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La sombra, Memory, and the Narrative Self: Galdós's Practice of Realism

Sarah Sierra

Commonly noted in nineteenth-century realism was a conscious decision to minimize romanticism's supernatural imaginings in favor of a mimetic discourse that reflected the vicissitudes of contemporary society. Realist authors tended to emphasize complex relationships between characters within a specific social milieu that allowed for a more sophisticated and lifelike representation of reality. As one of the prominent representatives of Spanish realism, it is not surprising that Galdós's narratives reflect this move toward greater verisimilitude. In his 1870 article, "Observaciones sobre la novela contemporánea," Galdós formulated his vision for the realist novel as a discursive space in which to identify the socio-cultural underpinnings defining the bourgeoisie as well as to diagnose and resolve the complications resulting from the ascension and establishment of this new class:

La novela moderna de costumbres ha de ser la expresión de cuanto bueno y malo existe en el fondo de esa clase, de la incesante agitación que la elabora, de ese desempeño que manifiesta por encontrar ciertos ideales y resolver ciertos problemas que preocupan a todos, y conocer el origen y el remedio de ciertos males que turban las familias. *La grande aspiración del arte literario en nuestro tiempo es dar forma a todo esto.* (130, emphasis mine)

While Galdós alludes to the ambiguous and ill-defined nature of the bourgeoisie, he envisions the novel as capable of articulating what appeared as the ineffable difficulties of the new social, political, and cultural order. With this initial endeavor into realism, Galdós integrates a naturally occurring process by which human beings translate their perceptions of self and place in society into narrative form. In this way, realism's mimetic nature not only portrays the content or representation of external reality, but also shows how individuals interpret and create meaning in relation to their social milieu by organizing and interpreting experience into a narrative structure. This narrative process, in which structure and meaning (or form and content) function in tandem, is what engenders the discursive complexity so often noted by critics in Galdós's works. However, in the context of the above-mentioned essay that outlines his initial practice of realism, the appearance of *La sombra* (1870), in which a supernatural menace haunts the protagonist, seems enigmatic and somewhat misplaced.¹ The contention here is that the

questionable status of this novel within his literary corpus is only illusory; the supernatural presence of a hostile being does indeed point to romanticism's supernatural vein, but the emphasis is on the narrative process, placing this work squarely within the scope of Galdós's novelistic trajectory.

We begin by considering how the supernatural element is used in *La sombra* to support, rather than contradict, Galdós's practice of realism through what would become a principle component in later works: the interaction and tension between individual and society. The novel portrays the dialogic interaction between a narrator/character and don Anselmo, the latter who recounts episodes of his life emphasizing the anomalous appearance of a shadowy phantom that definitively provokes his unraveling grasp on reality. As commonly depicted in gothic-supernatural tales, a transitional social status is the catalyst for the full onset of his psychological degeneration. In the case of Anselmo, his marriage to Elena triggers the psychotic episode in which he imagines that the Greek mythic character, Paris, has escaped the confines of a portrait and is seducing his wife. With increasingly erratic and violent behavior, don Anselmo causes his wife to suffer from a debilitating condition that leads to her death, upon which he is released from Paris's torturous haunting. However, the gothic inclusion of a menacing entity is only part of the mystery driving the narrative. In fact, it is possible to consider that the ambiguity surrounding Paris's existence is only a thinly disguised veil covering the real mystery of the novel.² The pressing issue that predominantly befuddles the narrator is not whether Paris is real, but rather how the story develops as a narrative piece. This is underlined in the narrator's final comment when he ultimately dismisses the need to reveal the status of Paris's existence:

Al bajar de la escalera me acordé de que no le había preguntado una cosa importante y merecía ser aclarado, esto es, si la figura de Paris había vuelto a presentarse en el lienzo, como parecía natural. Pensé subir a que me sacara de dudas satisfaciendo mi curiosidad; pero no había andado dos escalones cuando me ocurrió que el caso no merecía la pena, porque a mí no me importa mucho saberlo, ni al lector tampoco. (91)

On the other hand, the narrator invests much of his effort in deciphering the style and organizational structure of don Anselmo's narrative recollection that determines how he tells the story. The narrator presses Anselmo to try to recover the logical origins that led to the manifestation of Paris, noting that the mystery is rooted in the protagonist's memory lapse causing him to narrate events out of sequence: "Ahora bien, D. Anselmo, piénselo usted bien y procure hacer memoria: ¿antes de la aparición de Paris no ocurrió algún hecho que pudiera ser la primera causa determinante de esa serie de fenómenos que tanto le trastornaron a usted?" (85). In this respect, the gothic element has engaged the reader, but the emphasis has shifted from the existence of Paris to Anselmo's enigmatic narrative process.

