MODES OF FIGURATION IN *MIAU*

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Of Galdós's many strategies for translating the complex processes of reality into fiction, heterogeneity and open-endedness are among the most elusive, because in producing the reality effect they call upon an unwieldy diversity of materials. Readers seeking organic form in Galdós's fictions will encounter apparently intrusive details or segments of elaboration whose narrative purposes seem obscure but for whose presence they feel certain a logic exists. Deciphering the internal logic of Galdós's narratives inevitably becomes one of the realist critic's greatest challenges, and a most rewarding one as well, since it is often within the anarchic spaces of narrative that illumination and subtle ordering can be found.

The elaborative set piece is a familiar rhetorical staple in Galdós's novels. Such writerly exercises as Rufete's mad sequence and Bringas's hair picture occupy aesthetic spaces of their own within the text and, like theatrical or operatic set pieces, they address the specific situations of the characters whose traits they perform. They serve as vehicles of exposition and conceptual thinking, as dramatizations of affective and moral dimensions in character, or simply as spaces of prolonged artistry whose presence articulates issues that the plot only indirectly raises. Hence Galdós's set pieces are both performative and organic, and, insofar as they signal suppressed discourses, they are figural as well.

"Figure," as Genette defines it, is a surplus of meaning that falls into the gap "between what the poet has *written* and what he *thought* . . . and like all space it possesses form" (47). "Every figure is translatable and bears its translation visible, like a watemark, or a palimpsest beneath its apparent text" (50). Genette's observations with respect to poetic diction and syntax can be usefully translated to the more ample articulations of a narrative text. Pascal says that "figure bears both absence and presence" (quoted in Genette 49). As narrative absences, figures depend for their existence upon the readers' consciousness of unresolved cruxes in the text and upon their capacity for attaching significance to elliptical or elusive segments of narrative. As narrative presences, figures rely upon the readers' desire for connectedness and upon their natural capacity for reasoning analogically. In this way, figures in narrative signify typologically as well as metaphorically or metonymically; spaces of intense feeling and significance become artful and ingenious forms that resonate with one another. As Galdós says: "ese misterioso saber de filosofía y ansias de poeta que todo humano lleva en sí . . . en los talentos superiores . . . pueden revestirse, al pasar del pensamiento a la pluma, de gallardas y seductoras formas" ("Prólogo" 63-64).

Tableaux, icons, microcosms, "cuadros de costumbres," "estampas de género"—all are well-known designations for the "gallardas y seductoras formas" of Galdós's fictions. From each stage of Galdós's novelistic career one can retrieve collages, both verbal and visual, whose positioning in their texts gives them genuinely theatrical prominence. Recent studies have added to the taxonomy and increased the range of the Galdosian figure. Percival (154) and Deutsch (36) both

see the labyrinth as a configuration for conceptual as well as thematic space; Urey takes Galdós's "framed silences" to be "partial texts, partial resolutions of . . . enigma" (53). The hair picture that opens *La de Bringas* suggests to Bergmann the classical mode of ekphrasis, a term with rich potential for the structuring of arrested motion. The ekphrastic figure is a composed digression. Like all such theatrically positioned texts, it requires of the reader attention of a particular kind, attention which may or may not be in violation of an overall sense of balance. That same dual potential for digressionary dislocation and internal structuring characterizes Gide's *mise en abyme,* a figure in the reflexive mode with the capacity for infinite reprise built into it.

