

## FROM MONUMENTS TO SYLLABLES: THE JOURNEY TO KNOWLEDGE IN *ZUMALACÁRREGUI*

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Among the many and diverse aspects of the third series of Galdós's *Episodios nacionales* not the least prominent is the pursuit of knowledge inherent in the novelistic and interpretive journeys of its characters and readers. Written between 1898 and 1900, these historical novels seek to explain the literary, social, economic, and political transformations of Spain between 1834 and 1846. The *Episodios*' reconstructive and explanatory pursuit of these times and events may be viewed as a temporal projection that delineates relationships of cause and effect. Symbolic relationships among the various historical and fictional elements of these works appear to supplement and clarify those explanations. Yet the conventional types of relations that seem to produce knowledge also break down and undo it, so that cause and effect become an infinite tracing of effects whose hypothetical causes are forever unknowable. Likewise, the symbolic structures of metaphor and analogy give way to irony and antithesis; relations of identity become relations of difference in their constant fluctuation. Such ceaseless and often contradictory movements are inherent in the mode called historical fiction. These two apparently different yet fundamentally similar types of interpretation—the temporal/historical and the symbolic/fictional—are both functions of the same relationship among words and texts. They are equally imaginary. The reader's journeys into the past through historical reconstruction or the many and varied journeys undertaken by fictional characters in the series are all journeys through words. As we travel from 1834 through crises of love and war to 1846 and through each volume to our interpretations of characters and events, we journey only through the relations among signs. These journeys through the third series reread conventional modes of viewing the past and of making signs, just as the characters reread themselves as they search for absent ideals. The characters' journeys organize all the other elements of the series and fully exploit the metaphors of life and literature as journey or voyage in order, ultimately, to reevaluate that metaphor as metaphor. Thus they consider the status of historical knowledge as image or sign, as the text of *Zumalacárregui* demonstrates.

José Fago, the soldier-priest protagonist of the first volume of the third series is, as Alfred Rodríguez has written in *An Introduction to the Episodios Nacionales of Galdós*, «an anguished being, withering under the strain of an unbearable inner contradiction.» This contradiction arises from his «confused effort to segregate an obsessive past... from a present that demands a very different pattern of behavior» (125). His libertine past haunts him when his emotional and military energies become focussed on the futile pursuit of Saloma Ulibarri, the woman he seduced before becoming a priest,

three years prior to the novel's opening in 1834. In the first chapter, Fago, sent to confess Saloma's *cristino* father, who is condemned to the firing squad by the Carlist General Zumalacárregui, confesses to Ulibarri instead. This fictional episode has its counterpart in the historical narration: Brian Dendle states in *Galdós: The Mature Thought* that «No historical background is given; the novel begins, in medias res, with Zumalacárregui's invasion of the Ribera de Navarra» (39). Fago's inconclusive emotional and geographical journeys are like the random record of military skirmishes and the «wandering, inconclusive nature of the military campaign» (40). Both the story and the history take place over a wide geographical area and seem to follow no logical sequence of events. Fago's crises of conscience, a chance word about Saloma, or his hallucinations direct his course. Dendle observes that this pattern provides an «impressionistic vision of the nature of the [Carlist] movement» (40). Indeed, such impressionism is a most appropriate format for depicting events of the past if they are without logic.

References to the role of chance as opposed to logic in human affairs abound in this volume and throughout the series. For example, in chapter 24 Fago begins one of his many searches for Saloma:

Toda la noche anduvo por desolados campos, sin dirección fija, adoptando el acaso por guía único de su andar vagabundo, y creyendo que los senderos desconocidos suelen conducirnos a donde deseamos. Renegaba de la previsión, del método, de todo el fárrago de prescripciones por que se guían los hombres, y que comúnmente resultan de menor eficacia que los dictados de la fatalidad. Somos unos seres infelices que creemos saber algo y no sabemos nada, que inventamos reglas y principios para engañar nuestra impotencia; vivimos a merced de la Naturaleza y de las misteriosas combinaciones del tiempo y el espacio. Iba, pues, entregado a lo que el espacio y el tiempo, ministros de Dios, quisieran disponer en su tiránico dominio. (861)

Man is powerless to know or alter his mysterious, indecipherable course, so a lack of direction or a vagabond path is as effective as method or prevision, according to Fago. The narrator's repetition of his opinions («somos unos seres infelices...») in this and other instances, or their echo through the voices of other characters in the novel, makes them not idiosyncratic to Fago but pertinent to the larger concerns of the series. Both the Carlists and the Cristinos, however, believe that God is on their side and thus directs their actions. The Carlists go so far as to refer to the Virgin as «Generalísima» (852). But even this hyperbolic faith in a divine logic does not spell victory for Don Carlos:

