

SALAS Y QUIROGA, *EL DIOS DEL SIGLO*
NOVELA ORIGINAL DE COSTUMBRES CONTEMPORÁNEAS, MADRID, 1848

Little interest has been shown in this minor Romantic figure.¹ Yet he distinguished himself in two important literary activities. His *Poestas* (Madrid, 1834) was the first collection of Romantic poetry to be published in volume form, and the poems offer as vivid and characteristic expression of the "Revolt" as *El Moro expósito*, of the same date, does of the "Revival", though the one has been emphasized at length and the other largely ignored. And when the proud standard of Romanticism fell from the grip of Eugenio de Ochoa and his collaborators in *El Artista* (1835-36), it was boldly taken up by Salas y Quiroga and his friends in *No Me Olvides* (May 1837-February 1838), who, in their "Prospecto",

convidan a todos los jóvenes literatos con las columnas de su periódico, ofreciendo dar cabida en ellas a todas las producciones ya en verso ya en prosa que a su juicio, tiendan al noble fin que se han propuesto.

It is here suggested that he deserves our attention for a third activity in which he was equally distinguished, and more original. His novel of Madrid life in the summer of 1836, *El Dios del siglo*, is not only better than the other realistic novels of the Romantic period, but explains and illustrates much more satisfactorily than they, or the "cuadro de costumbres", or *La Gaviota*, the immediate origins, and perhaps even supplies an early model, of the "novelas contemporáneas" of Galdós.

Until more is known of the reasons for Salas' constant journeyings we must accept the conclusions of Núñez de Arenas, and of our reading of his works, that they were the natural expression of his character. He was never forced to travel, as a political exile; yet he travelled further than most, driven by his urge to see the world, to understand its facts and to respond to its mysteries and beauties. So in the introduction to his *Viajes* (Madrid, 1840) he declares:

Me propongo dar a conocer los usos y costumbres, las letras y gobiernos, la naturaleza y arte de los diferentes pueblos a que me ha conducido el deseo de aprender y la necesidad de sentir. . . . juzgaré, en cuanto pueda, con la frialdad de la razón, pintaré, si me es dable, con el entusiasmo de la fe.

We do not know what took the boy, who had been born at Corunna in

¹ Two articles only are known to the present writer: E. Alarcos Llorach: "Un romántico olvidado: Jacinto de Salas y Quiroga," *Castilla*, Bol. del Seminario de Estudios de Lit. y Filología, Valladolid, Cnrsos 1941-43, II, 161-176 (a study of his poetry); and M. Núñez de Arenas: "Figuras románticas: El pobre Salas," *Alfar*, 1926, July, no. 59 (which adds greatly to our meagre biographical knowledge). I am much indebted to Professor Alarcos and to the son of Núñez de Arenas for giving me details of these articles.

1813, to school in Madrid and then to Bordeaux, nor later, at the age of seventeen, to embark alone on a boat bound for Guatemala. On this trip, which lasted from May 1830 to late in 1832, as on a later one in 1839, he travelled widely over the New World, mixing in Lima with the literary set and writing there prize poems and his first play (*Claudia*, acted in Lima in 1831 and printed in his *Poestas*). His views on such matters as colonial responsibilities are remarkably modern. He calls upon Spain, for example, to set up in La Habana

un congreso colonial compuesto de las personas más influyentes e importantes del país, por su saber, por su fortuna, por su posición, y que esto arregle su administración y proponga al gobierno supremo los medios que crea oportunos para aumentar la verdadera riqueza de la isla, riqueza que consiste en la población, en la instrucción, y en el amor al trabajo.¹

If this is done, he adds, independence will finally be assured, though it cannot be contemplated for long yet.