The *mise en abyme* is nowhere more exhaustively studied than in Dällenbach's *Le Récit spéculaire,* a meticulous and ingenious *mise en abyme* of scholarship. As guidelines for Gide's original sense of the term, Dällenbach recalls the figure's origin as an heraldic *blason,* its function of framing, and in particular its property of reflecting or mirroring the intelligibility and the formal structure of the work of art that contains it. In Gide's view some of the most famous examples of reflexivity in art and literature are only partially admissible examples of the *mise-en-abyme* technique: the inserted royal portrait in Velázquez's *Las Meninas,* for instance, Van Eyck's convex mirror, or *Hamlet*'s play within the play. Since quite a few apparently clear examples of the *abyme* fail to yield to Gide's criteria, Dällenbach concludes that Gide was probably describing what other writers have meant by interior duplication (31). More useful for purposes of critical distinction are Dällenbach's own basic types of *mises en abyme*—the simple, the infinite, and the paradoxical. Whatever its type may be, the figure can appear singly, dialogically, or recurringly within a fiction, insuring a measure of textual self-regulation in any of its forms of deployment. The figure may appear gratuitous, but it is not arbitrary. Like the more loosely defined theatrical set piece which it often embellishes, the *mise en abyme* usually signals latent meaning and reduplicates thematic matter at the level of character.

A remarkable three-chapter set piece precedes the suicide of Ramón Villaamil in *Miau.* It is a sequence of elaborated reflexivity that contains within it figures that signify in a variety of complex ways. The sequence is puzzling and in many ways disquieting. Its significance to the novel is universally acknowledged yet rarely explained. From the standpoint of plot, Villaamil's excursus is almost wholly superfluous, since it is simply an intensely performed interlude between prior resolution of the novel's various conflicts and the protagonist's removal from it at the end. It therefore serves as a cadenza or coda section to the novel itself. Robert Weber's transcription of the Alpha version of the *Miau* manuscript has a laconic sketch for the sequence in question: "Villaamil se dirige al sitio fatal. La vida le es insoportable. Quiere morir, quiere ir a otro mundo, quiere dejar de padecer, no siente afecto ninguno a su mujer. La muerte es una manía. Apetece el descanso. Ve con voluptuosidad la muerte. Llega y encomendándose brevemente a Dios, se pega un tiro" (154; Weber's punctuation). These early notes present Villaamil as a kind of Don Álvaro "en levita." Galdós apparently had in mind quite conventional romantic notions of the psychology of a suicide as he sketched out his novel's ending. With the interpolation of the prolonged set piece, however, the final version of *Miau* ends less conventionally and more

interestingly, a fine example of Galdós's figural transformation of nineteenth-century commonplaces into the modern discourse of paradox.

Miau's narrator clearly designates the coda sequence as a soliloquy (XLII, 1109). The passage makes its mark first, therefore, as a piece of theatrical silhouetting, an extended declamatory statement against a recessive narrative ground. The nature of Villaamil's theatricality has caused considerable disagreement among the novel's critics, largely because of a tendency to view the character as a conflict-ridden psychic entity immersed in events which endow him with tragic, comic, or tragicomic proportions.[1] There are clear indications of pure melodrama in Villaamil's soliloquy, however. As Brooks tells us: "It is the nature of melodrama to exteriorize conflict and psychic structure" (35). The precepts of tragedy would appear to call for an anguished soliloquy along the lines suggested by the notes in the Alpha manuscript. Yet as Galdós's protagonist performs the passage of time between noon and nightfall of his last day, he achieves emotional intensity by simple self-repetition, by hyperbolical self-recapitulation, by escaping, in fact, into the givens of his own fiction. To the extent that Villaamil's excesses border on madness, we can detect in him the phenomenon that Gilman observed in Galdós's later treatment of mad characters: "Madness is no longer a comparison or a challenging allegory, it is a condition of narration" (51)—a fusion of narration and character into something resembling exegesis.

Villaamil is a fictional character whose textual death is imminent. As such he summarizes himself and the motifs that have occasioned his present exorbitant emotional and moral state: "cesantía," the "Estado," the female Miaus, hunger and poverty, letter-writting, social advancement, all of which and more come under the rubric of his character-defining "pesimismo." Villaamil's elation and revulsion assume dehumanizing or self-destructive proportions, while with equal exaggeration the tenderness he feels for his grandson Luisito modulates to quasi-beatification. Contrary to what might be expected from a character about to take his own life, the discursive emphasis of the soliloquizing is not on the obsessive pondering of theological or existential dilemmas but on the exteriorizing of a previously established character. Villaamil is not Prince Hamlet nor was he meant to be. Neither is he a latter-day Don Álvaro whose tragedy lies in resisting an irrepressible death wish. Notwithstanding the contrary indications in the Alpha version, suicide is conspicuously absent from the thematic content of Villaamil's soliloquy, and, when the moment for it comes, the death is neither tragically ironic nor dramatically surprising. It is simply, and sadly, in character.