La sombra reflects Galdós's early orientation toward a practice of realism in which narrative style and meaning are mutually informative. As noted above, the discursive complexity of this novel has been a predominant focus among critics. In broad terms, studies have noted that *La sombra* reveals Galdós's commitment to demonstrating the

relations between art and society that mark his more mature works. Harriet Turner posits that “[t]he novel may be treated as a self-contained piece but it may also be treated as a work of rhetoric, designed to communicate a social message and to impose that message upon the reader without violating the demands of realistic, non-didactic fiction” (6). Thomas Franz states: “[He] is certainly not alone in placing the focus on literary functions—Balzac, Zola, and Machado de Assis come easily to mind—, he is clearly one of the earliest and most consistent of novelists to embody the contention that a study of novelistic art is epistemologically compatible with the study of social reality” (51). In Alan Smith’s critical study on the position of *La sombra* within the corpus of Galdós’s works, he notes that it was not definitively published as part of a collection until 1890, yet he (i.e., Galdós) maintained an active relationship with this novel throughout his career. Galdós’s decision to include *La sombra* as part of his “*corpus de libros*” in the 1890 collection was due to a “conciencia de una crisis en el discurso realista, compañera de una crisis en los valores y sentido histórico de la clase social a la que él y ese discurso pertenecían” (Smith 229). As evidenced in Smith’s study, Galdós’s engagement with realism demonstrated a conscientious critical stance that is already present in this early novel. Along this line of inquiry, and in a study that is indicative of more recent approaches to Galdós’s works, Hazel Gold points to the author’s somewhat contentious relationship with realism that underscores “the problematic nature of representation” (836). This is manifest in *La sombra* through “[t]he mode of telling, that is, the reverse sequencing of events and the allusions to the supernatural, is granted primacy over the tale itself; Anselmo effectively calls attention to the pane of representation that realism works so hard to conceal” (835). Above all, these various studies highlight *La sombra* as a discursive space in which Galdós negotiates his terms by which he would practice, problematize, and question realism’s agenda.

This analysis shifts the focus to consider how Galdós uses memory as the foundation of the narrative process in *La sombra*. With this approach, we shall primarily draw from Paul Ricoeur’s exhaustive study *Time and Narrative*, as well as from resources in cognitive psychology both of which have contributed to understanding how lived time is transformed into a narrative format to create meaning. Our justification for framing Galdós’s *La sombra* in contemporary cognitive psychology is that it provides an overt recognition of the internal mechanisms of identity creation, self-narratives, and memory that had been present in literature long before the rise of such fields in the human sciences. In Ricoeur’s study, he states: “time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence” (52). The cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner explains that these processes of turning lived time into a narrative form have existed since the earliest documented eras, but it is only recently that theorists have offered a more lucid explanation of the cognitive activity that translates a sequence of events into a meaningful narrative (695). It is this essential idea of understanding time through narrative that has provided cognitive psychology with its general framework for approaching notions of memory and self in society. Furthermore, both Ricoeur and cognitive psychologists have considered the great literary works, specifically those of the nineteenth century, as one of the primary sources for their theories on narrative studies. For our purposes, Ricoeur’s explanation of Augustine’s dialectic of the three-fold present and cognitive psychologists’ research into memory and social identity help to elucidate

Galdós's practice of realism. This application of contemporary terminology will afford us a more cogent understanding of Galdós's aesthetic agenda as it develops in *La sombra*.

