration, losing their energy and individuality (29). Moreover, because mendicants were only permitted to request charity within the jurisdiction of their birthplace (Arenal 92), Almudena's identity as an immigrant puts his tentative acceptability in question. Whereas Doña Paca's racially unmarked (white) European body and former class standing enable her to return to a non-pathologized position, the interior frontiers that cast Almudena out of the social body only intensify after he contracts a disease believed to be leprosy. One of the characteristics that differentiates disability from disease is the possibility of contagion.[10] This fear of contact and contraction, invasion and intimacy, demonstrates the points of suture between interior and exterior frontiers, as we will see in the third section.

The multiplicities of Almudena and Doña Paca's social devaluation are crucial to understanding Benina's caregiving as politically transgressive. Through acts of caregiving, Benina values Almudena and Doña Paca's lives. By valuing that which is devalued through sociological, medical, and anthropological discourses, she rejects the authority and conclusions of those discourses. Conversely, the priority of removing the appearance of dependency in custodial care upholds the notion that failures to be self-reliant should be private, and in doing so, reinforces an ethos of individuality and independence as the cornerstone to a well-ordered and healthy society.

CUSTODIAL CARE, CAREGIVING, AND INTERDEPENDENCE

Despite the differences between custodial care and caregiving, the novel does not immediately frame the values of these two models of care as being at odds. Characters who view Benina's mendicancy as a problem (rather than as an economic decision to care for her friends) advise her to seek help at Don Romualdo's asylum for the elderly poor. Furthermore, because Benina had invented stories about a generous priest named Romualdo to conceal her begging from Doña Paca, other characters' encounters with Don Romualdo seem to imply that Benina has unwittingly and miraculously brought her fictional character to life, which has invited scholarly speculation about their shared values.[11] However, a reading that distinguishes between caregiving and custodial care complicates the idea that Don Romualdo represents an extension of Benina's principles. Both Benina and Romualdo are generous in the administration of their resources and attempt to help sectors of the lower class make ends meet. However, in his management of custodial care, Romualdo disengages from the lived

realities of institutionalized subjects and illustrates the oppressive manifestations of order and charity in custodial care.

The novel invites criticism of the motivation and management of Don Romualdo's custodial institution through the sudden revelation that Don Romualdo disdains the beggars who seek help in his asylum. Explaining his position as owner and administrator of the Casa de Misericordia, Don Romualdo mentions that he is constantly accosted by "mendigos importunos" (Galdós, *Misericordia* 269) hoping to be taken in. He adds, "Podríamos creer … que es nuestro país inmensa gusanera de pobres y que debemos hacer de la nación un Asilo sin fin, donde quepamos todos … Al paso que vamos pronto seremos el Hospicio más grande de Europa" (269). Don Romualdo's dehumanizing phrase "gusanera de pobres" aligns him and the Casa de Misericordia with the new conceptualization of the poor as a threat to social health. By calling for a nation-wide asylum or hospice, Don Romualdo echoes the fears José María Escuder articulated in his medico-legal texts of a nation overrun by degeneration and disorder. In *Locos lúcidos* (1883), Escuder writes, "la civilización de una nación está en razón directa al número de manicomios ... España es el país clásico de locos" (10). Though Don Romualdo manages a poorhouse, rather than one of the psychiatric institutions to which Escuder refers, both custodial institutions share the regulatory function of maintaining the social order by removing unproductive subjects from the public space.

The relationship Don Romualdo draws between custodial enclosures and society resonates with Galdós's earlier novels: *La desheredada* (1881) refers to the asylum Leganés as a theoretical city (72) and to Madrid as "un manicomio suelto" (239), while *Fortunata y Jacinta* offers sequential chapters set in and around a convent entitled "Las Micaelas por dentro" and "Las Micaelas por fuera," signaling the continued surveillance and control exercised on the protagonist's body.[12] If, as Liana Ewald has written, *La desheredada*'s representations of confinement serve as sites of exploration for Galdós's growing concerns over the new societal order of bourgeoisie values, his frustration manifests more fully over a decade later in *Misericordia*. While both *La desheredada* and *Fortunata y Jacinta* describe an existing social reality in which the proliferation of disciplinary technologies creates a carceral archipelago, in *Misericordia*, Don Romualdo's view of a nation-asylum appears more explicitly threatening because it is not a description, but a proposal to extend technologies of surveillance and intervention.

