HISTORY AS LANGUAGE IN THE FIRST SERIES OF THE *EPISODIOS NACIONALES*: THE LITERARY SELF-CREATION OF GABRIEL DE ARACELI

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> Las letras pasaban por mi mano, trocándose de brutal y muda materia en elocuente lenguaje escrito. ¡Cuánta animación en aquella masa caótica! En la caja, cada signo parecía representar los elementos de la creación, arrojados aquí y allí, antes de empezar la grande obra.
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> *(El 19 de marzo y el 2 de mayo)*

Critics of Galdós have learned to read the *Novelas españolas contemporáneas* as autonomous works of literature that are conscious of their own status as fiction and as language. In contrast, they have largely overlooked the literary and linguistic dimensions of Galdós's *Episodios nacionales:* criticism on these novels, especially on the first series, has been limited primarily to sociological investigations.[1] Hans Hinterhäuser, one of the first to author a book-length study of the *Episodios,* attempts to piece together Galdós's vision of history by referring to the author's biography and to the possible sources for his works. Antonio Regalado García reduces all of Galdós's historical novels to the author's political ideology. Yet another critic, influenced by Lukács's model of the historical novel, views the *Episodios* as a document of social and historical evolution (Rodríguez).[2] Even Brian Dendle, who recognizes the importance of the fictional elements in these novels, considers these elements to be incompatible with the presentation of a coherent historical vision.[3]

Hayden White, in his work on nineteenth-century historiography *(Metahistory),* underscores the fundamentally literary nature of all historical writing.[4] The historical text, he claims, is ultimately a verbal structure that the historian constructs through the use of the poetic imagination. The literariness of Galdós's "historical novels" is made even more explicit by the presence of a fictional narrator who mediates between the reader and the history within the novels.[5] As Ricardo Gullón observes in his discussion of the first series, the sociological critic, all too eager to reconstruct the author's vision of history, has repeatedly ignored the autonomy of the narrator, who invents his own version of history ("Los *Episodios*" 299). Galdós's *Episodios,* commonly considered "historical novels" in the Lukácsian sense, often expose the literary and linguistic nature of historical writing, which, in the end, is an act of creation.[6] These novels blur the separation between "history" and "fiction" through their awareness that history is ultimately language and that, as such, it can exist only as the written word of a narrator.[7]

The fictional narrator of the entire first series of the *Episodios* is the adult Gabriel de Araceli, whose writings are an account of his participation in the major events of Spanish history between the Battle of Trafalgar (1805) and the end of

the Napoleonic invasion (1813). As is true with all autobiographical accounts, the narrative arises out of the space between the writing subject (the adult Araceli) and the written self (the protagonist of the events narrated).[8] In writing a personal and national history, Gabriel de Araceli repeatedly calls attention to his role as inventor of fictions, of which his written self forms a part. The entire notion of historical reconstruction is therefore undermined not only by the mediatory presence of a fictional narrator but also by his awareness of the fictionality of his narrative.

Gabriel de Araceli's self-creation in the first series of the *Episodios* depends directly upon the transformation of his semiotic consciousness: the protagonist, who at first maintains a fundamentally innocent vision of the signs of the world around him, gradually becomes an actor in this world by learning to manipulate its duplicitious signs. *La corte de Carlos IV*, the second novel of this series, marks the protagonist's awakening to the arbitrary nature of the sign through his contact with the courtly society of Madrid, represented by the metaphor of the theater. Although Gabriel's education in the world does not stop at the end of this novel, his increasingly sophisticated vision of the sign later in the first series is a result of his role as actor—in theater and society alike—in *La corte de Carlos IV*. His mastery of language enables him to create narratives through which he learns to deceive and to control others around him. Finally, his semiotic education, which begins in this second novel, is completed only through the act of writing his autobiography. It is possible, therefore, to read the novels of the entire first series as a self-conscious account of the protagonist-narrator's semiotic initiation, which culminates in the writing of his memoirs. By viewing these works from this perspective, one can justify Galdós's use of the first-person narrative, which Dendle criticizes as lacking in coherence and in plausibility (32-33).

Having abandoned his position in Cádiz as Don Alonso's page, Gabriel enters the service of an actress, Pepa González, in Madrid. Not yet wise in the ways of the world, he is cast into the center of the intrigues and conspiracies of the "inhospitalaria Corte" (1: 255). Pepa's profession is in itself significant, as acting involves the fabrication of signs that are meant to deceive the spectator, drawing him or her into the artistic illusion—an illusion that leads the spectator to believe that the signs on stage correspond to a referent in the real world, when such a referent does not really exist. Gabriel declares that his occupation, which brings him into close contact with this world of artifice, "era muy propio para adquirir conocimiento del mundo en poco tiempo" (1: 255). Throughout the novel, the narrator associates theater with the falseness of courtly society, whose signs never correspond to the truth.[9] The king, apparently the Head of State, is a puppet of the opportunistic Godoy; the queen, whose hypocrisy is represented by her false teeth, "engaña al pueblo, haciendo creer lo que no es" (1: 312), as one of her servants observes; the ministers, according to the Countess Amaranta, are no more than "instrumentos y maniquíes que se mueven a impulsos de una fuerza que el público no ve" (1: 316); even the Cortes of Cádiz are compared to a farce, "una función de teatro" (1: 901), by one of their spectators.[10]

Pepa González herself, as the adult narrator recalls her, is a duplicitous sign, which language is unable to represent: "caigo también en que sus movimientos tenían una gracia especial, un cierto no sé qué, un encanto indefinible, que podrá

expresarse cuando el lenguaje tenga la riqueza suficiente para poder designar con una misma palabra la malicia y el recato, la modestia y la provocación" (1: 256). In his self-conscious meditation upon his language, the narrator recognizes the reversibility of these antithetical words. If language is insufficient in capturing the duplicitous nature of Pepa's character, he suggests, it is because all signs are reversible and, therefore, arbitrary: "Esta rarísima antítesis consiste en que nada hay más hipócrita que ciertas formas de compostura, o en que la malignidad ha descubierto que el mejor medio de vencer a la modestia es imitarla" (1: 256). His recognition of the insufficiency of language allows him to manipulate social signs through an act of imitation and to replace these signs gradually with an autonomous language of his own making.