Ricoeur elaborates that memory allows the past to be apprehended in the present and recounted through narrative. Yet, the key to Ricoeur's analysis is not that the past is made present, but rather it is an image, which is "an impression left by events, an impression that remains in the mind" (10). The past is filtered through memory, which is a function of the present. In this way, Ricoeur makes use of Augustine's theory of the three-fold present to explain that the seemingly paradoxical notion of capturing time is possible through the "internal multiplicity" of the present as experienced by the human mind. We shall return to the fundamental importance of the multiple present shortly, but first it is worthy to replicate Augustine's formula for this three-fold present that identifies where the past and future are located: "It might be correct to say that there are three times, a present of [...] past things, a present of [...] present things, and a present of [...] future things. Some such different times do exist in [in] the mind, but nowhere else [...] that I can see" (Augustine, qtd. in Ricoeur 11). Both memory and anticipation are projections or modes of the present. These modes are mutually informative, creating a fragile equilibrium that then functions to process external impressions that inform the narrative self. It is the impression of the image that becomes central to situating the self within a shared cultural network. This occurs through the internalization of not just the symbolic meaning but also, and perhaps more importantly, of how to narrativize the meaning of external events and their impressions on the mind in creating a psychologically cohesive self. If the processing of the impression is disrupted or fragmented as it enters into the dialectic of the three-fold present, temporal cohesiveness of the psychological self, likewise, suffers distortions and consequently affects how the narrative self is presented in relation to external reality.

Ricoeur notes that in the span of a life there is an underlying linear structure of events that he categorizes as episodic. He adds that there is a fundamental difference between simply enumerating events and configuring a meaningful story of one's life: "To understand the story is to understand how and why the successive episodes led to this conclusion, which, far from being foreseeable, must finally be acceptable, as congruent with the episodes brought together by the story" (67). The series of episodes are woven together in narrative form from a retrospective position. In other words, the story is needed to explain how an individual has arrived at a certain place and circumstance in life. In this way, memory will seek out those episodes that give narrative meaning to the present understanding of self, which implies an intrinsic connection with the temporal consciousness of one's life to establish the overall coherence of self through time. It is this facet of coherency over time that interlinks mnemonic functions with the narrative process in creating a stable perception of self. Identity, then, is generated as perceptions of time are integrated into a narrative form, which is enabled by mnemonic faculties.³

As a cognitive function, mnemonic capabilities are partially conditioned by genetic predispositions; however, they are also subject to external socio-cultural forces that can affect interpretation, perception, and even stability of recall processes, thus interfering with or corroborating notions of self. The prevailing view in cognitive psychology is that "both memory and self are constructed through specific forms of social interactions

and/or cultural frameworks that lead to the formation of an autobiographical narrative” (Fivush and Haden vii). The creation of selfhood hinges upon the ability to narrate into creation an identity that falls within the parameters of a schematic life script reflecting the norms of an overarching socio-cultural matrix. The life script, according to Berntsen and Bohn, is dependent upon collectively shared norms that influence how individuals envision themselves within a cultural schema:

Scripts are collectively shared knowledge that enables us to communicate about and orient ourselves in recurrent, complex situations. In the same way, a life script represents a prototypical life course within a certain culture. It influences how we communicate and think about our life and how we plan our future. (64)

These collective narrative scripts allow individuals to make sense of their life and to adapt behaviors in accordance with the socio-cultural meta-narrative. It is clear that the life script not only provides a guide to an individual in society, but it also governs the way in which memory is implemented to recall the past. Berntsen and Bohn add: “In addition to influencing people’s plans for their future, cultural life scripts structure recall from autobiographical memory and influence what we choose to include in our personal life stories” (79). Memory, therefore, reflects both individual and cultural characteristics and its disruptions must take into account tension between both sources that contribute to the notions of selfhood. These processes are integral to the modern novel in its development of narrative technique and representation of reality. What we consider now is how the tension between self and the socio-cultural meta-narrative is translated into the novel and functions as part of Galdós’s practice of realism.

Ricoeur identified three phases in the modern novel associated with verisimilitude that saw “[t]he notion of character overtake that of plot, becoming equal with it, then finally surpass it entirely” (9). In the three stages, the notion of a faithful representation of reality underwent significant transformation in narrative. The second stage “[m]ay be characterized by a precarious equilibrium between the always more strongly affirmed aim of faithfulness to reality and the ever sharper awareness of the artifice behind a successful composition” (13). While this is the practice that Galdós inherits from his European predecessors, *La sombra* demonstrates that his engagement with realism was already evolving into what is closer to the third and last stage of the modern novel. In this phase, verisimilitude is reconfigured to reflect the characters’ perceived experiences that often belie an officially mandated version of an ordered reality. In this third stage, verisimilitude demonstrates an increasing lack of “a plot or characters or any discernible temporal organization [that] is more genuinely faithful to experience, which is itself fragmented and inconsistent” (14). In this stage, the imported images processed by the three-fold present disorient rather than order the individual’s perceptions. It is in this manner that Galdós enters into an ambiguous relationship with realism in *La sombra* by privileging the protagonist’s memory-led narrative that is full of disruptions and distortions.⁴