The cruelty of Don Romualdo's hyperbolic call for mass-institutionalization is amplified when it coincides with Benina's forceful imprisonment in the municipal asylum. The state in which she and

Almudena emerge from it – filthy, sick, lice-ridden, starving – denounces the failure of the institution as a caretaking model. The description of it as an establishment that "más parece mazmorra que hospicio" (Galdós, *Misericordia* 294) recasts Romualdo's desire to transform the whole country into an asylum as an idea that threatens public welfare as well as freedom. The carceral conditions of charitable asylums were a topic of public concern, as demonstrated by Concepción Arenal's criticism of custodial institutions in *El pauperismo* (1879), which explains that almshouses were unappealing to people who needed them because "*socorro*" and "*reclusión*" had become synonymous (394). The distinction between how Benina and Don Romualdo care for others belies the generosity that seemingly connects the two characters and emphasizes the intimacy of Benina's labor of care.

In contrast to the custodial care model that establishes the caregiver's power over the care receiver, Benina's model of caregiving affirms Almudena's and Doña Paca's agency over their care management and cultivates relationships of interdependence or mutuality. Through their approaches to disability, feminist philosophers working in legal and political theory, such as Eva Kittay, Martha Nussbaum, and Kathryn Abrams, have argued for an acknowledgment of interdependence – the idea that everyone is dependent to some degree on others.[13] Recognizing interdependence challenges the idealization of independence that has often been used to stigmatize people who require assistance or care.[14] Benina's caregiving is rooted in recognition of interdependence, both in her mendicancy and in her relationships with the people for whom she cares. Moreover, although Benina is occasionally cast in a maternal role with other characters, she does not engage in the paternalistic practices of custodial care that seek to render care-receivers passive. This is what makes her model of care transgressive: it eschews the individualist values of self-interest and control present in custodial approaches. Rather than use the inequities of dependency to proclaim her superiority as an "independent" person or to reify class distinctions through segregation and charity, she takes her friends' needs as the starting point for her caring labor as "ninguna necesidad de las personas sometidas a su cuidado se le olvidaba" (Galdós, *Misericordia* 23). Benina's care practices reject the values of individuality and utilitarianism through her decision to care for people who will not contribute to a productive economy and by prioritizing the dignity and agency of her care recipients.

Interconnectedness, however, does not in itself challenge hierarchical structures. In fact, interdependence in a network of unequal relationships often facilitates exploitation.[15] Galdós's earlier novels *Tormento* (1884) and *Tristana* (1892) reveal his interest in exploring the gendered power

dynamics of care through the emotional abuses Amparo suffers as a caregiver, and Tristana suffers as a care recipient. In both of these novels, an impoverished woman finds herself indebted to a wealthy older man who engages in surveillance and abuse as a reminder of the gender and class power he holds over her. Although *Misericordia* also depicts the potential for abuse in care relationships, Benina's relationships deviate from the previous examples in that they also illustrate positive, mutual dependence. Benina ends up caring for Doña Paca because she finds herself too emotionally attached to leave Doña Paca's children, who view her as a mother (Galdós, *Misericordia* 105–6). In her relationship with Almudena, Benina is initially dependent on him, as she asks for financial help at the beginning of the novel, and when she later cares for him, indicates that she loves him as a son (298). As a caregiver, Benina becomes dependent on the people to whom she provides care as she develops kinship ties she would not have had otherwise.

Conversely, the two instances of abuse or exploitation in Benina's interdependent relationships with Almudena and Doña Paca arise from a desire to reassert power relationships across gender and class, just as they do in *Tormento* and *Tristana*. When Almudena, who is initially in love with Benina, believes that she is romantically involved with another man, he attempts to beat her. As the novel progresses and she becomes his caregiver, he grows content to enjoy the non-erotic intimacy of their friendship. The trajectory of their relationship, therefore, moves from one in which heteronormative jealousy and violence are replaced by appreciation beyond romantic structures. In Benina's relationship with Doña Paca, the trajectory from abuse to appreciation appears reversed. While Doña Paca initially respects Benina's household management (217) and worries about her in her absence (258), no sooner is her family fortune restored than she forgets Benina's friendship and service (260). Benina's expulsion from the family home following years of friendship and unpaid caregiving is undeniably exploitative and functions to reify the familial divisions and class differences that had become muddled in Doña Paca's time of need. The trajectories of both relationships demonstrate that abuse and exploitation reproduce oppressive hierarchies while interdependencies that cultivate nurturance function as a foundation to challenge the inequities of power structures across race, gender, and class.