In 1833 he returned to Madrid, having spent several months in Liverpool, London, Paris and Bordeaux on the way home. In an article in *No Me Olvides* (No. 19), he mentions that he has used the Bibliothèque Richelieu in Paris "durante años", but it is not clear when this could have been. Back in Spain (the last part of his fare having been paid by the Spanish consul in Bordeaux), he seems to have made his way in the literary world by publishing verses, writing articles, taking odd jobs in the government or the press, doing a little translating of plays and, later, of historical works. He was accepted as a young man of talent and taste, and struck up a warm friendship with Zorrilla (who in 1837 dedicated a poem to him) and probably with Larra. He frequented the Liceo, where he often read poems, and in January 1838 undertook the newly-established "cátedra" there of "Filosofía de la poesía". This was, one may assume, more honorary than the "curso de Derecho natural y de gentes" (to which might be added another "de Historia"), which was advertised to begin in August 1837 under his directorship "en el establecimiento de la calle de la Victoria, núm. 3, cuarto principal". By this time he was editor of *No Me Olvides*, which, however unrewarding financially, must have given great satisfaction to one so deeply persuaded of the sacred mission of the writer and of his responsibilities towards humanity:

Nosotros, jóvenes escritores del *No Me Olvides*, no aspiramos a más gloria que la de establecer los sanos principios de la verdadera literatura, de la poesía del corazón, y vengar a la escuela llamada 'romántica' de la calumnia. . . .

Si entendiésemos nosotros por *romanticismo* esa ridícula fantasmagoría de espectros y cadalsos, esa violenta exaltación de todos

¹ *Viajes*, p. 281.

los sentimientos, esa inmoral parodia del crimen y la iniquidad... fuéramos ciertamente... los primeros que alzáramos nuestra débil voz contra tamaños abusos... Pero si en nuestra creencia es el romanticismo un manantial de consuelo y pureza, el germen de las virtudes sociales, el paño de lágrimas que vierte el inocente, el perdón de las culpas, el lazo que debe unir a todos los seres, ¿cómo resistir al deseo de ser los predicadores de tanta santa doctrina, de luchar a brazo partido por este dogma de pureza?¹

All the youth of the day are united in this battle, whether they fight with sword or pen, and they share the common aims :

Destruir rivalidades mezquinas, aumentar los sanos principios de la fraternidad, extinguir odios nacidos tal vez de mala inteligencia, sofocar el mal bajo todas las formas, descubrir el bien que existe en todo lo creado, he aquí una obra inmensa, la obra que han acometido los jóvenes del día.²

But not all of them continued the struggle when Romanticism no longer served as a rallying-cry, as did Salas, who was perpetually goaded into action by the shameful cynicism and corruption which he saw around him. In the "Advertencia" to *El Dios del siglo*, for example, he writes :

Por amor a nuestro semejante, pintamos aquí sus costumbres ; si bien teniendo siempre fijo el pensamiento en la humanidad, no en el individuo. Un hombre aislado es un gusano : el conjunto de todos los hombres es la obra más cabal y perfecta de la creación.

The tale of our ignorance of the rest of Salas' life is quickly told. When he arrived in the Indies a second time, in 1839 (Havana, November 25, en route from Puerto Rico), it seems that his world had fallen into ruins about his feet :

Harto ya de una vida de agonía..., barridas mis más dulces ilusiones, oprimido bajo el peso de las desgracias de mi patria y de mi familia [in Spain] donde tuve todo y ya no tengo nada.³

Of where, or how, he spent the last ten years of his brief life we know nothing. Like so many others, he turned to history to occupy his pen, and one presumes to earn a livelihood. A few plays and political pamphlets have survived. Núñez de Arenas attributes to him a novel which was published anonymously, *Los Habitantes de la luna*, of which no copy is known.

Such as it is, our knowledge allows us to visualize the growth of a personality. When he wrote his poems he was a madcap youth of under twenty, violently enthusiastic for novelties and talented enough to enjoy and understand many of them (one poem dedicated to Victor Hugo he

¹ *No Me Olvides*, No. 1, Editorial.

² *Ibid.*, Prospecto, 1837.