Further comparison of Galdós's Beta *Miau* with the Alpha manuscript suggests that making the Alpha ending consistent with the purport of the Beta novel posed problems whose resolution required unusually energetic artistry. Although Galdós composed *Miau* with the suicide in mind, Villaamil's story is an end-determined fiction only in the plotting sense. Villaamil's is the death of a character who has outstripped his usefulness, the ultimate "cesantía." Like Máximo Manso, he has been defined negatively from the outset of his novel. His textual demise occurs, in fact, with the relinquishing of his last charge, Luisito, to the surrogate "padre de familia," Ildefonso Cabrera; but the novel's premises do not permit him simply to write himself out of the text as Manso does: "He dado mi fruto y estoy de más. Todo lo que ha cumplido su ley desaparece . . . . Voy a

tomar postura" (*Manso* L, 1308). Without his "dependientes" the "cesante madrileño" suffers a reversion to type, a return to purely *costumbrista* interest. His novel is gone. It is something beyond plot, therefore, and perhaps beyond character, that requires of Villaamil a "divagación" and soliloquy as preludes to his suicide.

There have been suggestions that *Miau*'s final chapters dramatize a change in Villaamil's character. His enjoyment of food and nature appears to betoken a new sense of liberation and euphoria. "It is ironic," says Lowe, "that as he plans his death the world is 'born' to him . . . . Villaamil's eyes have at last opened, allowing him to see beyond the limitations of his work" (10). In truth, the final Villaamil is more blindly himself than ever, a perambulating obsession silhouetted against a background of persistently reinterpreted natural and human phenomena.[2] Birds alternately surround and flee from him in punctuation of his emotional extremes. His final meal briefly satisfies him, then quickly generates memories of "mis tiempos de muchacho, cuando . . . no me ocupaba de si había o no había para mandar mañana a la plaza" (XLII, 1110). A group of military "recién llegados" elicits biblically oracular exhortations from him, as he incorrectly assumes that they are youthful projections of himself. The birds, too, are either projections of Villaamil–"vosotros sois padres de familia y tenéis hijos que mantener" (XLIII, 1111)–or of the female Miaus who, like the biblical birds of the air, "ni siembran ni siegan" (Mat. 6.26): "A ver esos pajarillos tan graciosos que andan por ahí picoteando, ¿se ocupan de lo que comerán mañana? No: por eso son felices . . . . Ninguno de éstos estará casado con una pájara que se llame Pura" (XLII, 1110). Narrated nature is impassively beautiful–"El día era espléndido, raso y bruñido" (XLII, 1108)–but it, like the birds, soon reverts to a landscape that harmonizes with Villaamil's own obsessions: "Los setos de aligustre ostentaban ya sus lozanos renuevos, rivalizando a los *evonymus* de perenne hoja . . . . Observó Villaamil la diferencia de tiempo con que las especies arbóreas despiertan de la somnolencia invernal" (XLII, 1108).