Beyond the transgressive function of nurturing interdependent relationships, Benina's decision to care for people who are not family or children challenges familial and capitalist structures in two ways: first, by acknowledging dependency outside the privacy of the nuclear family home, and secondly by prolonging the lives of people who are not productive.

Feminist political philosophers Martha Fineman and Diemut Grace Bubeck explain that capitalist values and familial constructions led to the stigmatization of caring labor in ways that are broadly applicable to capitalist societies with gender inequities, including turn-of-the-century Spain. As Bridget Aldaraca and Catherine Jagoe have demonstrated, the gendered separation of public and private spheres brought about by the development of the urban workplace meant that the ideal woman was "defined not ontologically, not functionally but territorially, by the space which she occupies" (Aldaraca 27). Her exclusion from "the public" and subsequently from citizenship was inseparable from that "special privilege … to create and sustain the psychic space of the home," which was not considered labor precisely because it did not occur in the public sphere of exchange and consequently led to the "idealization of female invisibility" (Jagoe 20, 27). Women, of course, were more active in political and commercial matters than the vision of the *ángel del hogar* would suggest, but the myth of the angel as a regulatory fiction was nevertheless significant in the construction of cultural values.[16] As Fineman explains, the political role of the family is to uphold "the myth that autonomy and independence can be attained," a myth that condemns recognition of dependency, such as caregiving (215). Benina's open acknowledgment of her economic dependency by begging and being in the streets is (as Doña Paca indicates) indecorous. However, it is no less indecorous than her kinship ties with Doña Paca, which upend the privatization of dependency through the family.

Fineman and Bubeck's emphasis on the necessity of caretaking for the continuation of society (Fineman 215; Bubeck 174) draws our attention to another aspect of social deviance in Benina's caregiving: while caring for a child may be socially necessary, Benina's care receivers may easily be considered drains on society's resources. Quirós distinguishes between "el parasitismo normal y el anormal," defining the former as the dependence children have on adults and the latter as a dependency that continues into adulthood (28). Benina's use of her money to care for adults undermines the expectation of individualism and independence that upholds the utilitarian ethos. Nevertheless, her rejection of utilitarian discourses goes beyond this: In keeping Doña Paca and Almudena alive, Benina rejects the implication that an economically non-productive life is a wasted life. In this way, she deviates from discourses on social progress by valuing pathologized and dependent subjects, not as an act of charity, but for their own sake and on their terms.[17]

The development of Almudena's illness contributes to a crucial turning point in the novel. He contracts the disease while he and Benina are incarcerated in the Madrid municipal asylum. During that time, Don Romualdo informs Doña Paca and her family that they have received a large inheritance from a distant family member. When Benina leaves the asylum with an ailing Almudena, she soon finds she is no longer welcome in Doña Paca's home. With the restoration of Doña Paca's family fortune, her daughter-in-law, Juliana (a successful participant in the new economy), is the first to bolster the family's return to the upper-middle class, and the first to be repulsed by Almudena and suggest he return to his country. Through these interactions, Juliana replicates the values of custodial care Don Romualdo had expressed earlier in the novel, tying them more concretely to the middle-class norms of polite society in Spain. In this sense, Almudena's illness and its possible contagion become a site of exploration for the relationship between national identity and models of care.

Although it is clear that Almudena contracted the disease due to the living conditions of the Madrid municipal asylum, Juliana is quick to diagnose it as leprosy and frame it as an African disease, saying that she knew another Moroccan with leprosy and that Almudena should go back to his country. This instance of dramatic irony frames Juliana's assessment as an example of the potential inaccuracies and ethical failures of the bourgeois need for classification.[18] At the end of the novel, Benina's ability to cure Almudena can be considered a miracle, or it can suggest that Almudena never had leprosy. Regardless of our doubts over Juliana's diagnosis, an analysis of how Almudena's skin is read or misread demands a consideration of the contemporary conversations on leprosy. Leprosy had first been introduced into Europe in the Middle Ages, but the pandemic in the last decade of the nineteenth century, combined with medical and institutional advances, led to a discussion on contagion and control (Bernabeu and Ballester 410–12). Leprosy had never been entirely eradicated from Spain, and yet, throughout most of Europe, it was seen as a distinctly foreign illness, and one that was highly contagious and incurable. Despite the centuries of leprosy in Europe, medical doctors continued to emphasize its origins in "los ardientes climas de la Arabia, de la Siria y del Egipto; desde cuyo último país acompañó sin duda en su peregrinación á los hebreos" (Méndez Álvaro 7). Ethnographic studies too insisted on the "Disposicion de razas de climas cálidos a la lepra" (Guallart y Beguer 14-15). In this context, Almudena's leprosy emphasizes his position as a racial Other and poses a particular threat to the Spanish bourgeoisie (the class to which Juliana ascends while he contracts the illness).