³ *Viajes*, p. 5.

wrote in French), but still deeply marked with the imprint of the neo-classical education he had received :

Tenía yo apenas dieciocho años, y acababa de salir de un colegio de Francia ; mi imaginación estaba exaltada, pero con esa exaltación que puede dar la lectura de Boileau, compasada, fría y monótona.¹

In his early poems the romantic influences of Byron, Lamartine and Hugo are thus severely chaperoned by those of Goldsmith, La Fontaine, Horace and Martínez de la Rosa. This phase passed, but without leading him to the heights of Romantic writing, for which he probably had not the gifts even of a Romero Larrañaga or a Nicomedes Pastor Díaz. His emotions and thoughts were later much more deeply stirred by "the still, sad music of humanity" which he sensed, as Larra did, beneath the strife and cynicism of his fellow-citizens. Others before him in Spain had written on the contemporary scene, as for example his old colleague of the Liceo, Patricio de la Escosura (*El Patriarca del valle*, 1846-47). He in particular seems to have responded to the works of Dickens and Sue.

It is not therefore wholly surprising that a Romantic should have written a "novela de costumbres"; what is perhaps surprising is that it should be such a good one. It is true that we are prepared, in the "Advertencia", for a work which has been long maturing and which expresses some of the author's profoundest convictions :

Esta novela no es una sátira, ni un libelo ; es una obra pensada con madurez y escrita con reflexión ; fruto de la observación más minuciosa y desinteresada, expresión de creencias razonadas y de convicciones profundas. Quien lo contrario creyere, yerra. Quien tenga por retratos los que no son más que caracteres, por alusiones las inspiraciones de la verdad, por personalidades las coincidencias imposibles de evitar, incurre en una equivocación grave o calumnia al autor.

Neither Galdós nor Fernán Caballero could say more, and no earlier nineteenth-century novelist could say as much.

The conflict of the powers of good and evil are symbolised in this story of the Madrid of 1836 by the two forces of "dinero" and "talento", in the persons of Don Sisebuto de Soto, miser and operator of shady financial deals, and Don Félix de Montelirio, a young nobleman of impeccable principles, taste and conduct. The symbol does not overshadow the person any more than it does in *Doña Perfecta* or *La Gaviota* : we remember that Salas was a generous-hearted Christian, who believed that every man, however vicious, had in him a touch of virtue.

It is only gradually that the two men become aware of each other. At a "tertulia" each is impressed by the beauty and innocent charm of Otelina, the daughter of a Spanish ambassador recently returned to the

¹ Foreword to *Claudia*.

capital, Carlos de Zúñiga. Their rivalry is only made patent later, when, after drinking overmuch at a party, Sisebuto is forbidden by Félix, who has overheard his boasts, to pronounce the name of the beauty who he declares is casting longing eyes on his "millones". It takes a more violent tone when Félix acts as lawyer for a young "manola", Angustias, who has financial claims against Sisebuto. This attack on his most sensitive spot rouses Sisebuto as nothing else could. Aply seconded by the Condesa de Florseca, he succeeds in having Félix arrested as a conspirator and taken into solitary confinement in the Cárcel de Corte. Up to this point everything has gone well for Sisebuto; if his proposal for Otelina's hand has been scornfully rejected, at least Félix in his modesty has not yet made one. But the discovery of a "plot" which has led to only one arrest, and that of an influential opposition journalist, has deeply stirred the press of Madrid. Long extracts are quoted from rival newspapers, which reveal their venality and corruption as clearly as they are revealed by the fruitless "démarches" of Carlos de Zúñiga to have an impartial tribunal set up to investigate the whole affair.

Meanwhile in his solitary confinement Félix enjoys comparative liberty thanks to the corruptibility of his jailer, and so meets another prisoner whose untimely death by poison, poison intended for Félix, leads to the discovery, which the reader already suspected, that he and Sisebuto had been accomplices in the murder of Don Carlos' father and the stealing of the family fortune. Félix is released by a government which can find no charge to make against him, Sisebuto is tried, found guilty, and sentenced—on a plea by Félix—not to hanging but to life imprisonment. Félix is elected "diputado", and marries Otelina. Their wedding bells sound the dirge for Angustias, whose acquaintanceship with Félix, gradually deepening into admiration, trust and love, had opened up new horizons in her life. Only Otelina, as she taught her to read and write, guessed her secret, a secret finally revealed to Félix in the first use she made of her newly acquired knowledge, the words she traced for him to read on her deathbed.