That "precozmente veraniego" spring afternoon occasions frequent discrepancies between narrational neutrality and Villaamil's conditioned observation of nature's rivalries and precedences.[3] By insistently intruding into the sequence Villaamil's by now familiar motifs, Galdós systematically subordinates conventional "dying man" tropes to the exigencies imposed by Villaamil's character. The dying man's life passes before his eyes; the dying man is reborn to nature; the condemned man enjoys a hearty last meal: "¡Qué gracia tienen para sazonar en esta taberna! ¡Y qué persona tan simpática es el tabernero, y qué bien le sientan los manguitos verdes, los zapatos de alfombra y la gorra de piel! ¡Cuánto más guapo es que Cucúrbitas y que el propio Pantoja!" (XLII, 1108). The modulation in this passage from trope to thematic obsession is characteristic of the entire coda sequence. The innkeeper's simple "gorra de piel" calls up Pantoja's ridiculously ornate "gorrete encarnado, con unas al modo de alcachofas bordadas de oro" (XXI, 1046), and in so doing admits him to the extended analogical system that in Villaamil's novel comprises "empleados," "pretendientes," "jubilados," and "cesantes," and, by extension, the Devil, God, and the text itself.[4] The simple analogy between one hat and another generates an extended metonymy in which the sharing of figural detail within the context of the larger novel overcomes the powerful attraction of external associations and conventions. In this instance,

the conventional "condemned man" trope shrinks to almost zero-degree meaning while within it a character meaning expands to the n[th] degree. Greater figures carry lesser figures within them, and frequently the predominance of the lesser permits character not only to restate itself once but to appear to do so over and over again.

In this fashion, *Miau*'s soliloquy section intensifies Villaamil's novel without recourse to essential modifications in his character. The protagonist becomes figurally reanimated, and the reduplication takes place at the level of character, as Gide originally intended. The simple summing up of character seems insufficient, however, to explain so intense and prolonged an elaboration as we find in the final pages of *Miau*. Gide's order of transposition for the figure he identifies, being descriptive rather than normative, is ultimately limiting. Dällenbach's more theoretical analysis of the *mise en abyme* goes well beyond Gide's by extending the analogical spectrum to include figures that are specific to discourse as well as character, thereby framing the novel's novel or the *roman du roman*. *Miau*'s coda is not merely a melodramatic exteriorization of character. Character space alternates with the space of narration, which itself contains a figure more closely resembling the heraldically framed *mise en abyme*. As a figural unit of text, the coda set piece performs many mirroring functions, but it is not autonomous. It is superfluous to plot but not detachable from it. A more text-determined kind of figuration appears in the guise of a generating narrative kernel, extrinsic to the novel but with striking formal similitude to it and with important ramifications for the exegetical problems it presents. The figure points to an absent presence (to echo Pascal's phrase), which is fleetingly signalled to the character Villaamil but whose meaning is finally manifest only to the reader's code of reference.

The unusual name of the tavern where Villaamil takes his last meal is openly indicated: "No hay otra [taberna] como ésta," the innkeeper says. "Fíjese en el rótulo: *La Viña del Señor*" (XLII, 1109). In the context of tavern nomenclature, the name derives from a proverbial adaptation of a biblical metaphor–"De todo hay en la viña del Señor"–which suggests that all kinds are welcome, there is something for everyone. In the context of *Miau* we must look again, however. Galdós's handling of the sign is so deictically explicit that it might almost be followed by a formulaic call to interpretation: "y el que quiera entender que entienda."[5] As Dällenbach indicates, the conditions of the *mise en abyme* often ensure that the reader's reception will be different from and superior to the character's. Villaamil's response to the sign is negation, a rejection of the text's invitation that he read himself in it: "No, si yo no he de volver. Mañana estaré muy lejos, amigo mío" (XLII, 1109). The "rótulo" invokes as a mirror text a familiar biblical phrase, but the determinate nature of Villaamil's character renders the text inaccessible to him, and, by ignoring it, he finally excludes both change and conversion as possible resolutions to his novel. He is permitted self-summary but denied the self-interpretation that could lead to change.