Pero aquel Dios, que muchos suponían tan calurosamente afecto a uno de los bandos, dispuso las cosas de distinta manera, y pasó lo que según unos no debió pasar, y según otros, sí. Estas sorpresas, que nada tienen de sobrenaturales, obra de la divina imparcialidad, son tan comunes, que con ellas casi exclusivamente se forma un tejido de variados hechos que llaman Historia, expresando con esta voz la que escriben los hombres, pues la que deben tener escrita los ángeles no la conocemos ni por el forro. (832)

The right or wrong of history is a matter of opinion; its truth is forever hidden. Rather, what is called History is merely the written weave —«tejido»— of assorted events, organized according to a writer's not necessarily logical or true impressions and perspective. Whether Zumalacárregui, the

Carlists, the Cristinos, or Fago believe their course directed by God or chance makes no difference, since the directing hand, should it exist, is forever unseen.

The desire to judge right and wrong in war is a futile search for an ultimate meaning, a transcendental truth, just as is the search for the correct interpretation of the written texts of the novel or history. *Zumalacárregui* illustrates how the knowledge of and judgment about history are necessarily derived from written documents that have already always been interpreted and therefore removed from the origin of the event itself—its cause—which can never be present. The meanings we instill in our «histories» as to causes may be rather an ordering of effects. In *The Use and Abuse of History*, Nietzsche identifies this effort, which he calls «monumental history,» as one type of error that can be made in historical interpretation:

Its object is to depict effects at the expense of the causes—«monumentally,» that is, as examples for imitation; it turns aside, as far as it may, from reasons, and might be called with far less exaggeration a collection of «effects in themselves» than of events that will have an effect on all ages. The events of war or religion cherished in our popular celebrations are such «effects in themselves»...

As long as the soul of history is found in the great impulse that it gives to a powerful spirit, as long as the past is principally used as a model for imitation, it is always in danger of being a little altered and touched up and brought nearer to fiction. Sometimes there is no possible distinction between a «monumental» past and a mythical romance, as the same motives for action can be gathered from the one world as the other. (15)

These remarks are particularly suited to the first volume of the third series. The cultivation of great men and deeds and the forgetting or hatred of all else appears to be the folly of Don Carlos, of Fago in his admiration and emulation of Zumalacárregui, of Zumalacárregui's concept of his own historic mission, and of posterity's exaltation of him. As the opening chapter proclaims: «¡Zumalacárregui, página bella y triste! España la hace suya, así por su hermosura como por su tristeza» (789). Yet this monument of Spain's history is perhaps not a fit object of emulation, as the volume's subsequent pages suggest.

The two-paragraph apostrophe to the Carlist General in chapter 1 paints him as a valiant military strategist who puts «los deberes militares sobre todo sentimiento de humanidad» (789). Correspondingly, in the first scene of *Zumalacárregui* in action he is mercilessly whipping the women who opposed his siege at Villafranca (801). The narrator's comments about the necessity of this tactic to strengthen the soldiers' resistance are conveyed in part through the free indirect style, as were the opening two paragraphs of the novel, which implicates the narrator, and consequently the reader, in this epic brutality. *Zumalacárregui*'s behavior, including his «heroism,» is presented in an ambiguous light from the outset, as Peter Bly argues in detail. Fago cannot understand the necessity for this public display of cruelty and provides another dissenting point of view in an equivocally «epic» characterization (801). Such contradictory interpretations of this «monument of history» undermine unilateral definitions of greatness, right, and wrong. Such is the case in the physical description of the General through Fago's eyes:

Era el General de aventajada estatura y regulares carnes, con un hombro más alto que otro. Por eso, y por su ligera inclinación hacia delante, efecto sin duda de un padecimiento renal, no era su cuerpo tan garboso como debiera. En él clavó sus ojos Fago, examinándole bien la cara, y al pronto se desilusionó enteramente, pues se lo figuraba de facciones duras, abultadas y terro-ríficas, con hermosura semeiante a la de algunas imágenes de la clase de tropa, como los guerreros bíblicos Aarón, Sansón y Josué... [Zumalacárregui] era un tipo melancólico, adusto, cara de sufrimiento y meditación. (800-01)

Fago's «illusion» of the historic figure compares him to legendary monuments; the «reality» of Zumalacárregui pales by comparison.