The purpose the author had in mind in writing his novel is clearly indicated in the 'Nota' with which he ends it:

El autor de esta novela está escribiendo otra, titulada *La condesa de Florseca*, como continuación del cuadro de nuestras costumbres contemporáneas que se ha propuesto trazar.

In the simple innocence and purity of Otelina one could still perhaps detect the conception of the ideal woman championed by her chivalrous knight (Félix) against the bestiality of the dragon (Sisebuto). But in a novel (of which nothing more is known than the title) which revolved around the character of the Condesa de Florseca, possibly the first high-class adventuress in Spanish literature, we could be jostled only by that

fanatical, self-seeking society of rival generals, bankers, lawyers and politicians which provided Bretón with endless subjects for his comedies and drove Larra to commit suicide. Félix is preserved from anticipating Larra, though he had thought of invoking that solution to his problems, by the strength of his Christian belief and his undying hope in the ultimate regeneration of Spain:

Quería la regeneración social de España; pero, al mismo tiempo apetecía el imperio del orden y de la libertad, no para el vencedor, sino para el vencido también.¹

He, or his creator—for there must be a large element of autobiography in this representation of the ideal Romantic possessed of a social conscience and mission—, was no whit less passionately involved than Figaro in the crusade to promote regeneration:

Muchas veces, cuando, al contemplar el desquiciamiento en que se halla la sociedad, desgarrado el corazón y abatido el espíritu, prorumpimos en ayes tan lastimosos como sinceros, una voz interna nos dice que la culpa de que haya *malvados* la tenemos los que por *buenos* pasamos. Si en vez de mostrar una culpable indiferencia cubriendo con el manto de la tolerancia los desórdenes y los vicios que cada día crecen, que cada día invaden más impetuosos la sociedad moderna, rechazásemos lejos, lejos de nosotros, a cuantos crean su mundano engrandecimiento por medios de corrupción y envilecimiento, entonces no se perpetuaría el mal, y antes bien, los tibios buscarían en el ejemplo fuerzas para agregarse al gremio de los que no quieren prosperidad, si la prosperidad es símbolo de la infamia.²

Salas y Quiroga is also a precursor of the Generation of 1898.

It is probably because of this deep preoccupation with Spain and of his faith, already referred to, in the goodness not of the individual but of the mass, of man in society, that the novelist has reached beyond several of the limitations which confined the contemporary novel of customs. He could not be interested in the static description of the "cuadro", nor in the magnified characterization of the Romantic novel, just as he refused to copy the methods of caricature and demagoguery utilised by Dickens and Sue. He was seeking to regenerate a society, not to hang a gallery with pictures of its more typical, topical or picturesque idiosyncracies. One of the merits of his novel is therefore the absence of the absolute (Otelina took so little notice of Félix at their first meeting that she hardly recognised him when she saw him again), and another the assimilation into the novel of intrigue of the very considerable quantity of "costumbres" which he describes. The technique of *La Gaviota* is in comparison naïve and immature to a degree. A third is the multiplicity

¹ I., p. 259.

² II., pp. 109-110.

of relationships which he establishes between the characters. A moral novelist of the eighteenth century or a Romantic-historical novelist of the nineteenth would have been content to set up Félix and Sisebuto as the good and the bad, or as the aristocrat and the "parvenu". Salas sees them symbolically as "el talento" and "el dinero". But how variously the symbol is disguised! The two are mutually incompatible by nature, class and culture. They are rivals for the hand of Otelina, in part at least because of the offended pride of the "arriviste" that a debt-ridden young nobleman (as he supposes) should dare to dispute another bargain with him. Félix is the lawyer who may make Sisebuto disgorge money and perhaps uncover incidents which were better let lie; he is also the political and social reformer whose activities would cripple those of the money-lender and jobber. Behind Sisebuto stands the Condesa de Florseca with her private grudge against Félix to work off. Angustias' "novio" is porter in Sisebuto's house and his dupe in a particularly mean transaction. Nor is this variety limited to those who are at cross purposes. In the opening scenes of the novel Sisebuto is tempted to jib at an urgent command of the Condesa, whose audacity, unscrupulousness and intelligence quite frequently dismay his meanness and low cunning: she is not implicated in his downfall, but lives, in her creator's imagination, to become the central character in the sequel to *El Dios del siglo*.