Boudreau has suggested that *Miau* is one of a paradigmatic series of *Novelas contemporáneas* that have potentially theological overtones. The presence in the novel of Luisito's God along with Villaamil's constant casting of himself in the Christ-like role of bureaucratic scapegoat would perhaps be sufficient to alert us to the presence of hieratic matter in *Miau*. Yet the manner and treatment of Villaamil's death impede facile allegorizing. In the light of the more openly

defined polemical position that Galdós took in his correspondence with Pereda more than ten years earlier (1876-77), it is instructive to read the following declaration in another letter to Pereda, dated February 9, 1888, seven days into work on the Beta version of *Miau:* "Yo sostengo que *La Montálvez* [Pereda's current novel] es una obra de tesis, como las que hacíamos hace años, y tiene por tanto las ventajas y los inconvenientes de las obras de tesis, en que se quiere probar algo . . . . Usted con su idea religiosa en el magín torció la novela tomando la dirección del *Paraíso* de Dante, en vez de tomar la del Infierno, que es donde debemos ir siempre los novelistas si queremos pintar la humanidad viva" (Bravo Villasante 37-38). In *Miau,* "Paraíso" and "Infierno" are interchangeable metaphors for the "Administración." Chapter 35 focuses "Infierno" in a short set description that compares "las figuras de Villaamil y de Argüelles" with "las de Dante y Virgilio buscando por senos recónditos la entrada o salida de los recintos infernales que visitaban" (1088). "Paraíso" emerges from a parallelism, elaborately contrived throughout the novel, that associates the favor-dispensing "ministro" with a justice-dispensing God.

The "Parables of the Kingdom" and other matter from the synoptic Gospels underlie much of what is problematical in *Miau.* The nature of Galdós's own moral judgments, of his purported didacticism, has long been a nagging concern for the novel's critics.[6] Critical insistence upon this particular crux in *Miau,* even though the same crux is in fact present in numerous of Galdós's other novels, will seem less surprising when it becomes apparent that *Miau*'s text contains a built-in formula for hermeneutic irresolution. It is, in fact, quite understandable that *Miau* should have been read as a residual thesis novel "en que se quiere probar algo," but it is more understandable still that the "algo" should remain largely unexplained.

Kermode's study of biblical parables as the "genesis of secrecy" in narrative is well known, as is the "intolerable" conclusion he reaches with respect to the parables' failure of prophecy. The author of the parables, he claims, was teaching through deliberate misdirection, apparently "in order that the crowd would miss the point" of what he was saying (28). Suleiman also comments upon the "willful obscurity" of the parables in her analysis of the *roman à thèse,* but she moderates Kermode's theory in one respect: "Despite the appeal of Kermode's argument for our skeptical sensibility, I believe that one cannot entirely exclude the pedagogical impulse behind [the parables]" (34). A parable calls for application and judgment, and at the same time it denies access to either. Accordingly, the innkeeper's sign makes manifest to *Miau*'s readers a subtext generically defined as having a didactic purpose; but, also by definition, resolution remains an interpretive paradox.

In its rhetoric and in its narrative outline, the *Viña del Señor* parable resonates with the abundance of New Testament matter in *Miau*–with the "Bienaventurados," with the Sermon on the Mount, with other parables, and of course with the *MIAU/INRI* analogy that marks the critical point of Villaamil's symbolic *via crucis.* The formulaic opening of the Saint Matthew version of the vineyard parable (20.1-16) immediately calls to mind one of *Miau*'s motifs: "Porque el reino de los cielos es semejante a un hombre padre de familia, que salió por la mañana a ajustar obreros para su viña." Matthew 21.33 repeats the motif in another "viña" parable: "Oíd otra parábola: fue un hombre padre de familia, el cual plantó una

viña . . . ." Minter points out that the "padre de familia" is a recurring Gospel type in which earthly and divine justice are confused. In Augustine's interpretation the *paterfamilias* is "the key figure who reconciles internal domestic demands with external social obligations" (87). In *Miau* the epithet specifically refers not only to Villaamil himself but to at least one of his subtypes, Argüelles.

Since the novel postulates a universe of typological analogues, Villaamil's story can be seen as an elaboration of parable and *costumbrista* typologies on a shared thematic ground of employment. As the Matthew 20 parable has it, the "Señor" of the vineyard summons laborers five times during the course of a day. Some of the workers are called early, others later, and others later still. At the end of the day, the last receive equal payment with the first, on a curious principle of equal pay for unequal work. Complaints about the injustice of that scheme of remuneration give rise to the parable's "logion" or summing-up explanation: "Así los primeros serán postreros, y los postreros primeros: porque muchos son llamados, mas pocos escogidos." As an explanation of the parable lesson, this is cryptic at best. The appropriateness of the simple narrative as a *mise en abyme* for Villaamil's situation should be apparent, however, since both discuss the theme of cosmic justice/injustice in terms of the distribution of rewards for labor.