The moral rhetoric surrounding leprosy further complicates the representational possibilities of Almudena's disease. In their analysis of leprosy in Spain in the final decade of the nineteenth century, social historians Josep Bernabeu-Mestre and Teresa Ballester-Artigues have argued that as philanthropic institutions attempted to monopolize the care of leprosy patients, their rhetorical use of the illness as a parable imbued it with moral implications. In comparing literal leprosy with the "leprosy of the soul," religious invective inadvertently collapsed the distinction, and leprosy came to symbolize "moral defects and consequences entailed by lack of respect for the prevailing social values" (Bernabeu and Ballester 414). From the beginning of the novel, Almudena's morality is already at odds with conventional Spanish Catholicism because of his Jewish faith and with the bourgeois utilitarian work ethic because of his mendicancy. After contracting a skin disease, these aspects of his identity become inseparable from his racialization. The conflation of racialized Otherness and contagious illness – that is, the rendering of race as contractible – is reminiscent of the expulsions of Jews and Moriscos during the first wave of Spanish nation-building (1492–1614). Jews who had converted to Christianity were allowed to remain in Spain "[protected] from contamination by those who insisted on retaining their Jewish faith," as were Morisco children under the age of five because they had not yet been contaminated by their families and communities (Martin-Márquez 15). As Susan Martin-Márquez argues, both of these measures complicate the idea of blood purity and suggest that "although race can be passed on from generation to generation through blood, close physical and even cultural contact may also produce an unredeemable contagion of the body politic" (15). Benina's loyalty to Almudena signals this slippage between disease and race, as Juliana is afraid of contracting leprosy through Benina despite her lack of symptoms.

While the expulsion of Benina and Almudena from Doña Paca's home echoes the anxieties of Spanish identity built on racial and religious exclusion from the first wave of nation-building, it also resonates with contemporary international efforts of segregation implemented to stop the spread of leprosy. The First International Leprosy Conference, held in Berlin six months after Galdós wrote *Misericordia*, concluded that the best way to minimize contagion was through segregation – both in terms of isolating symptomatic subjects and curtailing immigration.[19] Juliana's response to Almudena's illness reveals a connection between the racial exclusion of Spanish nation-building and the state's enforced isolation and restriction of migration to minimize the spread of disease. As Fuentes points out, Galdós had taken a firm stance against the isolationist treatment of lepers over a decade before the International Leprosy Conference by criticizing "the use

of hygiene as a political weapon" (165). Considering the co-construction of race and disability, feminist disability studies scholar Nirmala Erevelles argues that internal colonization, the inward application of the technologies of observation and control carried out in projects of empire, was exercised in the government interventions that categorized, sterilized, institutionalized, and euthanized people with disabilities (121–44). Although *Misericordia* does not explore the technologies of control that were tested out in Spanish colonies, Juliana's reaction to Almudena reveals Galdós's awareness that fear of contagion and desire for order underlie national expulsions based on race, religion, and health. Rather than take Almudena to the hospital as her husband suggests, Juliana responds, "más cuenta le tiene … mandarle para su tierra" (Galdós, *Misericordia* 303) – a statement that illustrates the ease with which the impulse to institutionalize can pivot from internal to international social control through the racialization of disability and destabilization of race.