In his choice of "costumbrista" material, Salas y Quiroga excludes all reference to the major events of the day, such as the Motín de la Granja of 12 August 1836, or the Carlist War; he is writing a "novela contemporánea", not an "episodio nacional". As he believes any reformation of society must begin with those who lead it, most of his shafts are reserved for the upper classes, not so much the aristocracy perhaps as the rich bourgeoisie which provides the nation with its generals, politicians, statesmen, journalists, poets and society celebrities. The range is wide, and, as a few examples will show, his pungency and humour are telling. Don Carlos de Zúñiga grew so ashamed of the indignities to which as Spanish Ambassador to various important countries he was subjected that he

solicitó su traslación a cualquier nación distante, en donde la mengua de España fuese menos conocida, y a fortuna tuvo el ser destinado a Constantinopla, único país del globo cuya decadencia fuese igual a la nuestra . . . (pero) vió con asombro y dolor, que hasta la Puerta Otomana . . . ajaba a España . . .¹

Félix had been imprisoned, and Volume II begins:

Hasta los primeros años de la época venturosa en que nos hallamos, pocos de nuestros lectores conocían la cárcel de corte de Madrid,

¹ I., pp. 120-121.

más que por fuera: en el día, los tuviéramos por personas de escasa valía si no la conociesen también por dentro.¹

The corrupt jailer describes the manner in which many political prisoners are set free, and Félix comments:

—¡Ya! no resultaría nada de la causa.
—¡Qué causa! ¡ni qué niño muerto! Las causas son buenas para los asesinos y ladrones. Para los señores así como V., que si son blancos, que si son negros, no hay nada; a veces los ponen en libertad sin tomarles una sola declaración. Algunos, como Matachel, no hubieran jamás sido ministros, ni cosa que lo valga, si no hubieran estado aquí la friolerilla de un par de meses. ¿Se ofrece algo más, que tengo prisa?²

In addition to a deliciously ironical scene in which a "veterano" explains to a new "empleado" of a government office how it comes about that, though the "pagas aquí van con seis meses de atraso", everyone in fact is paid regularly, there is a scene of "Vuelva Vd. mañana" which would have delighted Larra. Don Sisebuto goes to collect a debt in the Ministry:

Dos horas llevaba ya de antesala en una de las oficinas generales de Madrid, perteneciente al ramo de amortización, y todavía no sabía si don Ricardo de Aragón, oficial décimonono de la hacienda pública, se hallaba o no en el edificio. Un barrendero lo había dejado pasar por recomendación a la sala de los porteros, y estos señores, hasta que acabaron de leer la Gaceta, y de hacer y fumar el octavo cigarrillo de papel, no se dignaron darle audiencia . . .

—No es hora de audiencia—le dijo uno con énfasis.—Vuelva V. a eso de las tres.

—Vengo a cosa urgente y no puedo volver. Anoche me mandó venir el oficial.

—No sé si llegó ya; creo que no.

—Si me hiciese V. el obsequio de informarse.

—Cuando llame alguien, entraré y lo veré.

Quiso la suerte que llama entonces; el portero entró, pero no vió nada, porque se le olvidó.³

Among the guests of the Condesa de Florseca we notice:

algún general de la oposición vergonzante, es decir . . . que aman la guerra como medio de conseguir la paz . . ., que debía cuatro grados de cada cinco a los frecuentes pronunciamientos en que había tomado parte, unas veces con los vencidos, con los vencedores otras . . . capitalistas . . . poco dados a oír y sí mucho a escuchar, no parecía

¹ II., p. 7.

² II., p. 39.

³ I., p. 55.

sino que sus palabras valían dinero, siendo así que callaban las más veces por . . . no tener que decir . . .

