

## EL CABALLERO ENCANTADO: REVOLUTION AND DREAM \*

Stephen Gilman

Soñaba que Dios había dispuesto una transformación en mis estados; que mis vasallos vivían contentos; que tenían paz, bienestar, justicia..., y yo..., yo tenía salud...

(*Alma y vida* IV.i)

As Amado Alonso observed, as a historical novelist Galdós was something of an anomaly.<sup>1</sup> Exclusively interested in the «raíces vivas del presente» (198), he avoided Scott's archaeological reconstruction and resuscitation of the Middle Ages. As in the case of Mark Twain and the romanticism of the Old South, he considered Spain's preterite glories to be a dead weight on the national present and future. This judgment is particularly emphatic in *La Fontana de Oro* (with its scathingly allegorical Porreño mansion), in the first two series of *Episodios*, and in the three initial *Novelas contemporáneas*. But it surfaces again from time to time, even when Galdós is primarily concerned with other sources of axiological debasement: for example, the Marquesa de Aransis in *La desheredada* or the palace scenes in *La de Bringas*. Worship of the past is at once stultifying and reactionary. It is therefore noteworthy to find in Galdós's last narrative novel, *El caballero encantado* (begun in July 1909), a portrait of Spain's millennia of historical experience presented as a spiritual antidote to the *mal du siècle* of national old age. Even more, the debilitating plague of «señoritismo» (a constant theme ever since the creation of Joaquinito Pez) would find therein its only possible therapy. After experiencing past and present history, the «señorito» becomes the «hero». It is almost as if Mark Twain had saved the fraudulent soul of Tom Sawyer (as it appeared in *Huckleberry Finn*) by sending him back to Camelot—that is, instead of the perverse feat he did achieve: damning that of the practical, well-intentioned, down-to-earth mechanic, Hank Morgan.

As Montesinos has shown, Galdós's novelistic career is characterized by a series of acute «virajes» or «escalones» (61), sudden changes of narrative course that can only be fully understood in terms of the preceding novel. In this case it was *España trágica* (finished in March 1909), with its excruciating portrayal of the circumstances surrounding the assassination of Prim. When Galdós described that event in *La desheredada* as «la página más deshonrosa de la historia contemporánea» (pt. 1, ch. 17; 1060),<sup>2</sup> the choice of

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the adjective—«deshonrosa» rather than «atroz,» «criminal,» or «vil»—is significant. He was reacting in exactly the same way many Americans reacted to the Kennedy murders: as if that loss represented a watershed of communal degeneration. The episode is not «episodic» in the sense that it tells about one more horrible (or heroic) past event; rather, as in *Orbajosa*, it is «tragic» because foreordained and collectively perpetrated. Speaking for Galdós, Vicente Halconero sums it up: «la fatalidad histórica... nos dice con acento de oráculo infalible: ¡Españoles, matad a Prim!» (*España trágica*, ch. 21; 945). The Spain that killed Prim was at once the Spain to which he belonged and the Spain of Cánovas. It was a Spain whose history was not worth «continuing» once that statesman appeared on the scene. Hence, the decision to abandon the Fifth Series at the end of the episode bearing his name as well as the final call for a «revolution»:

Alarmante es la palabra revolución. Pero si no inventáis otra menos aterradora, no tendréis más remedio que usarla los que no queráis morir de la honda caquexia que invade el cansado cuerpo de tu nación... Sed constantes en la protesta, sed viriles, románticos y mientras no venzáis a la muerte no os ocupéis de *Maricló*... (*Cánovas*, ch. 28; 1363)

But what kind of revolution? The answer, of course, is to be found in Galdós's narrative reaction to the bleak pessimism of *España trágica*, the comic dream of *El caballero encantado*. In his well-researched introduction to the latter novel, Julio Rodríguez-Puértolas interprets the rhetoric of the «jacquerie» of Boñices as justifying a Marxist and proletarian definition. This is undoubtedly correct as far as it goes. Along with the literature of the «regenerationists» and of the Generation of '98 which Galdós had recently been reading, the socialism of Pablo Iglesias was present in his mind. To be saved, the aristocrat must become a worker.<sup>3</sup> Yet, at the same time, that salvation, insofar as it is dispensed morally, individual by individual, and results in the founding of «veinte mil escuelas» financed by the deus-ex-machina inheritance of an immensely rich American silver mine, is also Krausist and even utopian. What is presented is not a revolution but the dream of a revolution, which in spite of its portion of nightmare is essentially theatrical and comic. The tone—as contrasted to that of *España trágica*—is jubilant and ebullient, and the sequence of evil court, salutary «green world,» and final harmony corresponds more to the *Anatomy of Criticism* than to the economic determinism of *Das Kapital*.