The reader perceives a constant tension between the adult writer's awareness of the arbitrary nature of language and the innocence of the adolescent protagonist, who gradually gains a semiotic consciousness as he develops in the novel. The protagonist's role in the anti-Moratinista group, presented by the narrator as a pre-history of the events to follow, reveals Gabriel's initially innocent attitude toward the sign. As the spectator of *El sí de las niñas,* he loses his distance from the illusion of reality that the play creates and sees it not as artifice but as nature, as "el colmo de la naturalidad" (1: 262). In contrast to this perception of the play as a perfect imitation of reality, the poet who leads the anti-Moratinistas considers this "realism" to be a shortcoming in the dramatic work: "No se viene al teatro para ver lo que a todas horas se ve en las calles y en casa de cada *quisque*" (1: 261), he exclaims. "¿Te parece, Gabrielito, que esto es comedia? Si no hay enredo, ni trama, ni sorpresa, ni confusiones, ni engaños, ni *quid pro quo,* ni aquello de disfrazarse un personaje para hacer creer que es otro . . ." (1: 261). These characters represent two opposing ways of looking at the sign: Gabriel, who views literature as a faithful imitation of the everyday world, holds a belief in the referentiality of language; the poet, for whom the essence of literature lies in its very artificiality (represented by the devices of "sorpresa," "confusiones," and "engaños"), affirms the autonomy of language.[11] The protagonist of the first series gradually loses his innocent vision of language as "life" itself begins to take on the qualities of the neo-romantic drama extolled by the poet.[12]

Gabriel's willing suspension of disbelief as a spectator of Moratín's play corresponds to his innocence as a spectator of yet another theatrical world, the society of the influential aristocrats, actors and actresses, "personas muy metidas en los enredos de la Corte" (1: 274). These characters, who rehearse their roles for a theatrical production of an adaptation of *Othello,* are at the same time participants in political and amorous intrigues in their real lives. Gabriel, having just made his debut into this society, is unable to decipher the coded language of the actors and actresses, who speak of these intrigues through the roles of the characters whose parts they play on stage: Isidoro Máiquez, who plays the part of Othello, refers to his jealousy in real life by declaring that he would kill "Loredano" (Juan de Mañara) if his "Edelmira" (Lesbia) should deceive him. The actors of the play, as well as the aristocrats who participate in the theatrical world, are aware that they are using their fictional roles as codes through which they communicate their true situation. These codes, on the other hand, are not yet transparent to Gabriel.

Among the group of aristocrats is the Countess Amaranta, Gabriel's second employer, who initiates him into the society of the Court. The Countess, well instructed in the intrigues of this world, sees history–created by the "actors" of the Court–as a labyrinth of signs that she must decode. In a central scene of the novel, "history" is written on pieces of paper that contain a coded plan of Fernando VII's conspiracy to overthrow the King: one of these papers consists of a "sainete," whose characters are the members of the royal family; the other is also a coded message in which the Prince refers to the members of his family by Gothic names. Amaranta, who understands the allegorical nature of these signs, is able to decipher them and to make sense out of the mystery that surrounds the historical event. Her talent as *decoder* of signs is directly related to her skill as *encoder* of signs: not only does she influence the political life of the Court by fabricating intrigues, but she also manipulates Gabriel through the art of storytelling.

Amaranta, who gradually awakens her servant's consciousness of language, teaches him the art of weaving a text. She begins Gabriel's "education" by spinning the tale of the Sultan and of his guard as a parable to show him that those of humble origin can rise quickly under the protection of a "señora." The story, which according to the Countess comes from a book that she is reading, is in reality a literary account of the lives of Carlos IV and of Manuel Godoy. It also constitutes a self-conscious reflection upon the fictional process of the adult narrator's memoirs: both the Countess and Gabriel transform "history" into fiction. Yet while Gabriel disguises his narrative as truth by following the convention of the autobiographical form, Amaranta presents her narrative as a literary tale. By laying bare the fictionality of a historically based account, the Countess reveals that all "history," once encoded, becomes fiction. After she narrates the second "installment" of her tale, she presents her servant with his first assignment of espionage, declaring to him that the best way to prosper in the Court is through "la intriguilla, el disimulo y el arte de conocer los corazones" (1: 315). At first, Gabriel resists the Countess's efforts to teach him the language of deception: "Ya me fue imposible oír con calma una tan descarada y cínica exposición de las intrigas en que era la condesa consumada maestra y yo catecúmeno aún sin bautismo" (1: 317). Yet ironically, Gabriel's metaphorical "baptism"–his linguistic awakening–has already occurred. From the first moment of his contact with Amaranta, he has begun to learn from her the art of "engañar, fingir y mentir" (1: 350). No sooner than he refuses to spy upon Amaranta's enemies for reasons of "honor," Gabriel violates this honor by eavesdropping on his protector's conversation with the Queen. He responds to the angry Countess by turning her own language back upon her: "quería empezar a instruirme cuanto antes" (1: 322).