One of realism’s prevailing features is its understanding of identity through multiple perspectives, which the novel offers through temporal awareness.⁵ Identity unfolds as the

result of an awareness of self, as a continuous existence through time, and allows characters to make choices or have particular expectations according to their past actions or motivations. In this way, the mnemonic act is a vital process for creating meaning through narrative, as Ermath notes: “Since the meaning of any particular case cannot be understood without comparing it to other particular cases, and since the only other particular cases are the past ones, the mnemonic act of recovery is crucial for perceiving the pattern of its events” (515). She explains that memory is needed to select proper choices in a given social environment: “In all realistic novels, one of the chief moral problems characters face is that of making proper connections, literally by marriage and figuratively by sustained increase of conscious grasp; and the power to accomplish this is often explicitly tied to the power of memory” (515). She adds that “memory is the key to acting wisely and well, which is to say in one’s own self interest” (516). But it is precisely in the nineteenth-century novel that memory is attended to as problematic in creating the narrative of selfhood. Richard Terdiman confirms that

[i]t is the novel, [...] that most organizes itself as a projection of the memory function and its disruptions. Novels are the exercises in the process of memory. Of course, writers in all periods have turned their imagination toward the past, but nineteenth-century plots particularly present themselves as the diegesis of history’s stress. (25)

The temporal tension in *La sombra* is the product of Anselmo’s memory disruptions that interfere with the creation of a cohesive and logical narrative and, as shall be demonstrated, is rooted in the dissonance between his perceptions and the overarching socio-cultural order.

In this early work, Galdós recognizes that identity is constructed by configuring the episodes that constitute a life into a cohesive narrative. As such, he has his narrator open the novel with an emphasis on creating identity through the narrative process:

Conviene principiar por el principio, es decir, por informar al lector de quién es este D. Anselmo; por contarle su vida, sus costumbres, y hablar de su carácter y figura, sin omitir la opinión de loco rematado de que gozaba entre todos los que le conocían. Ésta era general, unánime, profundamente arraigada, sin que bastaran a desmentirle los frecuentes rasgos de genio de aquel hombre incomparable, sus momentos de buen sentido y elocuencia, la afable cortesía con que se prestaba a relatar los más curiosos hechos de su vida, haciendo en sus narraciones uso discreto de su prodigiosa facultad imaginativa. (23)

Here, rather than begin the novel with a revealing physical or moral description of don Anselmo, attention is drawn to the narrative act that generates the identity of the protagonist. Not only does the narrator introduce don Anselmo by overtly referring to narration as the means by which the reader will acquire knowledge of the character’s identity, he also refers to the protagonist’s propensity for telling stories about his life: “El hablar consigo mismo era en él más que hábito, una función en perenne ejercicio; su vida un monólogo sin fin” (28); “Su hábito, su temperamento, su personalidad era la

narración. Cuando contaba algo, era el doctor Anselmo en su genuina forma y exacta expresión” (29). Don Anselmo appears to be fully actualized through narrative; in fact, these selections indicate that don Anselmo’s existence is sustained by this process of continual self-narrating. The physical characterization of the protagonist depicts an individual who barely distinguishes himself within the social milieu, yet he becomes more vivid through language, and specifically through his recounting of events and experiences: “Sólo cuando hablaba se veían en su rostro los rasgos de una vivacidad nada común. Sus ojuelos pequeños y hundidos tenían entonces mucho brillo, y la boca, dotada de la movilidad más grande que hemos conocido, empleaba un sistema de signos más variados y expresivos que la misma palabra” (28). These introductory remarks point out that Anselmo comes to life—metaphorically speaking—through narration. Furthermore, his identity is intrinsically linked to a narrative self and, therefore, how he tells the story should be as relevant as what is told.