What used to be called the «sources» ought also to be mentioned. As I have remarked elsewhere, Galdós's «virajes» were often accompanied by visits to «talleres ajenos»—the novels of colleagues which could suggest a new course. In this case, the obvious choice was, curiously enough, one by Galdós's good friend and ideological antagonist, José María de Pereda. In *Peñas arriba* a typical «señorito» is «regenerated» and attains true manhood after submission to what Tolstoi termed «Arbeitstherapie» and romantic love during his residence in the author's wholesome «patria chica,» «la Montaña.» If Galdós found this cure to be both absurd and sentimental (it is satirized mercilessly in *Amadeo I* when Tito's father takes him to the land of the Carlists), precisely for that reason did it open a door for fancy. Let us for a moment leave the ugly facts of history, he seems to be saying to himself,

and instead dream along with Pereda. The difference was that Galdós's dream of a personal revolution would be overtly oneiric while Pereda's pretends foolishly to be realistic.

There are other differences. One is that Galdós's ultimate «señorito,» don Carlos de Tarsis y Suárez de Almondar, conde de Zorita de los Canes, is, in his own opinion and as his name implies, at least partially a genuine aristocrat. Unlike Pereda's hero and the various bourgeois «fils à papa» in the *Novelas contemporáneas*, his capital, though originally derived from mercantilism,<sup>4</sup> now consists of landed estates. And because of the deplorable state of Castilian agriculture, the income is woefully insufficient to support his expensive vices: not only women, hunting, and politics but also «el vértigo del automóvil.» We can imagine Juanito Santa Cruz with a garage full of sports cars! It is therefore fitting that after his enchantment he should be transformed into a farmhand named simply Gil. When he finally remembers his heartlessness as an absentee landlord, he is in a perfect position to comprehend the human misery caused by his past exactions.

Related to this, there is a second crucial difference: being a noble in his case implies a remnant of «nobleza.» Even on the border of financial ruin at the beginning (his peasants are emigrating to America in droves), he still manages to find «unos duros» to give to his best friend, Becerro, an erudite reincarnation of don Cayetano, who is so utterly destitute that he no longer eats at all. The point is that, unlike the «botarate,» Joaquinito Pez, the perverse Bueno de Guzmán, the stony-hearted Juanito Santa Cruz, or the vicious don Juan de Urríes, there is something in him worth saving. As his enchantress says at the end: «Los perversos y los tontos rematados no son susceptibles de encantamiento» (ch. 27; 342).

Although Tarsis enjoys to the full his various «dolencias» or expensive vices, he is also worthy of enchantment and therapeutic punishment because he shares the lucid pessimism which, according to Tito Livio, was the lot of all sentient Spaniards in the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> He has a keen and independent mind and is as capable of seeing through his own pretenses as those of others. An example is his characteristically Galdosian critique of contemporary «literatura dramática» as hopelessly «latosa, toda convencional, encogida, sin médula pasional, cuando no es grosera y desquiciada.» He then goes on to include (with unwitting irony in view of what is about to happen to him) the theater of the «Siglo de Oro»:

el teatro clásico, con su Lope y Tirso, me carga también, y siempre que voy a una función de esta clase, llevo la mala idea de descabezar un sueño en mi butaca. Una obra del teatro clásico se titula como debieron titularse todas: *La vida es sueño*. Digo y repito con pleno convencimiento que no tenemos teatro como no tenemos agricultura, como no tenemos política ni hacienda. Todo esto es aquí puramente nominal, figurado, obra de monos de imitación o de histriones que no saben su papel. Aquí no hay nada. Cuanto veis es bisutería precedente de saldos extranjeros. (ch. 3; 232)

I have cited these words at such length not only to show the continuity of pessimistic meditation that underlies the «viraje» but also because the allusion to Calderón is Galdós's sly way of acknowledging another source far removed from Pereda. The noble Tarsis is a latter-day Segismundo who.

instead of being transported from wilderness to court, is dispatched in the opposite direction. Both are submitted to dream therapy, however different, may be the lessons so carefully prepared for them. In this regard we might also mention that Galdós's plot recalls those plays of Lope that recreate the early centuries of reconquest in which noble or royal scions for varying reasons are brought up as peasants and eventually through sheer «hombria» succeed in reclaiming their birthrights. Again, Galdós differs from Lope in his comprehension of that quality, but their admiration of it is comparable. That the novelist was aware of the theatrical bent of his imagination is evident from beginning to end both in dialogue and action. Typical is the reaction of Tarsis at the very moment of his enchantment: «Sigue la farsa. Ahora tenemos una mutación de teatro hecha por habilísimos maquinistas y escenógrafos» (ch. 5; 240). Don Quijote would have searched for appropriate enchanters in his memories of romances of chivalry.<sup>6</sup>