The divergent codes that traverse the character Zumalacárregui make any interpretation subject to reversal. Not only does monumental history easily become confused with a mythical romance, as Nietzsche writes, but «monu-mental history lives by false analogy; it entices the brave to rashness, and the enthusiastic to fanaticism by its tempting comparisons» (16). The dangers signalled by Nietzsche can certainly be observed in Fago and perhaps in modern interpreters of this novel as well. Dendle, for instance, although acknowledging certain weaknesses of characterization, writes:

Zumalacárregui is presented in epic terms... It would not... be rash to see in Zumalacárregui a warning note that Galdós is sounding in the early months of 1898 to his fellow countrymen. ...[Fago] represents in his instability, his quest for an ever-elusive meaning for his existence, his inability to see clearly into his own nature—Galdós's projection onto the past of the Spain of 1898, of a Spain rent in two, unable to set firm goals in the future and vainly seeking a past made impossible by the very violence of the methods used to pursue it. (40-41)

Dendle's own pursuit, however provocative, is of an «ever-elusive meaning» as well, since whether we choose to read into this volume the Spain of 1898 or of 1834, we are confronted only with interpretations of those elusive times. As the above passage from the novel suggests, we can never know cause and effect; all we have is our written weave. This open textuality—a term that involves a constant movement from a never recuperable past towards an always out of reach future—in *Zumalacárregui* describes the Carlist General himself, as Bly observes: Zumalacárregui is never fully able to reject his past, nor «reach the end of... [his] spiritual journey.» Even more poignantly, perhaps, this open-ended textuality, this never-ending journey, is illustrated by Fago's physical search for Saloma Ulibarri.

Fago's valiant fight for the Carlists in chapter 16 gives way to hallucination and self-recrimination after he shoots the man whom he believes to be the already dead Ulibarri. This spectre from his past motivates days of errant wandering until he finally takes refuge in a hut whose occupants have heard of a Saloma or Salomé. This Salomé/Saloma both is and is not identifiable with Fago's memory or idealization of her. He also learns of his own double who is sighted with her. The next morning, as he journeys back to his unit, «empezó a ser atormentado por una idea.» He recalls «una carta olvidada» (845) which fell out of the jacket given him by an old woman. Before she tore it up, he believes he read the «sílabo Mé, abreviatura de Salomé, con que de niña la nombraba su abuela.» This syllable of a signature of the nickname (Salomé) of Saloma Ulibarri, this trace, inscribes itself in a goat's bleat that then directs his course: «por todo el camino, sobre la blancura

inmaculada de la nieve, fue viendo algo, como huellas de una cabra, un signo que evidentemente decía: *Mé, Mé, Mé...*» (846). The grammatical symbolism of this syllable is obvious: this «*Mé*» is the objective projection of Fago's subjective self, his «*yo*.» The narrative becomes the story of the wanderings of the divided self.

This passage identifies the journey with the book, the white snow with the blank page. Fago pursues an elusive meaning which is only the syllable «*Mé*,» not the woman herself, as he thinks. Yet this syllable is not really written; it is «*algo, como huellas*,» «*un signo*,» whose meaning is imagined. Only when the signifying «*huellas*» are given the status of the signified «*Mé*» do they become a complete sign and thus «*evidence*,» «*meaning*.» The identification, however, is not a stable sign, since «*Mé*» is another signifier, not a signified idea or woman. Fago pursues this meaning, which is not more than the signifier of a signifier, for three days, «*durante los cuales iba viendo el Mé, Mé, ya representado por la huella de cabras, ya por los letreros diferentes, trazados con negro en esquinzos de iglesias o en tapiales de caserones*» (846). The instability of this sign is underlined further as the signified signifier «*Mé*» slips from one signifier—«*huellas*»—to others—«*letreros diferentes*.» Fago sees his meaning wherever he looks. His search is guided by a preconceived vision of his goal: the snow and the road write what he wishes to read. Moreover, he only thinks he remembers the syllable that he pursues; he is not even certain of his memory: «*Y yo digo, ¿esto de creer recordar es como recordar verdaderamente? Si vi pasar la palabra Mé por el aire, ¿cómo no me causó la impresión que ahora me causa el querer recordarlo? Luego no hubo tal palabra... ¿Y no podría suceder que viera la sílaba sin darme cuenta de lo que significaba?*» (846). Like the historical documents that seem to signify the remembered memory of the event itself, this syllable signifies the absolute elusivity of the woman as text.