It is from Amaranta's fabrications–both political and "literary"–that Gabriel learns to construct his fictions. Later in the novel, when he becomes unjustly implicated in the Fernandine conspiracy, Gabriel invents not a simple lie but a coherent narrative in order to save himself from arrest. At the end of the novel, Amaranta declares to her servant: "Me parece que has empezado bien el curso en la universidad del mundo; y, o mucho me engaño, o te bastarán pocas lecciones más para ser maestro" (1: 350). It is ironical, but not surprising, that Amaranta herself ultimately becomes the victim of her disciple's fabrications. In the final

dialogue between the two characters, Gabriel blackmails Amaranta through the same art that she has employed previously in order to manipulate him: the art of storytelling. His tale, he says to her, is "una historia parecida a la que usía me refirió, aunque no es tan bonita" (1: 351): it is the story of Amaranta's illicit love affair with Santorcaz. Observing her reaction of anger, the mischievous servant declares: "Digo que desde que usía me dijo que el camino de la fortuna estaba en escuchar tras de los tapices y llevar y traer chismes de cámara en cámara, se han arreglado las cosas de tal modo, que, sin querer, estoy descubriendo secretos . . ." (1: 351). Like Lazarillo de Tormes, who uses the very same lesson that the blind man taught him in order to deceive his master, Gabriel ultimately turns against his instructor the linguistic knowledge that he has acquired from her.

Most importantly, Gabriel's apprenticeship with Amaranta gives him the linguistic consciousness necessary to write his memoirs. By teaching him the art of narrative creation, the Countess also awakens the protagonist's awareness of the conventionality of literary language. As he launches his narrative in the opening pages of *Trafalgar,* the narrator, in a discursive passage, makes reference to the picaresque genre, comparing his story to that of Quevedo's hero: "Doy principio, pues, a mi historia como Pablos, el buscón de Segovia" (1: 181).[13] From the first page of the novel, the narrator is aware that his narrative is the product of a literary convention, a fiction.[14] The protagonist himself is born out of a blank slate. Unlike other picaresque heroes, who typically begin their accounts by declaring their name and ancestry, the narrator of *Trafalgar* withholds this information from the reader throughout the first chapter: "Al hablar de mi nacimiento, no imitaré a la mayor parte de los que cuentan hechos de su propia vida, quienes empiezan nombrando su parentela . . . Yo, en esta parte, no puedo adornar mi libro con sonoros apellidos . . ." (1: 181). This omission is significant, as the narrator records that the true creator of his protagonist is not the parent who gives the character his "apellido" but the narrator himself. From the perspective of the adult writer, the protagonist is only partially created at his birth: he is truly born only when the narrative is completed. When the reader finally discovers Gabriel's first name in the second chapter of *Trafalgar,* he or she does so almost accidentally through the word of Don Alonso, the protagonist's first master. Gabriel does not receive his last name until the fifth book of the series *(Napoleón, en Chamartín).* After he is named Viceroy of Peru, Gabriel struggles to recall his parentage in order to provide legal proof of his origin. From the "belén de mis apellidos" (1: 580), as Gabriel calls it, Licenciado Lobo chooses one of them, "de Araceli," to give to the character: "–¡Oh, bonitísimo! Esto de Araceli es boca de príncipes, y más de cuatro se despepitarían por llevar este nombre. Suena así como Medinaceli *Coelico Metinensis,* que dijo el latino. No necesito más" (1: 580). The name, then, reflects not the "historical" identity of the character but the identity that he gains within the context of the (not mutually exclusive) social and literary worlds to which he belongs.

It becomes increasingly evident that Gabriel invents not only himself but also the other characters in his narrative. At the beginning of *La corte de Carlos IV,* the narrator reveals the fictional process by which his beloved woman, Inés, comes into being as a literary creation: he portrays her as "semejante a una de esas figuras simbólicas que, sin estar materialmente representadas en ninguna parte, se dejan ver de los ojos del alma cuando las ideas, agitándose en nuestra

mente, pugnan por vestirse de formas visibles en la obscura región del cerebro" (1: 264). Inés, he suggests, exists not "materially" but as an "idea" that struggles to come into existence through the creative process of the writer: he transforms the woman into a "figura simbólica" through his language. The narrator is aware that he bases the creation of Inés on his knowledge of literary conventions: "alguien encontrará digna de risa la presentación de semejante heroína y hará mil aspavientos al ver que he querido hacer una irrisoria *Beatrice* con los materiales de una modistilla . . ." (1: 265). As he constructs his version of the female literary archetype through his imagination, the original "modistilla" becomes a mere pretext for his creative act.

In *El 19 de marzo y el 2 de mayo,* the narrator presents another self-conscious commentary on Inés's metaphorical birth in the work. In this novel, the adolescent Gabriel finds himself working as a typesetter for the *Diario de Madrid.* His apprenticeship in the printing business awakens his consciousness of the creative possibilities of the signs in front of him ("la caja me ofrece sus letras de plomo, que no aguardan más que mis manos para juntarse y hablar" [1: 359]) and, above all, of his power to create Inés through these signs ("pero mi mano no conoce en los primeros momentos sino cuatro de aquellos negros signos, que al punto se reúnen para formar este solo nombre: *Inés*" [1: 359]). The arrangement of these letters, I-N-E-S, constitutes the origin of the fictional character, Inés, that the narrator constructs in his narrative, which in itself is a woven tissue of signs. It is significant that Gabriel is a typesetter for the same newspaper through whose ads he twice finds an occupation. The *Diario* is in a sense the origin of his life and adventures and, by extension, of his narrative.