Shortly after the initial remarks, don Anselmo’s narrative propensity is cast as problematic. The narrator, along with society in general, is often left bewildered by Anselmo’s particular discursive style: “Al contar estas cosas, siempre referentes a algún pasaje de su vida, ponía en juego los más caprichosos recursos de la retórica y un copioso caudal de retazos eruditos que desembuchaba aquí y allí con gran desenfado” (29). His grandiose narrative is at times simply ascribed to his overactive imagination; in other instances his chaotic discourse arises from an increasing estrangement from society: “Cuentan personas autorizadas, que en los meses que estuvo casado, la enajenación, la extravagancia de nuestro personaje llegaron a su último extremo” (30). This increasing alienation from society equally affects his ability to relate a cohesive and meaningful narrative in reference to himself: “No volvió a tener reposado y claro el juicio, siendo desde entonces el hombre de las cosas estafalarias o inconexas, cada vez más incomprensible, enfrascado en sus diálogos internos, y agitado siempre por la idea insana, que llegó poco a poco a formar parte de su naturaleza moral” (31). Here, the interaction between the overarching socio-cultural narrative and Anselmo’s personal narrative only exacerbates his position as an outcast of society.

In fact, Anselmo never reconciles his perspective of events with that of society at large, as he points out to the narrator: “Usted oiría hablar entonces de mi esposa, de mí; oiría mil necedades que distan mucho de la verdad. La verdad pura es lo que voy a contar” (36). His irregular self-narrative is judged by society as the result of a mental disturbance, and as a preventive measure against social contamination, the general population distances itself: “Huyeron de él los que antes le tenían afecto o lástima, y solo había un reducido número de personas que iban a oírle contar peregrinas aventuras, soñadas por él sin duda, pues no existía un ser cuyo papel en la sociedad hubiera sido más pasivo” (31). Society justifies Anselmo’s alienation due to an inherited madness, which is used to explain the many discrepancies in his narrative:

[P]or ejemplo, cuando dice que fue al duelo con Paris sin testigos para afirmar, con posterioridad, que sus criados estaban presentes e incluso le ayudaron a cargar el cuerpo herido; o cuando, hablando de su juventud, refiere que ha tenido desafíos en su vida para más adelante declarar que no sabe manejar ningún arma. (Monleón 35)

These contradictions, however, can just as easily be attributed to memory disruptions that affect his interpretation of experience. And, by shifting focus to Anselmo's memory discrepancies as the primary source of his inconsistent narration, it will be shown that society is implicated in his psychotic break. This does not dispute that don Anselmo suffered from an inherited mental instability, but that in addition to his genetic psychological problem is the disorienting effect of bourgeois society's meta-narrative that interferes with his mnemonic faculties.

La sombra consists of two narrative planes that are affected by Anselmo's recollection of the past. The first takes place in the narrated present in which he recounts segments of his life story for the narrator. As he proceeds through this narrative plane, the abnormalities in his tale become more indicative of temporal confusions. On this level, Anselmo transposes past events onto the present without distinguishing between the narrated story and the narrative present. Secondly, Anselmo selects anomalous markers in his recollection of the past that disorient rather than clarify the story for the narrator, as exemplified in the memory of his childhood home. Rather than select the relevant points that give order to his life story, he demonstrates a disruption rooted in too much memory. The second narrative plane contains the embedded story of Paris and Alejandro in which the sequential order of events is inverted. This reversal of order is caused by mnemonic failure in recalling certain episodes from his past, particularly regarding the existence and infiltration of Alejandro X in Anselmo's home. This dysfunction requires that Anselmo retell his story against normative and logical patterns recalling the apparition of Paris as the disconcerting event rather than the scandalous presence of Alejandro; it also points to an alienation from a cohesive and comprehensive self-consciousness.⁶

Don Anselmo's memory dysfunction leads to a fusion or confusion between the past and present. On several occasions in his story, the past becomes so powerfully emotional that the boundaries are blurred between what is absent (the image) and what is present (the recollection). In one particular instance, as he recalls Paris's first visit, Anselmo acts out against the narrator confusing the past episode with the narrative present:

-¡Monstruo!—grité levantándome con furia amenzándole—calla, o si no aquí mismo [...]
 - ¡Cuidado!—dije a mi vez haciéndome un poco de atrás, al ver que D. Anselmo, contando aquel pasaje se levantó dirigiéndose a mí con los puños cerrados, como si yo fuera la infernal aparición que tanto le había atormentado. (54)

While the past is integrated as an informative governing model for perceiving the present and selecting for the future, in these occurrences don Anselmo is crippled by his memories that not only subsume the present, but are contrary to any normative representation of events. He demonstrates a loss of control over perceptions of time, which contributes to the inability to construe meaning from his narrative process. As he cannot disentangle and distance himself from the past, this also affects his ability to interpret the codes of his social environment in the present.