In his incisive essay, «*The Infinite Text*,» Manfred Frank connects the literary tradition of the idea of life as a journey to the infinite journey of the written text. In classical and early Christian literature, there was usually a happy return at the end of a journey, but «*this changes upon the threshold of the new era. Here doubts about the 'immanence of meaning in life'... disturb the economy of the successful homecoming*.» Marked by the romantic period, «*Our historical interest in ideas and motifs encounters the problem of losing one's way only, of course, at the thematic level. In fact, one can observe that modern literature—since Coleridge and Brentano— has identified the aimless passage with the fate of poetic speech*» (71-72). Fago's chance-determined travels and particularly his fruitless pursuit of Saloma, «*Mé*,» black marks on a white background, clearly correlate travel with writing in *Zumalacárregui*. Fago never reaches his goal—neither his own identity as priest, soldier, or man, nor the syllable «*Mé*» or the woman Saloma. As Frank observes: «*The endlessness of the trip clearly becomes a problem in the interminability of writing itself. Literature reflects its own condition when it de-limits (ent-grenzt) the metaphor of the journey with life*» (72). Fago's endless journey is one of the many ways in which the series describes its own textual process. Moreover, the incessant «*self-doubling*» of this text «*de-limits*» representation itself. Avallé-Arce has noted that the duplication

of Saloma is both Cervantine and folletinesque. These two literary traditions, though different in many aspects, both presuppose the open-ended processes of writing and reading. Not only is Fago the *Doppelgänger* of Zumalacárregui (Avalle-Arce 367), but the double is re-duplicated in Fago's own novelesque rival in the pursuit of Salomé. This multifaceted repetition in difference describes the futile journey toward meaning in *Zumalacárregui*. Whether that meaning is the historical knowledge that this *Episodio* seems to offer or the definitive interpretation of its interpretations of the Carlist war or of the Spain of 1898, it is a goal as out of reach and as undecidable as Fago's own. As Avalle-Arce has commented: «Las relaciones de Fago con su pasado adquieran las dimensiones de una verdadera obsesión... Fago quiere huir del pasado, al mismo tiempo que empeña su vida en la búsqueda de Saloma Ulibarri. Pero los términos de la paradoja son inabarcables por la vida, y así Fago se deshace en la empresa» (366). In like fashion this paradoxical text called a historical novel is undone when the value of one of its terms—whether history or fiction—becomes an obsession.

When Fago finds his way back to his unit after his fruitless efforts to trace the syllable «Mé,» he is at first accused of spying, since he was sighted with Salomé. This case of mistaken identities, like that of Fago's double, is never resolved in the novel. He is sent on a mission to capture her, since she is believed to be a «cristina» spy. At first he resists this disorienting pull of his past; then he agrees after his manhood is challenged: «No se le exige ciencia militar ni teología dogmática. Esta no es empresa de guerrero ni de sacerdote. —¿Pues de qué? —De hombre..., simplemente de hombre, señor Fago» (853). He falls almost fatally ill—«sin ganas de vivir» (854)—before he can begin his search, but when he does recover and undertakes the mission, he follows only false clues or chance sightings of the plural identities of Salomé, «ama de cura... clériga—mujer virtuosa» (845), «monja domínica..., aldeana rústica o ama de cría» (853). His journey, like his life and finally his death, is without logic, a series of discontinuous movements toward an objective whose various aspects, like «ama de cura» and «ama de cría,» cannot be reconciled.

Fago visits the ailing Zumalacárregui frequently before he dies, and every day as he goes to the General's house he observes the washerwomen in the creek: «Apoyando los codos en el pretil del puente, se pasaba allí el hombre largos ratos, viendo a las mujeres con media pierna dentro del agua» (885). We deduce from the final words of the novel that one of these women is Salomé, since the woman who speaks these words is not named. The sigfusilar a mi padre» (889). This is as close as the novel comes to presenting Salomé, since she says of Zumalacárregui: «—Bien muerto está... Mandó nifying process that relates these final lines to Fago's first confession to Ulibarri and to the main plot of the *Episodio* is a complicated series of substitutions and associations. The words «padre,» «fusilar,» and «Zumalacárregui» associate this washerwoman with Salomé Ulibarri, the end of the novel with the beginning. But just as the daughter is absent in the first scene and becomes the object of Fago's relentless search, so the name Ulibarri is not literally identified with «padre» here, although the reader assumes the substitution. The substitution and associations through which the reader unifies

the plot of the novel, names characters, and instills it with meaning are arbitrary and ultimately unstable in the ceaselessly signifying chain.