The figure of Inés serves an important function in Gabriel's text. A character who disappears and reappears throughout the first series of the *Episodios,* she maintains a powerful influence over the protagonist, even in her absence. She represents an ideal of which he is in constant pursuit—an ideal that often slips away the moment it is found. Like Gabriel, she is an orphan whose true origin remains mysterious both to the protagonist and to the reader until *Bailén,* the fourth book of the series. It is Gabriel who gives her an identity, both by discovering the "history" of her origin and by (re)writing this "history." The adolescent protagonist gradually pieces together Inés's "history" by unraveling various "texts": Juana's deathbed confession, gossip, and ultimately a written text, Santorcaz's letter to Amaranta. Gabriel unravels these texts only to weave them once again into another text: his memoirs, which contain the same story in the process of being unraveled. The protagonist's literal search for Inés's identity represents the writer's search for the character's story: the process of discovery is simultaneous with the act of narrative creation.

The adult narrator constantly reveals his awareness of the literary conventions through which he transforms the events of his life into fiction. In *La corte de Carlos IV,* he begins his narrative account of the courtly society by renaming the characters, "la duquesa de X" and "la condesa de X," with "nombres convencionales" (1: 269). These linguistic designations, like Gabriel's own name, are arbitrary: *Lesbia* and *Amaranta,* the names chosen for the unidentified aristocrats, originally belong to "lindas pastoras" (1: 269) in a tapestry that the narrator comes across quite accidentally while writing his memoirs. Not only the arbitrariness of these names but also their overtly "artistic" nature call attention

to the fictionality of Gabriel's narrative. It is significant that immediately following the narrator's naming of Lesbia and Amaranta, he declares that language is insufficient to express their beauty: "En cuanto a su hermosura, todo lo que mi descolorida pluma pueda expresar será poco para describirlas" (1: 269). To assert that language is insufficient is to recognize that it is essentially arbitrary, that there is a gap between the signifier and the signified. The idea of a perfect language that can close this gap by expressing the inexpressible is in itself a fiction that serves to encourage the narrator's creative act. His language, in perpetually striving to capture this imaginary ideal, becomes increasingly removed from the notion of referentiality. The written word is necessarily an autonomous fiction.

The evolution of Gabriel de Araceli's semiotic consciousness culminates in his recognition that art and life, literature and society, are alike in their creation of arbitrary systems of signs. This knowledge allows him to write his autobiography, which is in itself a form of conventional language. The narrator of *La corte de Carlos IV* reveals his consciousness of language by presenting an account of his participation in the theatrical production of *Othello* at the end of the novel. Gabriel's role as actor in the play symbolizes the extent of his linguistic participation in society. An innocent spectator of *El sí de las niñas* at the beginning of the novel, he is now a participant in a drama that directly reflects the intrigue and deceptiveness of the Court. The adult writer, who (re)creates this event, perceives that the theater is a mirror of life, that "la intriga del drama que iba a representarse entre bastidores" has begun to imitate art, "el [drama] comenzado sobre las tablas y ante el público" (1: 337). Gabriel is the spectator of the "drama entre bastidores": he eavesdrops on the conversation between Isidoro and Lesbia, who recognize the link between their roles on stage as Othello and Edelmira and off the stage in their real lives. Between acts Isidoro admits that he has come to identify completely with Othello's jealousy; Lesbia, in turn, exclaims to Isidoro: "No eres Isidoro, eres Otelo en persona" (1: 340). Soon the narrator begins to refer to Isidoro consistently as "el moro" even when the actor is off the stage. The adult writer's consciousness of the theatricality of life reveals his vision of society as a fictional construct based upon an arbitrary system of signs.

Gabriel's own role as Pésaro (Iago) is suggestive. In the original play by Shakespeare, tragedy is a direct result of the villain's linguistic talent: Iago deceives Othello by fabricating a narrative and, finally, by presenting to the Moor a false sign of his wife's infidelity. It is significant that this sign, a handkerchief in Shakespeare's drama, has been replaced by a letter in this twice-translated version of the play.[15] In the final act of the play, Pepa substitutes for the fictional letter a real one (written by Lesbia), which becomes a proof of Lesbia's infidelity to Isidoro in real life. A written text therefore makes possible the fusion of reality and fiction at the end of the play. This text, moreover, simultaneously deceives and reveals the truth. Within the context of the play, the letter is a false sign of Edelmira/Desdemona's infidelity; in "life," however, it exposes the truth of Lesbia's infidelity. The meaning of this text, like that of all texts, is a direct function of the context that governs its interpretation. The *mise en abyme* technique (the text [the letter] within the text [the twice-translated *Othello*] within the text [Gabriel's memoirs]), which serves as a self-conscious commentary on the signifying process itself, forces the reader to recognize the conventionality of all

notions of truth and fictionality. Gabriel/Pésaro's act of delivering the fatal letter to Isidoro/Otelo in the final scene of the play causes Isidoro to lose distance from his role. In his jealous anger, he nearly kills the terrified Lesbia, who has deceived him in real life. Although Gabriel becomes fully aware of the role that Pepa has staged for him only at the end of the drama, the part that he plays within the theatrical production symbolizes his increasing consciousness of the deceptive sign and of the language of deception.