Along with intentional or thematic dialogue with Pereda and Calderón, there are multiple echoes of Galdós's younger contemporaries. The pessimism of Salvador Monsalud and of the narrator of *España trágica* had been total (absolutism was the ingrown product of centuries and would persist for centuries more), but the «regenerationists» and the young poets and prosists of '98 were instead concerned immediately with the Spain they had been brought up in and the Spaniards they grew up with. If we can discover our true selves, we may learn to live together with harmony and significance. We will no longer depend on «bisutería procedente de saldos extranjeros.» This end, however, could not be achieved by a party or by a dictator; each individual, as the «krausistas» had preached, all alone had to regenerate himself. Personal and private revolutions had to precede the collective variety.

«Enfermo estás de la voluntad,» one of Tarsis's friends tells him at the beginning and goes on to recommend the same thrift and common sense Galdós had been wont to prescribe in earlier novels. But now a new remedy was offered: neither emulation of the past nor rejection of the present but submersion of the self in the timeless life of tradition, the authentic Spain behind and beneath transient modes and episodes. Thus, Tarsis after his enchantment is successively a farmhand, a shepherd (along with Blas and Rodrigacho),<sup>7</sup> and a quarrier delving physically into the living rock of the peninsula. In these preliminary and history-less stages of his «Bildung,» unlike Pepe Rey, he admires the landscape of the «meseta» for its austere and historically suggestive beauty: «veía extenderse hasta lo infinito la llanada de Castilla, inmenso blasón con cuarteles verdes...» (ch. 7; 247-48). The rural place names that fascinated Unamuno and Machado<sup>8</sup> soon begin to accumulate—Aldehuela, Micereses de Suso, Mojón de los Enebrillos, Ilo-luengo, San Bartolomé de Querque, Hoya de Horcajada—and infect the prose with the elemental poetry of sheer oral nomenclature, names named and cherished an infinity of times. We have come a long way from Pepe Rey's Villahorrenda and Valleameno, although, as we shall see, those desolate places have not been forgotten and are waiting in the wings.

When, prior to his enchantment, Tarsis is told by Becerro the legend of his «tátara tátara,» Gonzalo Gustioz, he remarks with «travesura»: «Ya me estoy regenerando... Sigue, sigue la historia...» (ch. 3; 230). But now, after

enchantment, his second lesson is historical. Place names previously stressed for their traditional euphony take on an epic resonance that aerates his soul: Barbadillo, Salas, Lara, San Esteban de Gormaz, «Arlanza... que amamantó vigorosas voluntades» (ch. 9; 255). There he breathes not just the «aire serrano... fresco y puro» of farmers and shepherds but «el aire del primer día del mundo [cuya] diafanidad... pureza y frescura dan vida nueva y potente a mi espíritu enfermo, envejecido» (ch. 9; 255). Like his ancestor, Mudarra, he is being trained to revenge the wrongs of Spain. And later when Gil, in search of his mysterious enchantress, suspects, without knowing why, that he may encounter her in Medinaceli, we in turn suspect that his author has been exposed to the conclusions of don Ramón. The first volume of the critical edition of the *Poema* appeared precisely in 1908.<sup>9</sup>

In this dream world, history does not move forward but rather, as most inhabitants of the twentieth century wish it might, backwards. If Gil's first mentors were Calderón and Cervantes, followed by Juan del Encina and the «juglares,» he ends by becoming a day laborer employed in the excavation of Numancia. There he learns from Becerro, who has been given a minor appointment as supervisor, the difference between the latter's previous stale erudition and «elevated» history: «Estos aires, tan sanos como históricos... la Historia alta, y llamo alta la que nos cuenta las virtudes máximas; la Historia de altura es el mejor de los tónicos» (ch. 14; 277).