Y los poetas, en tanto, gente de carácter impresionable y vario, unos festivos hasta rayar en desvarío, otros sentimentales hasta en soporíficos, servían para rellenar los huecos y formar el arco iris de toda sociedad.¹

If the attitude to "costumbrismo" which these quotations suggest seems to relate Salas y Quiroga particularly with Figaro, there are in the novel frequent details of the streets and customs of Madrid which might have come from the works of Meñero Romanos. There are descriptions likewise of houses and people which would have pleased Galdós. The observant reader will have noticed two other points of resemblance between this novel and the works of Galdós. Don Sisebuto de Soto is less powerfully drawn than Torquemada, the figure is not so imposing and tragic, but it is set in a web of conflicting interests no less curiously spun; while in choosing suggestive names for his characters, Florseca, Angustias, Rodríguez, Ganzúa, Salas y Quiroga notably anticipates the creation of Máximo Manso, Villahorrenda, Rosalía Pipaón de Bringas, and of Modesto Guerrero, Rosa Mística, by Galdós and Fernán Caballero.

Enough has perhaps been said and quoted to suggest the real interest which this novel possesses for the history of the kind in nineteenth-century Spain. Its existence sufficiently proves that we cannot trace the origins of the novels of Pérez Galdós directly back either to *La Gaviota* or to the "cuadro de costumbres", since in it, and in some twenty others written by Spanish authors between 1831 and 1850 (and who knows how many more after that date?), Galdós would have found repeated examples of a realistic novel, with native materials and something of a native style, which had already animated the "cuadro" and adapted it to the demands of fiction with a success greatly superior to anything achieved by Fernán Caballero in 1849. That would be sufficient reason for rescuing *El Dios del siglo* from the total oblivion in which it would seem to have rested since it was first published just over a hundred years ago. Let us add that, among the novels of its time, it is one of the few that can still be read to-day with ease and pleasure. Someone may some day be tempted to return to it as part of a general investigation of the life and works of this most unusual, and as far as one can judge, most interesting and notable man, Jacinto de Salas y Quiroga.

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¹I., pp. 217-9.

THE TREATY OF 1825 BETWEEN GREAT BRITAIN AND THE UNITED PROVINCES OF RÍO DE LA PLATA¹

"General Rosas began by saying how deep and sincere was the general feeling of the Argentines towards England; that it reposed on a basis which could not be shaken, as England was the first to recognize their Independence and their gratitude was coeval with their very existence—that the Treaty with Mr. Parish (which, he added, was very unfavourable to this Country) was made from the generous impulse that the recognition had given here—but that he never had regretted that Treaty and would preserve it inviolate to the last day of his power."² In these words, the British representative in Buenos Aires reported in 1847 to his Foreign Secretary the desire of the Argentine dictator to renew the traditional friendship between the two countries, an acknowledgement of ties which had outlasted a most difficult period of international misunderstanding. It is significant that Rosas should refer appreciatively to events which took place nearly a quarter of a century before and to the treaty signed in 1825 by Great Britain and the United Provinces of Río de la Plata as constituting the basis of this friendship. His words are a tribute to George Canning's prescience and to the permanent value of his decision to recognize, by means of a treaty, the existence of a new nation in the region of the River Plate. Rosas' parenthetical remark that the treaty was "very unfavourable" to his country was belied by his desire to keep it in being; because he must have known that he was in no position to conclude a more favourable agreement. His aside nevertheless shows that the events attending the making of the treaty deserve detailed examination if only to prove that, in the circumstances, when the relative position and strength of the contracting parties is taken into account, Argentina did not fare as badly as was suggested.

Great Britain in the 1820's was a rich, powerful and rapidly expanding industrialized nation, anxious to find new markets for its manufactures and new homes for its surplus population. Its interests lay in regularizing its trade with the River Plate, in securing the lives and properties of those of its subjects who had established themselves in the former vice-royalty, and in preventing the lands controlled by the new *criollo* governments from falling prey to any other European power. The other party, the United

¹Note on references. Documents with the prefix F.O. are in the Record Office, London. W. signifies those reprinted or summarized in C. K. Webster, *Britain and the Independence of Latin America*, 2 vols., London, 1938. A.G.N. indicates that the document is in the Archivo General de la Nación, Buenos Aires.

²F.O., 6/133, Howden to Ponsonby (Confidential), No. 8, 23 May 1847.