The first/last motif has been the subject of centuries of unresolved hermeneutic exegetics. The paradox it frames remains no less puzzling today for skeptical truth-seekers than does *Miau*'s lesson of bureaucratic inequity for realist readers of meaning: "Bienaventurados los brutos, porque de ellos es el reino . . . de la Administración" (IV, 997). The true "Bienaventurado" of this universe is the appropriately named Buenaventura Pantoja, a "padre de familia" who mediates successfully among his several worlds and is therefore apparently exempt from the law of typological determinacy. "[A]bsolver a los delincuentes y aún premiarlos, mientras los leales perecen" (XXVI, 1061): such is Villaamil's characteristic expression of *Miau*'s universal law. The type of the "delincuente" is, of course, Víctor Cadalso, who exploits the laws of Villaamil's universe with consummate hypocrisy: "Si he tenido la desgracia de ir por delante de otros, no es culpa mía" (XXXI, 1078). Once recognized as a generating narrative kernel for *Miau,* the *Viña* parable begins to call up its many thematic analogues within the text. The vineyard master's five-fold summons of the laborers corresponds numerically, though inversely, to Villaamil's five periods of "cesantía." The first/last motif belongs to Luisito's text, as well as to Villaamil's and Víctor's, and is introduced explicitly, although again in inverted form, in *Miau*'s opening paragraph: "el último quería ser el primero, y los pequeños chillaban más que los grandes." Admittance to "Paraíso" is a constant that extends from the text of the "cesantes" to that of the female Miaus and culminates in another embedded set piece, the lady Miaus at the opera: "¡Las Miaus en delantera! . . . No eran ellas las únicas abonadas a paraíso" (XXVII, 1064).

Insofar as the *Viña del Señor* signals both a formal and a thematic correlation of similitude with the text that contains it, it is the *roman du roman* that Dällenbach postulated. It is also a *roman du lecteur,* however, because the mere presence of parable in the text is an authorial hint as to the manner of the novel's reading. Parables have no purpose other than to be interpreted, and moral teaching inevitably calls for moral judgment. For this reason, *Miau* criticism has strained

to produce judgmental interpretations and interpretive judgments. The problematical nature of meaning is unquestionably inscribed in *Miau*'s lacunary *mise en abyme,* yet at the same time the parable's pedagogical impulse makes accessible relative judgments and transitory absolutes. The critical tendency to relativize Víctor Cadalso is a curious consequence of Galdós's habit of elaborating character through figural intensification. Purely rhetorical perspectivism in *Miau* leads to an ethical perspectivism in its critics that makes even Víctor's depravity seem theoretically admissible.[7] The mirror dream in chapter 11, for example, privileges Víctor, momentarily at least, with a place in a recognized hierarchy of morality: "Soñó que iba por una galería muy larga, inacabable, con paredes de espejos, que hasta lo infinito repetían su gallarda persona. Iba por aquel callejón persiguiendo a una mujer, a una dama elegante, la cual corría agitando con el rápido mover de sus pies la falda de crujiente seda. . . . En efecto la dama llevaba en la mano una cómoda ¡de tamaño natural! . . . como si fuera un portamonedas. Entonces Víctor despertaba sintiendo sobre sí un peso tal que no podía moverse, y un terror supersticioso que no sabía relacionar ni con la cómoda, ni con la dama, ni con los espejos" (XI, 1018).