Juliana's answer to Almudena's disease, however, is hardly unexpected. From a utilitarian perspective, the consecration of the bourgeois family requires the segregation of potentially contagious subjects.[20] Don Romualdo's news that Doña Paca has received an inheritance from a forgotten family member effectively leads to Benina and Almudena's expulsion from Doña Paca's household, both events marking the restoration of the family's bourgeois order by defining kinship through bloodline and marriage. The mutual fortification of the categories of class and kinship is exemplified by an exchange in which Benina asks why Doña Paca was willing to take in Frasquito Ponte, her husband's cousin's brother-in-law, when he fell ill but refuses to extend the same hospitality to Almudena. Doña Paca flounders through an excuse about not having enough space to accommodate the "moro de los dátiles," but the reason is clearly that, although Frasquito Ponte is a very distant and impoverished member of the family, she harbors memories of his days of wealth and still remembers him as a "caballero de principios" commensurate with her own class (122). Ponte is impoverished, but, like Doña Paca, his status as a well-educated white European places his social value above that of Almudena and makes him a more culturally acceptable recipient of Doña Paca's care. Doña Paca advises Benina to send Almudena to Don Romualdo's asylum, adding, "que lo mire como cosa mía … ¡ay, no sé lo que digo! ... como cosa tuya y tan tuya…" (298). Her desire to wash her hands of the issue by emphasizing that Almudena is only Benina's problem is also a desire to create distance between herself and Benina and to establish an interior frontier between them.

While the threat of contagion cements and justifies the quickly growing separation between Benina and Doña Paca, Juliana had effected this shift in

their relationship several chapters earlier when she encouraged Paca to take on a younger and more productive servant, adding that Benina "no le sirve a usted para nada" (288). Attempting to defend Benina as her friend rather than her servant, Paca makes an appeal about Benina's moral worth (rather than her usefulness) in exclaiming, "¡Ay! ... Pero es muy buena la Nina!" (288). Within Juliana's framework of utilitarian ethics, however, Benina's goodness and relative uselessness do not make her family, but instead, deem her one of the deserving poor. Juliana responds enthusiastically, "debemos socorrerla … darle de comer" (288), thereby articulating and establishing a social divide that turns Paca's capacity to help Benina into a classist affirmation of difference, rather than an intimate act of caregiving. It is perhaps this practical perspective on decorum that allows Paca to so quickly shift from telling Benina "no te abandonaré nunca" (298) to the recommendation that she and Almudena join Romualdo's institution because there is not enough room and Almudena's filth will affect her stomach and nerves (298), even before Juliana claims he is contagious. Utilitarianism, framed as practicality, motivates the devaluation of Almudena's life and the change in Benina's position from family-member to former servant.

Having suffered this rejection from Paca, Benina returns to Almudena, with whom she continues to cultivate a caring friendship for the remainder of the novel. Although Almudena had professed his love and jealousy for Benina previously, on their way to the hospital Almudena indicates his satisfaction with a non-erotic friendship, saying, "estar tigo *contentado* ... y si no *quierer* tú casar *migo*, ser tú *madra* mía, y yo niño tuyo *bunito*" (310). In *Halma* (1895), often read alongside *Misericordia* as one of Galdós's spiritual novels, the eponymous wealthy widow attempts to establish an asylum in the country but finds that state interests continue to manipulate her charitable efforts. In the end, she succeeds in establishing her own mode of charity, but only by marrying her cousin, one of the men under her care at the asylum. Though the novel concludes with "an unconventional family of adult children" (Ewald, "La sociedad" 283), Ewald notes that, by marrying, "Halma exchanges subservience to the State in matters related to her *asilo* for the freedom to rule her charitable refuge as she wishes from within the bonds of matrimony" (282). The vision of caregiving between Benina and Almudena references a maternal and marital relationship but ultimately finds happiness without the heteronormative framework of romance or reproduction. Through the development of their relationship, *Misericordia* expands on *Halma*'s model of care by rejecting the necessity of marriage ties to justify caregiving. Instead, the consolidation of the bourgeois family that

takes place at the end of *Misericordia*, resulting in Benina and Almudena's expulsion, reveals the damaging effects of narrow definitions of kinship.