Perhaps one of the more interesting effects of his mnemonic complications manifests itself as an occurrence of too much memory. As don Anselmo remembers his childhood home, he enumerates an excessive series of items that seem to extend beyond spatial limitations:

El jaspe, las estatuas, los relieves, las líneas entrantes y salientes, las molduras y reflejos, la tersa superficialidad del mármol de piso, que proyectaba a la inversa la construcción toda, la concavidad mitad sombría mitad luminosa de las bóvedas, la comunicación de las arquerías, el corte geométrico de las luces, la amplitud, la extensión, la altura, deslumbraban a todo el que por primera vez entraba en aquel recinto. A medida que se avanzaba, era más grandioso el espectáculo y se ofrecían a la contemplación espacios mayores y más bellos. Cada arquería abría paso a otro recinto, se entrecortaban las cornisas, engendrando en sus choques curvas más atrevidas; los arcos se transmitían sucesivamente la luz [...].
(36-7)

Here, he privileges enumerative accumulation over narrative meaning. Whereas narrative meaning discriminately limits which impressions are selected from the past to create a cohesive representation, enumeration transgresses bounded and empirically observed spatial limits through its hyperbolic nature. Yet, the purpose of discriminately selecting one's memories in the process of narrating the past is to understand and explain the present self. This excessive enumeration is symptomatic of Anselmo's disorientation in the present; he is confused by the codes and perceived norms of his environment and, therefore, is unable to situate himself within the social matrix. In referencing the significance of Anselmo's childhood home, Alan Smith aptly notes that "[el] palacio describe la condición mental de Anselmo" (232). For the present study, the disparate and seemingly endless passageways and objects represent Anselmo's confusion in the present; it signifies an inability to evaluate and organize the past into a narrative format that explains or gives meaning to his current situation. As a mnemonic disruption, the palace represents a storehouse of memories that are unfiltered and, therefore, unable to provide a cohesive and limited selection from the past to understand and interpret the present.

As a result, Anselmo demonstrates a tendency for chaos and heterogeneity in his recall of the past: "Buscar la simetría en este museo hubiera sido destruir su principal encanto, que era la heterogeneidad y el desorden" (41). And, in this predilection for disorder is a critique of the new social order. Bourgeois society's meta-narrative portrayed itself as the exclusive and objective representation of reality and in its exclusivity imposed a stifling sense of homogeneity.⁷ However, the oppressive nature of the new social order disguised the underlying chaos in which boundaries defining social roles and expectations had dissolved without affirming a solid new order. Fluidity between classes and freedom from spatial constraints may have had a liberating effect superficially, but this transformation induced greater confusion between the individual and society. Anselmo's chaotic recollection reflects the internalization of instability derived from a blurring of social boundaries. As he tries to integrate his own self-narrative within the ill-defined parameters of the new social meta-narrative, the result is disorder and a lack of boundaries on his memory:

[L]a amalgama de cosas bellas, curiosas o raras halagaba el entendimiento oprimido hasta entonces por la simetría. Y daba libertad a la vista, antes subyugada por la línea. [...] En este voluntario trabajo mental, producido por la armonía, la simetría, la proporción y la esbeltez, se fatiga la mente y flaquea entre el cansancio y el asombro. Cuando no hay estilo y sí detalles; cuando no hay punto de vista, no clave, la mirada no se fatiga, se espacia, se balancea, se pierde; pero permanece serena, porque no trata de medir, no de comparar; se entrega a la confusión del espectáculo, y extraviándose se salva. (41-2)

This excess reveals Anselmo's psychological fatigue from attempting to understand and situate himself in the present social order.