The dream endows the character with the capacity for anxiety and therefore attributes a psychology to him. Like other *mises en abyme,* the dream is a figured particularity, an accumulation of localized significance at a specific juncture in the narrative. As a gratuitous piece of embedding, the passage's assimilation into the reader's novel of morality and judgment is unusually difficult, since its relevance to the larger novel derives almost entirely from its analogical and evocative figural properties. Víctor's dream calls up the elaborate oneiric discourse that Luisito's text generates and at the same time infinitely reiterates that portion of Víctor's novel—"las faldas corruptoras"—which the reader never witnesses. Where the reader's novel is concerned, the problem of judgment remains. As Langbaum says, the myriad particulars of a given case mean that "judgment can never be final . . . it must always be checked against fact, which comes before judgment and remains more certain." In our empirical and untranscendent age, "judgment is largely psychologized and historicized" (107). Galdós's inclusion of Víctor's dream figure is a fleeting assertion of a character's historicity, a fact of seemingly transitory significance whose presence nevertheless calls permanently into question the absolute transcendence of his amorality.

In Galdós's realism the narrative figure has the quality of an aesthetic assertion, which brings with it a purely aesthetic form of transcendence. Generic and thematic reduplications lead to interpretive doubts and analogical certainties, just as parables are rhetorically determinate and didactically paradoxical. Parable, fable, and allegory are generic designations that recur frequently in critical treatments of Galdós's middle and late novels.[8] Each novel is its own kind of exemplary fiction, borrowing something of the manner and the matter of exemplary deep structures. In the case of *Miau,* Galdós adds the dimension of fable to that of parable. There is early evidence that he regarded the terms as interchangeable,[9] so we can perhaps read the novel's animal motif as a further extension of its exemplary figuration. The title *Miau* is a mimetic animal sound that becomes a cumulatively recurring figure of many aspects. As an acronym, "M.I.A.U." has its own pivotal *mise en abyme* in Guillén's "aleluyas": "una serie de dibujillos de mala muerte, con sus pareados al pie . . . comprendiendo la historia

completa de Villaamil desde su nacimiento hasta su muerte" (XXXIV, 1085). Villaamil's "historia completa" will never, of course, be told. His fictional birth and death, like Manso's, are no more than his novel's beginning and its ending. Yet the "aleluyas" are the figuration of a purely hypothetical life outside the novel, just as they are a prefiguration of the novelistic death that is to come. As a character epithet, "Miau" convokes Galdós's gallery of comic-grotesque animal caricatures: the gorilla Mendizábal, the cat ladies, the tiger *paterfamilias,* the "bestia apocalíptica" and "animal dañino" Víctor. Then, as a commonly used expletive, the word "miau" brings "clear connotations of derision and skepticism," as both Sackett and Rodgers have pointed out. The word is a warning "against taking the surface meaning of the novel too literally" (Rodgers 21).[10]

Literal misinterpretation is another of *Miau*'s coordinates, a motif that centers on Luisito Cadalso and his consistent misreading of his own visionary fictions. Luisito interprets literally; Villaamil interprets selectively. Both characters fail to see the child's visions for the figured fantasies that they are, and their mutual acceptance of paradox as prophecy gives the suggestion of cause and effect to the novel's textually decisive ending. Like Luisito with his dreams, Villaamil is incompetent as an internal reader of his novel's parable discourse. To the external reader, the summarizing logion is no help. Admittance to the "viña del Señor" remains provisional, and, in the absence of faith, the conditions of provisionality remain unknown and unknowable except through the closed systems and hermetic prophecies of figures.

In *Miau,* abyss calls to narrative abyss and figures circumscribe figures. Such is the analogical dimension of figuration and such is its strategy of containment. "In writing," Foucault has said, "the point is not to manifest or exalt the act of writing . . . it is rather a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears" (102). Thus regarded the *mise-en-abyme* figure could be seen to function as one of the black holes of fiction, as the ultimate in postmodernist denial of the author and his text. It is perhaps more appropriate in this connection to heed Dällenbach's opening admonition. He reminds us that *abyme* is a technical term and one should avoid being beguiled by its rich metaphysical associations (17). Both Gide and Dällenbach attempted to describe the practice of a particular kind of reflexive mode and in its elucidation were themselves beguiled. Galdós is more inventive and more practical.