Benina and Almudena's friendship also undercuts traditional gendered representations of metropole and colony. As Mary Coffey has noted, Galdós's novels often "[altered] ... the pattern of a dominant patriarchal metropolis and the feminized, submissive colony to suggest new ways of interpreting the consequences of Spanish imperial history" (168). Coffey's analysis of gendered colonial tropes in the "foundational fictions" of the second series of *Episodios nacionales* (1875–1879) and *El caballero encantado* (1909) provides a useful counterpoint to *Misericordia*.[21] She demonstrates that the *Episodios* promote a domestic focus as a response to imperial loss by encouraging the reader to read imperial politics through metaphors of gender, romance, and reproduction. *El caballero encantado* repeats this trope, depicting the Spanish protagonist's romance with a Colombian heiress who is capable and independent, but ultimately reduced to her female biology as she is charged with "raising the next generation of panhispanic leaders" (Coffey 180). Through Benina and Almudena, *Misericordia* offers a vision of colonial relations that avoids the formulation of metropole-as-husband and colony-as-wife, and, subsequently, imagines a relationship that does not center the problems of property and reproduction attached to the colonial marriage trope. Far from being a domestic romance that reflects national and colonial interests, the structure of *Misericordia* speaks to the idea of the nation as a waning empire at a time of extreme urban poverty in the metropole. By drawing together a character marginalized by an interior frontier (Benina) and one marginalized by an exterior frontier (Almudena), Galdós reorients the power relations between capital and colony to show that marginal subjects from the capital and those from the colony are both subject to imperial technologies of control.

Rather than suggest a renewed domestic focus as the second series of *Episodios* do, *Misericordia* moves in the opposite direction: Benina's continued relationship with Almudena enables her to disengage from the ingratitude of Spanish utilitarianism that prevents the acknowledgment and valuation of interdependence and caregiving. As Sara Schyfter has noted, Almudena shares in some aspects of Benina's standards of care, for instance, by "dispensing charity toward equals" (91). By contrast, as Almudena declares, Juliana's ingratitude is a microcosm of the ingratitude (that is, the devaluation of care) of the nation as a whole. Beyond being a "crisis of personal identity" for Benina and Almudena or a "crisis of social authority" within Madrid (Gold, "Outsider Art" 143), the protagonists' homelessness is a more literal depiction of what Lisa Surwillo observes in Galdós's earlier

work: "If Madrid is not home for the nation's subjects, then the familial structure around the *madre patria* is false" (83).

Benina had previously rejected Almudena's invitations to go to Morocco or Jerusalem because she perceived them as less civilized than Spain, but after being disowned by Paca and Juliana, she accepts. Collapsing the moral distinctions Benina had assumed existed between Spain and the Near East, she declares: "se llega de una parte del mundo a otra, y ... sacamos la certeza de que todo es lo mismo, y que las partes del mundo son, un suponer, como el mundo en junto; quiere decirse, que en donde quiera que vivan los hombres, o verbigracia, mujeres, habrá ingratitud, egoísmo, y unos que manden a los otros y les cojan la voluntad" (Galdós, *Misericordia* 310). Benina's criticism of the ingratitude, egoism, and suppression of agency takes aim at the devaluation of her caregiving, the utilitarian ethic that prioritizes wealth over extended kinships, and the loss of agency in custodial care – all of which Galdós posits as national problems.

Misericordia connects the restoration of the nuclear family with Benina's loss of faith in the superiority of Spanish civilization over that of Northern Africa and the Near East, which concomitantly posits her caregiving as a challenge to nationalist discourses on progress. In *fin-de-siglo* Spain, as elsewhere in Europe, progress was defined through the interrelated projects of scientific advancement, social order, and empire. As Campos, Martínez, and Huertas demonstrate, scientists who focused on degeneration were seen as the embodiment of progress precisely because they were expected to bring about social order through public hygiene (6, 91). Alongside European debates on race and social Darwinism, the question of Spain's degeneration incited the need to assert the superiority of the Spanish race through imperial expansion (Álvarez Junco 503). That is to say, scientists and politicians reified interior and exterior frontiers in the name of "el progreso, educando, elevando, perfeccionando al hombre" (Cánovas, qtd. in Álvarez Junco 503). Benina's caregiving challenges the scientific logic of degeneration and anthropological racial theories that bolstered both interior frontiers against poor Europeans and racial Others and external frontiers that cast Africa as a place to be colonized and "civilized." By rejecting custodial care, her caregiving eschews the application of scientific categorizations and disciplinary measures meant to effect social order and affirm Spanish superiority.