After he leaves Amaranta's service at the end of *La corte de Carlos IV*, the protagonist stages his own fictions, making use of the lessons that he has learned in the Court. In *Napoleón, en Chamartín,* Gabriel and his former employer become cast as rivals in the art of fiction-making. The Countess, with her "extremada habilidad artística" (1: 633), stages an intricate drama through which she tries to manipulate the fates of Gabriel and her daughter Inés. At the same time as she helps the protagonist to escape from French-occupied Madrid by disguising him in her cousin's clothing, she invents an intricate lie by which she tries to convince Inés of her former servant's death. "Lo que más le ha convencido fue el artificio verdaderamente teatral que puse en práctica para hacérselo creer" (1: 633), she declares, referring to her talent as actress in her drama. Her linguistic skill in her "artificio teatral" is inseparable from her ability to manipulate the social sign, as the fusion of theater and society attests. Gabriel, in imitation of Amaranta, stages his representation: instead of conforming to the part that the Countess has assigned him in her fiction, he "writes" his own role in the drama with a full consciousness of its conventions. Not only does he return to the Palace disguised as the Duke of Arion, but he also acts out the role of the Duke, making use of his linguistic talent. By this time, he has learned to manipulate the discourse of the Court well enough to deceive its personages temporarily. Upon discovering Gabriel's art, Amaranta, outwitted by him once again, exclaims: "Hipócrita, ¿dónde has aprendido a fingir?" (1: 653). The irony of these words is apparent, since it is the Countess who has given him lessons in "engaños y ficciones" (1: 633) throughout his apprenticeship in the Court. The protagonist's relationship to his former employer is perpetually ironic. The language that he has learned originally from her allows him to manipulate her, to subvert her fictions, and ultimately to (re)create her in his narrative account.

The art of role-playing, which Gabriel gradually masters throughout the first series, becomes increasingly dependent on a specifically literary consciousness. In *Cádiz,* society, contained in the microcosm of the Rumblar home, becomes a stage for the literary fictions of Gabriel and of other characters. Upon entering the Rumblar home, where Inés is held against her will, Gabriel senses the theatricality of "esta morada del disimulo y la mentira" (1: 879), whose *tertulias* he characterizes as "una completa representación de teatro" (1: 880). One of the principal actors on this stage is the Englishman Lord Gray: a prototypical romantic hero, he comes to Spain in search of the unconventional, the sublime and the imaginative, and he steps into the Spain that he has envisioned through his reading of literature. He seduces Asunción, whose "mysticism" intrigues him, sees La Celestina in his go-between ("Admirable tipo que hace revivir a mi lado la incomparable tragicomedia de Rodrigo Cota y Fernando de Rojas" [1: 915]), and, finally, recognizes in Gabriel the Don Quixote who seeks justice for the offended woman. As in *Don Quixote,* literary imagination becomes contagious. In

order to gain entrance into the Rumblar home, Gabriel plays the role of the Spanish mystic and at the same time defends the reactionary and absolutist values of the clergy. His role is never questioned in the Rumblar household, not only because he has mastered the art of role-playing, but also because the theatricality of life within the aristocratic society makes it impossible for anyone to distinguish truth from lie, reality from literature. The protagonist's literary consciousness also allows him to step into the role of Don Quixote at the end of the novel. Following the example of the knight-errant, Gabriel determines to avenge Asunción's dishonor by challenging her seducer to a duel. His sense of justice not only leads him to identify with Cervantes's hero but also to imitate his language. At one point in his dialogue with Lord Gray, he asserts, "Yo soy quien soy" (1: 950), echoing Don Quixote's ironic affirmation of his self-identity. Gabriel, like Don Quixote, is aware that he is representing a role in a world that he has transformed through his knowledge of literature. His prophetic words, "Después de las burlas pueden venir las veras" (1: 950), which evoke Cervantes's text once again, reveal his awareness of the fine line that separates fiction from reality. The scene of the duel is a rewriting of the episode in the second part of *Don Quixote* in which the knight-errant upsets Sansón Carrasco's fiction by defeating him in a duel that the Bachiller has staged. The outcome of the joint "fiction" of Gabriel and Lord Gray is predictable: the protagonist defeats his opponent, who dies in the battle. "Las burlas" have become "las veras" for both characters. The adult narrator's account of this episode in his history is a rewriting of a literary text. At the same time, his narrative dramatizes the process by which he gains an increasingly complex vision of literary language and conventions—a vision that is fundamental to the writing of his autobiography.

The gap between the adult narrator and the young protagonist gradually diminishes as the latter becomes increasingly self-conscious of his participation in a literary world. By the last book of the first series, the character is more aware than ever that his entire existence is a function of the all-pervasive world of literature about him. In *La batalla de los Arapiles*, the quixotic Miss Fly, who revives the "romantic" Spain that Lord Gray has envisioned in *Cádiz*, imposes the world of literature on Gabriel's life. Through her "monomanía literaria" (2: 43), she transforms him into the *caballero enamorado* of her books of chivalry and adopts the language of chivalry, addressing the protagonist as "vos" and referring to Inés as "vuestra dama" (2: 34). Gabriel, rather than fleeing from this world of literature, willingly steps into the role that Miss Fly has cast for him in the world of knights-errant, enchanters, and damsels in distress. Recognizing the poet in himself, he reinvents his life through language. As the narrator explains: "Todos somos algo poetas, y es muy dulce embellecer la propia vida, y muy natural regocijarnos con este embellecimiento, aun sabiendo que la transformación es obra nuestra" (2: 34). In accordance with the conventions of the romances of chivalry, Gabriel recreates the events of his life—his pursuit of Inés, whom Santorcaz has abducted and disguised as a "comiquilla"—as a tale of a knight in search of his beloved woman ("[una dama] hermosísima y principal"), whom an enchanter has transfigured into a "vulgar comiquilla" (2: 34). Miss Fly recognizes the conventionality of the protagonist's tale by exclaiming, "Veo que leéis libros de caballerías" (2: 34), and by affirming that the world of the books of chivalry cannot exist outside the imagination. By the same token, when she discovers that

Gabriel's story is based on "life," she declares that it is "tan hermoso que no parece real" (2: 43). Miss Fly's distinction between life and literature becomes ironic as she begins to confuse the two worlds. Upon seeing the extraordinary in life, she exclaims with surprise: "Eso sí que no estaba escrito en mis libros" (2: 69).[16] Gabriel must remind the Englishwoman of the fine line that separates literature from life: "Usted cree que todos los lances de amor y de aventura han de pasar en el mundo conforme a lo que ha leído en las novelas, en los romances, en las obras de los grandes poetas y escritores, y no advierte que las cosas extrañas y dramáticas suelen verse antes en la vida real que en los libros, llenos de ficciones convencionales y que se reproducen unas a otras" (2: 69).