The expressions «Historia de altura» and «Historia alta» provide a clue, albeit a misleading one, to the mystery of the identity of the elusive enchantress, protectress, teacher, and mother. She resembles history but possesses powers that surpass history. Gil, believing her to be a goddess, tries to kiss her hand, but she,

requiriendo la del pastor como apoyo para levantarse, dijo así:

—Vieja soy, hijo mío; pero mi ancianidad no es más que la expresión visible de mi luenga vida. Debajo de estas canas llevo escondida mi juventud para cuando sea de mi gusto mostrarla... Yo también he tenido infancia. Estas piedras adustas me vieron mozucla, más bien niña, ofreciendo a dioses que ya se fueron para no volver. (ch. 7; 250)

She is old but can become young again when she wishes. Furthermore, like Quevedo's «Fortuna con seso,» she can correct historical evils individual by individual and type by type: «señoritos,» profiteers, «caciques,» «ricos avarientos,» and political orators. Some are to be saved like Tarsis and others are to be punished, above all the last, who will be turned into «curas de pueblo» and forced to preach every Sunday and for all novenas.

Later on it is Gil who solves the mystery. Becerro has said that his only «madre» is History, the glorious past that «huye con repugnancia de los hechos y personas del día... No hay historia de lo presente. Lo presente no es más que espuma, fermentación, podredumbre.» Gil does not agree: «No es precisamente la Historia, sino la..., no sé cómo decirlo... Es el alma de la raza, triunfadora del tiempo y de las calamidades públicas; la que al mismo tiempo es tradición inmutable y revolución continua...» (ch. 22; 322-23). In other words, unlike Juan de Mena and other fifteenth-century «regenerationists,» Galdós does not advocate emulation of an exemplary past. Rather, he preaches the revolutionary rejuvenation from within of the national soul.

In Unamunian terms, «la intrahistoria» is summoned to replace the now useless «alta Historia.»

At this point, a new semester begins, and we (Gil and the reader) are abruptly transported out of «la tradición inmutable» into the «podredumbre» of Castile in the early years of this century—a Castile far more desolate and reprehensible than that represented by Orbajosa. Even before, when the enchantress had mentioned Arlanza, she felt constrained to qualify the vocative power of the name with a description of its present state: «hoy mal poblada de árboles, mísera y cansada tierra. Pues así como la ves, pobrecita y escuálida, es la primera en mis idolatrías de Madre; es mi epopeya...» And now, beginning in chapter 18 entitled «Refiérese lo que el caballero vio y oyó en el mísero y olvidado lugar de Boñices,» we enter a nightmare Spain that could only be ameliorated by a daydream of social revolution.

«Caciques» and their friends and relations supported by fanatical priests and brutal «guardias civiles» preside over the most wretched and hopeless form of rural poverty. As immune from any higher law as pirates in a Byzantine novel, they sequester Tarsis's enchanted beloved. The plight of Inés in the First Series is repeated in spades, but by this time the plot has become so flimsy that we do not much care. What is appalling is the milieu, the heartrending depiction of the squalor and suffering of the villagers of Boñices. Only in *Misericordia* and *Nazarín* had Galdós previously descended to social depths as low as these. The «barrio de las Peñuelas» in *La desheredada* and *Fortunata y Jacinta* is in comparison relatively cheerful.

In any case, by the end the lesson has been well learned. The erstwhile «señorito» is now an «hombre,»<sup>10</sup> not a «muñeco de resortes gastados,» and ready to pass his final examination. Nothing less than setting things right in Spain forever after! In this still unrealized project, however, he is not alone. He is accompanied by his newly rich mistress, his illegitimate child representing the future (Galdós significantly divorces marriage from his happy ending), and, above all, by his enchanting and seemingly omnipotent teacher. This last confederate, it should be stressed, is the one that really matters. Call her an «arbitrio» personified? Call her (despite the fact that Galdós would be indignant) a lay reincarnation of Berceo's miraculous Virgin Mary?<sup>11</sup> Or a fantasy of that aspect of Galdós known as don José Ido del Sagrario? Or whomever? What matters is that she is not an allegory of historical determinism but a dream.<sup>12</sup> As such, she not only recalls the supernatural novellas of Galdós's youth, but also she reappears in the guise of the marvellous and elusive Mari-Clío who presides over the last four oneiric *Episodios* dictated in blindness...<sup>13</sup>

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> A preliminary version of the present essay was presented at the 1984 meeting of the Modern Language Association with the title «Galdós and History: The Final Years.»

<sup>2</sup> Because of the lack of an easily available standard edition of the complete works, the page numbers of all citations are preceded by references to chapters.

<sup>3</sup> For the popularity of the *Episodios* in translation in the early years of the Russian revolution, see Chamberlin.

<sup>4</sup> The protected grain and sugar trade with the colonies, alluded to in ch. 3. (See Rodríguez-Puértolas 45-46.)

