

ON THE EDGE: LIMINAL SPACES IN THE NOVELS OF BENITO PÉREZ GALDÓS

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ABSTRACT

Liminal spaces in Benito Pérez Galdós's novels offer profound insights into the society, characters, and practices of representation in his art of fiction. Through examining settings that lie at the intersection between public and private, domestic and commercial, interior and exterior, such as balconies, display windows, patios, and corridors, this study aims to reveal previously unexplored aspects of Galdós's work.

In-between spaces determine the social reality of many Galdosian characters. For example, balconies and *miradores* show the importance of the facade of a home as a projection of bourgeois wealth. The windows of middle-class homes blur the line between domestic and commercial practices, as merchant families displayed goods in that space. The development of the display window transforms the public space of the street into a shop, forever changing the way characters navigate their urban surroundings. When middle-class characters visit the lower-class space of the *casa de corredor*, class tensions and inequalities become apparent. The narrative gaze, drawn to children as they play on the patio, reveals the lack of basic resources such as bread and water available to the lower class.

Liminal spaces also communicate the fears and desires of Galdosian characters. Display windows, at once transparent and reflective, play a role in the identity formation of the characters who stare into them and observe their own image superimposed onto exhibited goods. In some

cases, the balcony places characters on the precipice of death, as they consider suicide in the hope of regaining autonomy in their lives. For other characters, windows and balconies offer insight into their hidden fantasies, as they view the street from their home, filtering their observations through their own imagination.

Lastly, the balcony is an essential space for characters to view and perform spectacle and for Galdós's fiction to consider its own discourse. Galdosian characters take part in carnivalesque rituals on balconies and patios that directly oppose ecclesiastical norms. As they observe and interpret the misfortune of other characters on balconies, Galdós's fiction itself becomes performative, pointing to the metafictional function of liminal space in his art.