Life imitates art, as the narrative of Gabriel's life unfolds in accordance with the conventions of the chivalric romance. His role as hero of Miss Fly's (and his own) romance ultimately becomes inseparable from his real identity. In the final scene of the novel, he even courts Inés by imitating the chivalric language that he has learned from the Englishwoman. The narratives that the character creates within the larger narrative reflect the process of autobiographical writing through which the narrator ultimately converts himself into a text. The protagonist's words to Miss Fly, "Resignémonos a ser libro de texto" (2: 33), which reveal his cognizance of himself as a text to be read by others, anticipate his textual self-transformation through the writing of his memoirs.

The adult narrator constantly plays with the opposition that underlies his vision of language. On the one hand, he affirms his belief in the referentiality of language; on the other, he asserts the autonomy of language. In the context of the *Episodios nacionales,* the conflict between these two theories of language can be translated into the tension between the narrator's dual role as chronicler of history and as inventor of fictions. His role as "historian" in the first series, however, is undermined by his apprehension of the self-creative act. In a historical text, any suggestion of the autonomy of language necessarily subverts the validity of its fundamental project: the representation of a historical truth. Once the protagonist takes charge of his textuality, the narrator can no longer affirm the historicity of all else that the same text embraces. As Ricardo Gullón states, "Lo histórico y lo ficticio están tejidos en la novela con la misma clase de fibra" ("La historia" 23). As historical figures and events are placed within a fictional framework, they become indistinguishable from their purely literary counterparts.

The narrator of the first series often calls attention to the "historicity" of his account only to ironize his affirmation. In *Bailén,* for example, he interrupts his story *(histoire)* to explain why he has emphasized the words of one of the characters: "He subrayado estas palabras, porque son puntualmente históricas; constan en papeles impresos de aquel tiempo, que puedo mostrar al que verlos desee" (1: 482). According to the narrator's claim, he has underscored these words in order to show us that he has transcribed them directly from a historical source. In the next line, however, he declares that these words do not belong to the character to whom he has attributed them: "(pues no fue doña María, y el atribuirlo a ésta es de mi exclusiva responsabilidad)" (1: 482; Galdós's parentheses). This "aside" not only undermines the narrator's original assertion of the historicity of his account but also serves as a reminder of his authorial power over his narrative. Moreover, he alleges the historicity of the character's words

by referring not to the events themselves but to another textual source. In this way, Gabriel lays bare the linguistic nature of his writing. His text, rather than the representation of an absolute historical truth, is a rewriting of another text.

In the opening pages of *Napoleón, en Chamartín,* the adult narrator makes his pretensions to historical accuracy ironic by parodying the conventions of historical documentation. He begins the novel with a portrayal of the dissipated don Diego de Rumblar:

> Aquí tenía principio, según opinión de los sesudos autores que se han ocupado de don Diego de Rumblar, la verdadera existencia de aquel insigne rapazuelo, y también es cierto que todos los cronistas, si bien desacordes en algunos pormenores de estas escandalosas aventuras, están conformes en afirmar que siempre le acompañaba el supradicho Mañara, y que casi nunca dejaban de visitar a una altísima dama, la cual lo era sin duda por vivir en un tercer piso de la calle de la Pasión, y tenía por nombre *la Zaina* o *la Zunga,* pues en este punto existe una lamentable discordancia entre autores, cronistas, historiógrafos y demás graves personas que de las hazañas de tan famosa hembra han tratado. (1: 547)

The narrator's language is completely playful. He makes use of ironic epithets ("insigne rapazuelo"), puns ("altísima dama, la cual lo era sin duda por vivir en un tercer piso de la calle de la Pasión"), and bathos (the juxtaposition of the epithet "famosa" with the derogatory "hembra"). The entire passage, moreover, echoes the language of the narrator of *Don Quixote,* who makes equally ironic references to the historical sources from which he draws his "verdadera historia." By calling attention to the irony of his rhetoric, the narrator undercuts any claim that he might make to the historicity of his account. Significantly, after he pretends to struggle with the question of the woman's "true" name, he exercises his authorial freedom by choosing it: "yo me decido a llamarla siempre *la Zaina*" (1: 547).

At the end point of his narrative, the narrator calls attention to an accusation that could undermine the historicity of his writing. He coyly suggests, in the concluding pages of *La batalla de los Arapiles,* the possibility that Miss Fly has never existed: "Muchas personas que anteriormente me han oído contar esto, sostienen que jamás ha existido miss Fly; que toda esta parte de mi historia es una invención mía para recrearme a mí propio y entretener a los demás" (2: 137). Yet at no time does he directly negate the fictionality of Miss Fly or affirm her existence in the real world. He responds, "pero ¿no debe creerse ciegamente la palabra de un hombre honrado?" (2: 137), suggesting not that the accusation is untrue but that the reader should suspend his or her disbelief and blindly accept the word of the narrator. Moreover, Gabriel's attempt to attest to his credibility by presenting himself as "un hombre honrado" is also ironic, since "honor," in the context of the protagonist's evolution, represents not an absolute quality of moral worth, but the ability to manipulate language. The narrator's subsequent words, "Por ventura, quien de tanta rectitud dio pruebas, ¿será capaz ahora de obscurecer su reputación con ficciones absurdas, con fábricas de la imaginación que no tengan por base y fundamento la misma verdad, hija de Dios?" (2: 137), constitute more than a simple rhetorical question. Through the very act of posing this question, he calls attention to the possibility that his narrative may be other than the representation of a historical truth. Finally, the name "Miss Fly" turns back on itself as a sign of fictionality. Roland Barthes asserts that a belief in "the