<sup>5</sup> Rodríguez-Puértolas correctly points out the reaction against pessimism in the novel, which resembles that expressed in the essay «Soñemos, alma, soñemos,» but Galdós, as a well-practiced pessimist on his own, surely would have defended himself on the grounds that that form of reaction was a necessary first step away from the collective optimism of «los bobos años.» Along with the rather despairing call for revolution at the end of *Cánovas*, the last words of *Alma y vida* (1902), spoken by the hero *after* the success of his uprising, should be taken into account by those who would oversimplify Galdós: «¿...qué hemos hecho? Destruir una tiranía para levantar otra semejante. El mal se perpetúa... Entre vosotros siguen reinando la maldad, la corrupción, la injusticia. ¡Llorad, vidas sin alma, llorad, llorad!» (IV.vii; 761).

<sup>6</sup> Although, as Rodríguez-Puértolas indicates, there are as usual frequent Cervantine references, the structure is a series of lesson acts.

<sup>7</sup> He had played dramatically with Juan del Encina in *Alma y vida*, with its alternately effete and rustic shepherd scenes. Now he not only uses the familiar names but also quotes him directly: «¡Oh Venus, dea graciosa, / a ti quiero y a ti llamo!...», etc. (ch. 13; 272).

<sup>8</sup> As early as 1899, after visiting Brianzuelo de la Sierra, Unamuno records the following dialogue:

Vino mi compañero:  
 «¡Ea, perezoso, arriba! Vamos a ver el pueblo...»  
 «¡A ver el pueblo!» le contesté. «¿Y para qué?»  
 «¿Para qué? ¡Tú estás malo!... ¿Pues a qué hemos venido?»  
 «¡A soñarlo! Déjeme que me le figure a mi antojo...»  
 «Lo mismo podías habérselo figurado en la ciudad...»  
 «No, lo mismo no. Aquí estoy en él, y la conciencia de estar en él vivifica mi imaginación; aquí respiro con su aire de efluvios espirituales...»

The conclusion follows: «¿Sabes que me gustaría quedarme aquí... y después de haberme dejado empapar de esta vida difusa, lenta, de pura costumbre, escribir una 'Historia universal de Brianzuelo de la Sierra'?» (1: 64-65).

<sup>9</sup> In this connection, and in view of the emphasis on Tarsis's resemblance to his «ancestor,» Mudarra, one is led to wonder whether Galdós might not also have absorbed don Ramón Menéndez Pidal's doctoral dissertation, *La leyenda de los infantes de Lara*, published in 1896.

<sup>10</sup> In this sense our novel seems to constitute an answer to Unamuno's castigation of «regeneracionismo» as a form of intellectual hypocrisy: «Todos estamos mintiendo al hablar de regeneración, puesto que nadie piensa en serio en regenerarse a sí mismo» («La vida es sueño. Reflexiones sobre la regeneración de España» 3: 407; originally published in *La España Moderna* in 1898).

<sup>11</sup> This more or less «structuralist» interpretation is supported not only by Galdós's participation in the Berceo revival of those years («mi primer gran poeta, Gonzalo de Berceo» [ch. 9; 257]) but also by the cult-like worship of the enchantress's predecessor Laura in *Alma y vida*: «La duquesa es un ser divino... En ella veo la ideal señora, la ideal belleza, la ideal justicia. Al influjo de su divina luz, el aventurero que gastaba su fuerza en vanas travesuras, se ha convertido en un esclavo, cuerpo y vaso de aquel espíritu...» (III.xiv; 952-53). Even the «pecador social,» Monegro, repents at the end in a specially significant fashion: «(Se arrodilla, inclinando su frente hasta casi tocar el suelo.) ¡Mi señora!... ¡Perdónenos a todos vuestra grandeza..., para que Dios nos perdone!» (IV, vii; 961). Similarly, her obvious successor, the Mari-Clo of the last four *Episodios*, who began as a dealer in antiques and old papers «venida a menos,» gradually acquires magic powers (including that of self-rejuvenation) and is worshipped by Tito Livio. In commenting on the «Clio» in her name, we should not overlook the «Mari»!

<sup>12</sup> One wonders whether Carlos Fuentes had some awareness of this novel when he created his own oneiric historical extravaganza, *Terra nostra*. That is doubtful, but I am inclined to agree with the attending scholar (at the MLA gathering) who pointed out the resemblance of Valle-Inclán's revolutionary noble, don Juan Manuel Montenegro, to Tarsis. In any case, Laín Entralgo's observations on the «dreaminess» of the Generation of '98 seem relevant to our novel.

<sup>13</sup> Thanks to Rodolfo Cardona, I learn that the proofs of *Amadeo I* (in the archives of the Casa-Museo Pérez Galdós) were partially corrected by another hand.

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