The predominant episode of don Anselmo's memory dysfunction occurs in relation to his recollection of Alejandro, the young gentleman who instigated his initial mental breakdown. However, don Anselmo does not acknowledge Alejandro's existence in the narrative until after a series of disturbing and violent reactions against the phantom, Paris. It is only through dialogue with other characters that Anselmo is made aware of Alejandro's presence in his house. Furthermore, the most distinguishing aspect of the narrative revelation is that Anselmo had no recollection of this individual even after being told that Alejandro frequented the house often and had been seen in his company. In fact, Anselmo is informed by his father-in-law, *el conde del Torbellino*, of the existence of Alejandro. As *el conde* scolds him for behaving irrationally toward Elena and for giving credence to a few "malas lenguas," he reveals that the rumors are founded "en que frecuente tu casa ese joven, ese joven...ese que viene aquí desde hace algunos días...ese Alejandro no sé cuántos" (76). Anselmo responds: "No sé de quién habla usted" (76). During the embedded narrative that recounts the Paris/Alejandro episode, don Anselmo never recuperates the memory of this particular individual on his own. It is only when Anselmo is forced to consider his narrative according to normative and logical patterns that he concedes to the idea that Alejandro's presence preceded the appearance of Paris. Yet, this version of the narrative defies Anselmo's experiences, thus casting doubt on the stability of the meta-narrative.

The narrator represents the regulative perspective of the prevailing meta-cultural system. He is conditioned to interpret episodic stories through a normative and sequential process and, thus, draws out the missing memory from don Anselmo's narrative. In fact, the narrator is less stupefied by the tale of the apparition of Paris than by the narrative order, and consequently tries to impose logic on the irregularity by suggesting a general schematic for a more logical story: "¿No sería más lógico que precediera la realidad, y que después, a consecuencia de un estado real de su ánimo, aparecieran las visiones que tanto le atormentaron?" (85). The narrator attempts to frame Anselmo's account of events within empirically bounded norms by proposing an alternative understanding of experience rooted in an objective account of reality. Anselmo acknowledges that this perspective reflects a normative interpretation of events:

Transcurrido algún tiempo, pude, a fuerza de recapacitar, a fuerza de atar cabos, restablecer los hechos, aunque no con claridad que requerían. Por

último, pude recordar que efectivamente yo había conocido a aquel Alejandro de que hablaban mis suegros, mi amigo, y por fin, Madrid entero. (85)

Somewhat encouraged by Anselmo's temporary recourse to logic over experience, the narrator recounts the events in a coherent pattern: "El orden lógico del cuento—dije—, es el siguiente: usted conoció que ese joven galanteaba a su esposa; usted pensó mucho en aquello, se reconcentró, se aisló: la idea fija le fue dominando, y por último se volvió loco, porque otro nombre no merece tan horrendo delirio" (90). Yet, the narrator's influence is ultimately ineffectual for don Anselmo's narrative remembering. Not only was he cognitively impaired during the episode of Paris/Alejandro, but the narrator's version does not reflect Anselmo's experience. As a result, he returns to the account he initially told, insisting that he tell it in inverse order to maintain its level of verisimilitude, since this is the way in which he remembers the events:

Así es—contestó el doctor—. Solo que yo, para dar a mi aventura más verdad, la cuento como me pasó, es decir, al revés. En mi cabeza se verificó una desorganización completa, así es que cuando ocurrió la primera de mis alucinaciones, yo no recordaba los antecedentes de aquella dolorosa enfermedad moral" (90).

Anselmo's determination to narrate his story according to his interpretation of reality, as experienced and not as an empirically determined external truth, introduces fissures in the ideal of a normalizing and homogeneous truth for an entire national body.

Anselmo's version of his story is categorized as a memory-led narrative that does not observe logical and empirical structures, but rather a subjective recollection of events, more indicative of the third stage of novelistic development as outlined above by Ricoeur. This type of narrative abounds in disruptions, as Gerard Genette elaborates, because memory "obeys other laws than those of time" that respond to "the concern to tell things as they were 'lived' at the time and the concern to tell them as they were recalled after the event" (157). Genette elucidates the significance of temporal distortions in memory-led narratives in that they assert a more faithful orientation toward verisimilitude (157). Don Anselmo makes this same claim to realistic representation by portraying his narrative as he experienced it, in inverse order, rather than subjecting events to an externally determined empiricism that appeals to traditional chronological sequencing of events. His experience is opposed to how external and objective reality determines a normative narrative, and the author underscores his own conflict with perceived meta-narratives as his narrator grapples with the appropriate version of Anselmo's story to transmit. While the narrator intervenes continuously through Anselmo's story to make adjustments and corrections to the anomalous tale, in the end, he too relates the events faithful to how they were experienced by the protagonist rather than according to a normative social meta-narrative.