natural relation of names and essences" (*New Critical Essays* 67-68) underlies all acts of literary creation. The reader cannot but see the "natural" affinity between the impertinent and meddling Miss Fly (often referred to as "Mosquita," "Mariposa," or "Pajarita" by Gabriel and other characters) and her name. This "Cratylean consciousness of signs," as Barthes would call it (68), becomes in itself a sign of the literary function.

In the *Episodios nacionales,* historical writing always involves the process of linguistic transformation, as is exemplified in Gabriel's self-conscious conversion of personal and national history into a literary text. Throughout the first series, many other characters also engage in the making of history, whether by simply interpreting the events around them or by actually composing a written "historical" text. As each character, or each member of society, interprets, reinvents, and fictionalizes the historical occurrence, the notion of historical accuracy eventually dissipates. In *Trafalgar,* the pathological liar, José María Malespina, invents his version of history by transforming himself into a hero of the battle of Trafalgar. As the narrator claims, Malespina's account is nothing but "una novela de heroísmo" (1: 252). In *La corte de Carlos IV,* each member of society interprets Fernando VII's letters in his or her way in an attempt to understand the truth behind the Prince's conspiracy to overthrow his father. These letters, which contain the Prince's supposed apology to the King for his role in the plot, are transcribed in *La Gaceta de Madrid* along with a royal decree. The apparent truth contained in these letters, however, is cast into doubt by those who claim that Godoy, in an attempt to humiliate the Prince, has forced him to invent a text. In *Gerona,* Pablo de Nomdedeu (whose name, translated as "Name of God," suggests his status as yet another creator figure) authors elaborate texts in order to protect his deaf and invalid daughter from the realities of the war that surrounds them. These texts, which take the form of letters to his daughter, contain a curious mixture of history and fiction. Nomdedeu, who artfully constructs a fictional account of the siege of Gerona, at the same time cites historical figures, events, and statistics in order to render his account verisimilar. *Gerona,* the only novel of the first series that Gabriel does not directly narrate, is nevertheless his rewriting of Andresillo Marijuán's account of the siege. Gabriel admits to giving "uniformity" to his memoirs by modifying his friend's style and by adding other elements to his narration. History therefore comes to the reader twice mediated. At the end of *La batalla de los Arapiles,* Amaranta takes over Gabriel's act of historical and self-invention by transforming him, through her epistolary mania, into a holder of successively higher military titles.

The narrator assimilates these texts, each of which contains a separate version of history, into a single narrative. This narrative, which consists of the entire first series of the *Episodios,* lays bare the fictional nature of history-making by dramatizing the awakening of the narrator's consciousness of the linguistic sign. It is precisely his new semiotic consciousness that allows the mature Gabriel to transform himself and his historical context textually. Benveniste has defined the privileged place of language among all sign systems as its "metalinguistic faculty," its capacity to interpret other systems ("The Semiology of Language" 243). History, in Gabriel's text, is a labyrinth of individual and social fictions, all arbitrary systems of signs. In writing his memoirs, the narrator of the first series

uses language in order to interpret and to lay bare the various "fictions" in the world of the protagonist. Gabriel's autobiographical narrative thus seems to show that history is no more than a pre-text for the narrator's fictionalizations. The reader's recognition of the fictionality of the narrative account does not negate the historical illusion created within the world of the novel. We can still read the *Episodios nacionales* to learn about the historical events of nineteenth-century Spain, but at the same time, we are reminded, through the novels' self-conscious presentation of history, that our knowledge of these events is mediated by language.

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NOTES

[1] Nigel Glendinning's study of the psychological and moral motivation of characters in the first series exemplifies another form of thematic approach that disregards the linguistic constitution of the text. He treats the protagonists of these works not as fictional characters but as "individual human beings" (56).

[2] For Lukács, the rise of the historical novel in the early nineteenth century marks the emergence of a new historical consciousness among writers: the modern historical novel focuses upon a complete society as the object of artistic representation, presents history as a process of continual evolution through which the past becomes the precondition of the present, and portrays the individual as the product of his or her age and of a concrete historical destiny.

[3] In his discussion of *Trafalgar,* for example, Dendle attributes what he views as Galdós's incomplete vision of history to the literary aspects of the novel: "The clumsy attempts at amusing the reader with the portrayal of the implausibly comic and with the adoption of a narrative method that ostentatiously uses the devices of fictional models impede suspension of disbelief" (33).

[4] See also *The Content of the Form,* a collection of essays by the same author that explore the relationship between narrative discourse and historical representation. According to White, the narrative "form" that historical discourse takes possesses an implicit moral or ideological "content" in its own right rather than being a value-free medium for the representation of history. Narrativity, as the precondition for the authority of the historical discourse, actually helps to *create* historical meaning.

[5] Diane Urey ("Linguistic Mediation") similarly asserts that the meaning of a historical novel, like that of any other work of fiction, "is only obtained mediately—through the medium of language—whether it be the language of the text of the printed page, or that which the reader himself brings to the text" (263; see also "The Confusion").