Benina's caregiving is not productive in a capitalist sense. It is a creative act that can challenge the racial and economic hierarchies that construct some lives as more valuable than others. Like the marginal subjects Akiko Tsuchiya has examined, Benina has "a productive role, allowing us to imagine identities that have the potential to challenge and redefine

established norms" (27). By depicting theories of degeneration and the economic laws of utilitarianism as flawed and violent social constructs, *Misericordia* creates the space for a new set of values to construct a new social reality – namely Benina's creation of a discourse that values the lives of Almudena and other marginal subjects. Through Benina, Galdós not only questions the values of nation-building that give rise to the inhumane treatment of marginal subjects but ultimately invites us to desire a society in which all people are cared for and in which care is rewarded.

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NOTES

1. For an analysis on how transformations of the family structure in nineteenth-century Europe impacted the social treatment of impaired subjects, see the chapter entitled "The Classical Centuries" in Henri-Jacques Stiker's *A History of Disability.* Speaking specifically to the Spanish context, Pilar Muñoz López has written about the family's responsibility toward marginalized and less productive relatives in *Sangre, amor e interés*, particularly chapters 9 and 10. Adrian Shubert's *Historia Social de España* briefly outlines the social efforts to strengthen family ties among the poor and to establish poorhouses that emphasized work ethic (78-82). Mariano Esteban de Vega discusses the questions and attempted solutions surrounding the social question during the Spanish Restoration in "La asistencia liberal española."
2. In English these establishments were referred to as "almshouses," "poorhouses," or "poor asylums." I refer to the Casa de Misericordia as an asylum to preserve its resonances with the use of "asilo" in the original text, particularly as it echoes with the "asilo municipal" in which Benita and Almudena are detained in chapter 31. Additionally, this term more clearly connects to the topics of care and policing as it evokes notions of seeking or providing asylum.
3. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's article "Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory" named feminist disability studies as an academic field of inquiry and indicated ways in which feminist scholarship and disability scholarship could be put in conversation to "investigate how culture saturates the particularities of bodies with meanings and probes the consequences of those meanings" (3). In my article, I use work from feminist disability scholars (particularly the concept of interdependence in the second section), and I put feminist political philosophy on caring labor (specifically that of Martha Fineman and Diemut Grace Bubeck) in conversation with issues of disability.

4 For scholars that refer specifically to both Benina's morality and her economic failure, see Walter Glannon's "Charity and Distributive Justice: *Misericordia* Reexamined" (1985), Richard Young's "Money, Time, and Space in Galdós's *Misericordia*" (1993), Peter Bly's "La pobreza económica y moral: Paralelos temáticos y estructurales entre *La de Bringas* y *Misericordia*" (1997), Hazel Gold's "El nomadismo urbano y la crisis finisecular en *Misericordia*" (1997), Teresa Fuentes's *Visions of Filth* (2003), and Amy Wright's "La mirada y los marginados en la *Misericordia* Galdosiana" (2009).

5 While disability studies originated in the Anglophone context, recent scholarship in Iberian studies has address the co-construction of disability, gender, and nationalism in Spanish history. Encarnación Juárez-Almendros's *Disabled Bodies in Early Modern Spanish Literature* (2017) examines disability and female embodiment in the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries, while *The Politics of Age and Disability in Contemporary Spanish Film* (2013) by Matthew J. Marr and Benjamin Fraser's *Disability Studies and Spanish Culture* (2013) and *Cognitive Disability Aesthetics* (2018) focus on twentieth and twenty-first century literary and cinematic texts. Within the field of nineteenth-century studies, Sara Muñoz-Muriana's "'¡Pobre pierna que sólo sirve para andar!' Female (Dis)Empowerments, (Dis)ability, and Space in Literary and Filmic *Tristana*" (2015) and Julia Chang's "Becoming Useless: Masculinity, Able-Bodiedness, and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Spain" (2019) constitute important contributions.

6 Throughout this essay I use *disease* and *illness* interchangeably to refer to what is termed *enfermedad* in Spanish. In disability studies, *impairment* refers to a physical or biological condition and *disability* refers to social barriers or processes that stigmatize impairment. More recently, disability studies scholars have complicated the relation between these terms, arguing that impairments always exist within a framework of disability and, at the same time, calling for closer attention to impairments in terms of bodily limitations. This essay uses both terms, explicitly drawing attention to processes of stigmatization when necessary.

7 See the 1884 *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*.

8 For an in-depth analysis of the relationship between empire and the anthropological pathologization of the peninsular population see Joshua Goode's *Impurity of Blood: Defining Race in Spain, 1870–1930*.