The gaps between words are bridged by imagined associations, just as Fago gazes down upon the women, unable to reach them. Yet those gaps can never be bridged fully, just as Fago does not reach Salomé here or anywhere in the novel, nor can he bridge the distance between himself and his past, a meaningful life, or a stable identity. The fever and convulsions he suffers before he dies, like those he experienced earlier, underscore his inability to connect and make coherent the diverse facets of his character, whether physical or mental, past or present. His delirious vision of «un grande, negro, insondable abismo que le atraía» (887) is an image of his unreachable past and his unknowable destination; it suggests the infinite hollowiness of the image itself as word, memory, or ideal.

Fago's death, which leaves his search unended, his story as incomplete as it began, coincides with Zumalacárregui's in the midst of the unresolved war. These two seekers of an unattainable past, which in Zumalacárregui's case is both heroic and reactionary, illustrate perhaps Nietzsche's thesis that «'Only strong personalities can endure history; the weak are extinguished by it.' History unsettles the feelings when they are not powerful enough to measure the past by themselves» (32). Fago's search is also a search for his own identity in his pursuit of the syllable/woman/memory/text/«Mé.» He continually fluctuates among his roles of «guerrero» and «sacerdote» and his past as «seglar desalmado y libertino» (853), unable to find a «settled» association of these signifiers, which cannot «logically» substitute for one another. His dilemma is most melodramatically illustrated when he dreams of interrupting mass to exterminate «cristinos» (841-42). It was precisely the challenge to this unsettled or unstable identity that made him take up the search for his history labelled Salomé. For he was told that his own double, «un hombre muy listo, muy despierto, buena estampa, aficionadillo a las aventuras,» who had not «recibido más que la primera tonsura [del estado eclesiástico], y parece inclinado a seguir carrera a volandera Mé» (856), would be «competidor suyo en la comisión de atrapar a la volandera Mé» (859). Incapable of enduring his task, however, Fago is extinguished by it, just like his historical model.

Zumalacárregui and Fago's last conversation reveals Fago's renunciation of his journey/life and his renunciation of his identity as the text Fago itself. In spite of the General's encouragement and praise, Fago insists upon denying his abilities and likewise his identity, with remarks such as «No soy apto para nada» (886); «Y aquí me tiene usted sin vocación ninguna, pues todas las he perdido, y con toda verdad le digo que no sé adónde han ido a parar»; «¡Mi vida es tan poco útil!»; «Yo soy hombre concluido» (887). As Fago's text concludes, so does *Zumalacárregui*. Still, he dies without confession, so the end of his journey is up to God: «a Dios toca darle su merecido» (889). Dendle observes that «Fago's own identity is as much a mystery, both for himself and others, as that of Saloma» (40). For Rodríguez he «is the oddest characterization in the Series» (125). Fago's mysterious, unsettled identity, like that of «Mé,» signals the undecidability not only of his personality, in its past and present manifestations, but of his temporal and per-

sonal journeys. Fago seeks in «Mé» what he might have had in the past: a reconciliation of his own warring facets. But we know from his confession to Ulibarri that he never possessed this stable identity in the first place; he has always led an erratic life: «—Mi carácter violento, mis hábitos de disolución y desorden de mi conducta, fueron causa de que, a los tres meses de aquella vida errante, Saloma y yo pareciéramos enemigos» (792). Fago's dilemma suggests the romantic notion of «yearning for the Infinite,» as Schlegel defines it. Frank writes that the concept of «Infinite» «presupposes the loss of an 'original meaning' and feels 'driven' to seek it just the same. The self finds itself in a substantially negative relation to its Other. This negativity nowhere allows the self to achieve 'self-identity... The result is that the "existence" of the self becomes the "greatest secret," the unsolvable "riddle" » (78-79). These remarks are applicable to the search of Fago's «yo» for his «Mé,» to the details of his personality, to his journey, and to the notions of historical recuperation and textuality in *Zumalacárregui*. They are also pertinent to the third series as a whole, particularly to Fernando Calpena, the series' «greatest secret.»

José Fago's secret, his identity, is never fully resolved; his journey is endless. Frank observes that «The indeterminacy of personality reflects the loss of an absolute meaning of Man» (79). If the past is forever absent—only an illusion, a fiction, a remembered memory—then its pursuit in the self or in books is a destructive endeavor, since the goal is always out of reach. Such is the fate of Fago's journey, of the Carlist war, of the text of this *Episodio*. As Frank writes, «The endless deferral of the goal which our texts relate thus corresponds to an endless deferral of sense within the structure of the texts themselves» (78). Any sense of character, of history, or of the novel that the reader creates is only one among a continual chain of signifying relationships that can be fabricated for this text in the open-ended process of historical fiction.

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