[6] Germán Gullón also recognizes that the writing of history is a literary undertaking: "Galdós va a narrativizar la historia dándole forma novelesca, literaturizándola, y en verdad poniéndola al servicio de la ficción" (46).

[7] In another instructive study ("Isabel II"), Urey examines the works of the fourth series as a self-conscious commentary on the process of the historical novel itself. By analyzing the role of Pepe Fajardo, the historian figure within the text, Urey demonstrates that these works ultimately undermine the historian's claim to truth behind the written word.

[8] Harry Sieber, in his work on *Lazarillo de Tormes,* describes the twofold structure of the picaresque narrative in precisely these terms and highlights the importance of this structure for his interpretation of the novel as an account of the protagonist's semiotic initiation.

[9] As Umberto Eco affirms, all signs are essentially duplicitous: "If something [the sign] cannot be used to tell a lie, conversely it cannot be used to tell the truth: it cannot in fact be used 'to tell' at all" (7). Many of Galdós's other works repeatedly expose the deceptive and, therefore, arbitrary nature of social signs through a critique of hypocrisy and of the cult of appearances.

[10] Dendle observes: "Falsehood exists not only in the theater; it pervades the national life of Spain . . . Ministers appear to rule, but they are puppets manipulated by the hidden intrigues of courtiers. The royal family heads the nation, but the queen herself is the victim of blackmail. As in

a bad comedy, rewards and punishments are capriciously granted. While courtiers play their fickle roles, the real power–that of Napoleon, to whose tune all must ultimately dance–lurks offstage" (36).

[11] Gabriel's dialogue with the poet brings to mind the final scene of *El doctor Centeno*, in which Felipe Centeno and José Ido del Sagrario, a writer of serial novels, appear to step out of the fictional world to comment upon it as literature. Ido, who echoes the words of the poet in *La corte de Carlos IV*, sees literature as autonomous language that has renounced its connection to the real world: "Las cosas comunes y que están pasando todos los días no tienen el gustoso saborete que es propio de las inventadas, extraídas de la imaginación. La pluma del poeta se ha de mojar en la ambrosía de la mentira hermosa, y no en el caldo de la horrible verdad." Felipe Centeno, who suggests that Ido model his novel on "todo lo que nos ha pasado a mi amo y a mí" (1468), represents the antithetical conception of literature as a faithful reflection of the real world. The famous exchange between Segismundo Ballester and the literary critic Ponce in Fortunata's funeral scene similarly dramatizes the tension between these two different notions of language.

[12] My discussion of the protagonist's linguistic awakening is not meant to judge, either positively or negatively, his favorable response to *El sí de las niñas* at the beginning of *La corte de Carlos IV*. Many times in Galdós's works, when the romanticism/realism dichotomy (which represent, respectively, the autonomous and referential impulses of language) appears to arise in a negative/positive dialectic, both of these attitudes toward literature are parodied equally. (See Andreu, who explores in similar terms the mutually deconstructive relationship between two linguistic codes, "el folletinista y el realista," in *Tormento* [55].)

[13] See Benveniste's useful distinction between *histoire* and *discours*. *Histoire* is a mode of utterance that characterizes the narration of past events: it refers to an impersonal, third-person narration apparently free of the narrator's presence. The discursive mode, on the other hand, is the rhetoric of the narrator: it assumes a relationship between the person of the narrator and the implied addressee (*Problems in General Linguistics* 205-15). Galdós's *Episodios nacionales* clearly subvert the notion of history as zero-degree narration (Benveniste's *histoire*). His "historical" novels contain frequent discursive passages in which the narrator calls attention to his own rhetoric. In literary narration, discursive utterances become the mark of the self-conscious narrator who is aware of the linguistic status of his or her own narration. Barthes, in "The Discourse of History," similarly debunks the notion of an objective history that "seems to tell itself" by attributing this illusion to the "reality effect": "in 'objective' history, the 'real' is never anything but an unformulated signified, sheltered behind the apparent omnipotence of the referent" (139). This displaced "signified" is the narrative configuration, the linguistic structure of historical discourse.

[14] I attribute this awareness of the semiotic world to the adult narrator of the novel. It is precisely the narrative perspective of the mature Gabriel that enables him to present retrospectively an account of his linguistic awakening in *La corte de Carlos IV*.

[15] The translated rendition of Shakespeare's work may be seen as a metaphor for the narrator's historical/autobiographical writing. Translation suggests a process of linguistic transformation; it is, in the literal sense, a "taking beyond" (from the Latin *trans* [across/beyond] + *latus* [carried]) of the original. Gabriel's memoirs, a "translation" of social and personal history, necessarily involve an act of creation. His discourse thus replaces the original reality that it purports to represent.

[16] In his "Observaciones sobre la novela contemporánea en España," Galdós speaks of the apparent paradox by which the same readers who are bewildered by the invasion of the "novelistic" into real life can fall easily into the trap of illusionist art by coming to believe that the novelistic is life: "Cuando vemos un acontecimiento extraordinariamente anómalo y singular, decimos que *parece cosa de novela;* y cuando tropezamos con algún individuo extremadamente raro, le llamamos *héroe de novela,* y nos reímos de él porque se nos presenta con toda la extrañeza e inusitada forma con que le hemos visto en aquellos extravagantes libros. En cambio, cuando leemos las admirables obras de arte que produjo Cervantes y hoy hace Carlos Dickens, decimos: '¡Qué verdadero es esto! Parece cosa de la vida. Tal o cual personaje, parece que le hemos conocido'" (118-19). Galdós suggests that these two phenomena are two sides of the same coin, since to see the "novelistic" elements in life in the first place presumes a belief in the existence of a "mundo de novela."

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