Miau, with its coda logion, represents an extension of Galdós's earlier uses of narrative figuration. Other experiments in unknowing and the unknowable coincide with the composition of *Miau (La incógnita/Realidad),* and more extensive parabolic narratives are soon to follow: *Torquemada*—"Más liviano trabajo es pasar un camello por el ojo de una aguja que entrar un rico en el reino de Dios" (Mat. 19.21)—and *Misericordia*—"Bienaventurados los misericordiosos, porque ellos alcanzarán misericordia" (Mat. 5.7). Parable morphology surfaces definitively in *Nazarín, Halma,* and *Ángel Guerra.* In *Miau,* however, Galdós's narrative set pieces and abysses recall already familiar strategies of ordering and signalling, applied here with artful ingenuity to reconciling a closed construction with its disturbing moral open-endedness. Inserted as a prelude to a closure, the soliloquy sequence is a rhetorical excess. Yet its presence configures surplus feeling for the character and surplus meaning for the reader. In this fashion, Galdós provides each with a formalized catharsis, with a release whose energy disconcertingly turns inward

upon the fiction itself. The character's self-reflection permits self-justification but not self-knowledge. The reader encounters uneasy resolutions as art creates order among the tag ends of reality. For Galdós, *Miau* is both an echo and a portent. Framing neither dogma nor denunciation but cosmic frustration and moral vacuum, the novel's ending explores the poetics of evasion, as Galdós, assiduous now in his objective to "retratar la humanidad viva," dissipates among figures the tendentious "inconvenientes" of his fiction.

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NOTES

[1] See in particular Parker and Matthews.

[2] Bly's reading is much nearer the mark when he places Villaamil's "joyous contemplation of beautiful nature" in the context of "the ultimate paradox . . . of Villaamil's suicide within the sight of this beautiful landscape." He sees the "basic inauthenticity of Villaamil's change of attitude." Villaamil's apparent renewal "strikes an excessively discordant note and masks the real new direction in Villaamil's life . . . ." (180).

[3] See Miller for a discussion of *Miau* in terms of Darwinian competition and aggression.

[4] In a recent study, Andreu concludes that finally even the text itself is "cesante": "Establece el texto cesante, por lo tanto, que fuera de [la arbitrariedad y la ambigüedad de sus signos] no hay nada intrínsecamente presente o ausente en la escritura" (185).

[5] Although the origin of the phrase is biblical, I have taken it from Unamuno, who inserts a cryptic *mise en abyme* at the end of *San Manuel Bueno, mártir* in the form of a parable-like aprocryphal narration, which, for "el que entienda," gives another turn to the interpretive screw.

[6] The critical dialogue is well known. See Weber, Parker, Matthews, Sackett, Ribbans, Scanlon and Jones, Ramsden.

[7] Sackett sees in Víctor "a very developed inferiority complex" (32). Round finds that Víctor's "cynicism and cruelty . . . no longer appear motiveless . . . they are a reprisal . . . for the exclusion from which he has suffered" (29). Bretz finds Víctor more complex than is generally thought: "In terms of Víctor's character, what was initially presented as incontrovertible is subsequently shown to be deceptive . . . . Galdós utilizes irony with a double purpose: to negate the absolute truth of any single outlook and conversely to suggest the relative validity of each" (18, 19).

[8] Turner argues that even Galdós's first novel is "a fable, an exemplary novel possessing, by definition, a message which the author desires to impose upon the readers" (13).

[9] In March of 1866 Galdós writes: "idear una sencilla parábola, haciendo intervenir en ella dos o más animales, en quienes se ha personificado una virtud o un vicio . . . esto se llama fábula, palabra que en su acepción rigurosa no distingue este género de las demás manifestaciones de la poesía" (Shoemaker 131).

[10] Sackett (36) cites Iribarren in explaining that "miau" in popular usage can be interpreted as "eso es mentira," "no me vengas con tonterías," or "¡que te crees tú eso!" (408).

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