9 The historical connections and, in fact, conflation, of disability and poverty are explored in the context of early modern Europe and Spain in Henri-Jacques Stiker's *A History of Disability* and Encarnación Juárez-Almendros's *Disabled Bodies in Early Modern Spanish Literature*, respectively. What is specific to the nineteenth-century context, however, is (1) the link between disability and poverty is elaborated through the frameworks of degeneration theories and

(2) as Stiker notes, that "liberal assistance … consists of having the poor adopt liberalism's values" (127).

10 For readings on healthy disabled people treated as though they were contagious see Wendell's "Unhealthy Disabled." For an exploration on how contagion theory can be taken up by queer and crip theorists, see the 2018 special issue of *Feminist Formations* entitled *The Biosocial Politics of Queer/Crip Contagions*.

11 See Joaquín Casalduero's "Significado y Forma de *Misericordia*" (1944), John Kronik's "Misericordia as Metafiction" (1981), Teresa Méndez-Faith's "Del sentimiento caritativo en *Marianela* y *Misericordia*" (1982), Vernon Chamberlin's "Two Character-Creating Servants: Niná in Gómez de la Avellaneda's *El artista barquer*o and Benina in Galdós's *Misericordia*" (1994), Amy Wright's "La mirada y los marginados en la *Misericordia* galdosiana" (2009), and Liana Ewald's "'La sociedad por todas partes se filtra': Nation Formation in *Halma*" (2012).

12 For an analysis of confinement in Galdós's earlier novel, see Liana Ewald's "Confinement, Consolation, and Confession in Galdós' *La desheredada*" (2008). For an analysis of discipline and tactics of resistance in *Fortunata y Jacinta*, see Akiko Tsuchiya's *Marginal Subjects: Gender and Deviance in Fin-de-Siècle Spain* (2011).

13 See Eva Kittay's "The Ethics of Care, Dependence, and Disability," Martha Nussbaum's *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, and Kathryn Abrams's "Performing Interdependence: Judith Butler and Sunaura Taylor in *The Examined Life*."

14 See Solveig Magnus Reindal's "Independence, Dependence, Interdependence: Some reflections on the subject and personal autonomy."

15 See Eva Kittay's "The Ethics of Care, Dependence, and Disability" and Nirmala Erevelles's *Disability and Difference in Global Contexts*, particularly her chapter entitled "The 'Other' Side of the Dialectic: Toward a Materialist Ethic of Care."

16 Bridget Aldaraca, Lou Charnon-Deutsch, and Susan Kirkpatrick, among others, have demonstrated that the separation of public and private spheres was overstated, as women did engage in cultural production; they have also argued that, despite the realities of women's participation in public life, the idea of the *ángel del hogar* greatly influenced gender construction in the nineteenth century.

17 Juárez-Almendros demonstrates that during the early modern period "old women are presented as corrupted social agents that harm both the individual body and the body politic with their distorted knowledge and evil powers" (83) and their literary representations can ultimately be understood as signaling political crises, including "the disintegration of idealized imperialistic and masculine Spanish power" (106). Though Benina is an elderly woman, she

does not fall into the early modern categories of aging women (midwife, procuress, and witch). Nevertheless, her decision to care for subjects who constitute a drain on society effectively aligns her with her literary predecessors as a character who corrupts and distorts various hierarchies. Galdós's novel, however, does not posit this destruction as monstrous, but as necessary.

18 For an analysis of Galdós's growing skepticism of the visual classification systems of the middle-class see Colin McKinney's *Mapping the Social Body*.

19 See Shubhada Pandya's "The first international leprosy conference, Berlin, 1897: the politics of segregation" in *História, Ciências, Saúde-Manguinhos.* For the application of the conference's conclusions in Spanish law, see the 1903 *Boletín jurídico-administrativo: Apéndice al Diccionario de la administración española peninsular y ultramarina* by Marcelo Martínez Alcubilla.

20 Jesús Cruz notes that "Social agents involved in its promotion [the promotion of bourgeois culture] measured their success based on the logic of utilitarian liberalism" (11). For an analysis of the construction of the family within bourgeois culture, see the chapter entitled "Homes from the Inside."

21 Coffey draws the term "foundational fictions" from Doris Sommer's work on mid-nineteenth-century Latin American heterosexual romances as representative of broader nationalist projects.

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