The emphasis on creating a meaningful narrative that integrates the individual into a larger social matrix is one of the salient discursive threads throughout *La sombra*. The ability to generate and sustain narrative meaning depends on healthy cognitive faculties

and specifically on memory processes. Mnemonic processes that contribute to identity within any given socio-cultural sphere are dependent on this larger framework in selecting events and organizing the narrative structure of one's life story. It would seem, then, that healthy cognitive faculties and relatively little conflict with the overarching order are mutually contingent factors for the development of one's self-narrative. This is problematized in *La sombra* as it points to the fundamental dissonance between Anselmo's interpretation of social situations and that of the new bourgeois order. His father-in-law makes this apparent when he confronts Anselmo and urges him to adapt his behavior toward Elena: "Si tuvieras la calma, la filosofía que se necesita para poder vivir en estos tiempos que alcanzamos, no te sucedería eso. Es que tú te apuras de nada; eres muy puntilloso; tomas muy a pecho todas las cosas, y, en resumen...no sabes vivir" (75). Don Anselmo has not incorporated this new "filosofía" into his psyche and is often ostracized by the general public for not attending to what is deemed relevant and important in the new social order. Yet, the problem is not exclusively rooted in Anselmo's mental disturbance, but in the disorienting state of the socio-cultural meta-narrative.

The image of Paris is subconsciously conjured by Anselmo as the embodiment of what appears indecipherable in the new social context. As a result, Anselmo is often left bewildered by Paris's declarations such as in the elaborate account of his identity to which Anselmo confesses to the narrator: "Cuando oí esta relación, resolví hacer un esfuerzo a ver si podía descifrar el espantoso enigma" (55). The same misunderstanding occurs when Paris affirms his intention to take possession of Anselmo's wife. As Paris begins to clarify the difference between Elena as wife and Elena as a person, the underlying conflict emerges:

Lo que llevaré y sacaré a pública plaza, es: las miradas que me dirige, las citas que me da, los favores que me concede, los desaires que te hace, las reticencias que deja escapar hablando de ti [...]. Quédate con tu esposa: yo no haré más que pasearme ante ella y ante todos, recibir la exhalación de sus ojos en presencia de centenares de personas, difundir por mi cuerpo su perfume favorito, recorrer las calles de modo que en cualquier parte parezca que salgo de aquí [...]. (59)

As the two continue their dialogue, Anselmo realizes that Paris's threat is the violation of boundaries. The appearance of Paris, then, comes to represent the intrusion of "el vulgo, sociedad, gente, público, canalla, vecinos, amigos, mundo" (58) into the private space of marriage, and his continued presence is the force of this new social order in which boundaries separating public and private spaces had eroded.⁸ The dissolution of social boundaries is articulated in don Anselmo's recollection that substituted Paris for Alejandro X, in which the mythical figure transgressed the bounded/framed painting into his world. The narrative account of Paris then metaphorically represents the discursive chaos of the socio-cultural meta-narrative that disorients rather than assimilates the narrative self. The narrator corroborates society's implication in Anselmo's social disorientation: "Había, sin embargo, una pequeña dosis de sentido en el fondo de todos aquellos desatinos, porque la figura de Paris, ente de imaginación, a quien había dado aparente existencia la gran fantasía de mi amigo, podía pasar muy bien como la personificación de uno de los vicios capitales de la sociedad" (61). Society, or the new

bourgeois order, placed greater importance on the social self and this externalization of an identity configuration was considerably unstable. This instability explains Anselmo's propensity toward self-narration at the beginning of the novel as he attempts to create meaning. His narrative disorder, however, reflects a more pervasive chaos disrupting social organization and narrative meaning.

Throughout Galdós's literary career, his most memorable characters attempt to reconcile their narrative self with the imposing socio-cultural meta-narrative, yet inevitably fail. The failure of these characters to integrate their narrative self within the governing normative discourse is often considered the consequence of an inherited madness. However, by considering that these personal narratives obey the dictates of a remembered experience over a predetermined meta-narrative, these memory-led narratives become subversive acts against the homogenizing socio-cultural narrative of the bourgeoisie. While the many characters from don Anselmo to Isidora Rufete, among others, are ridiculed for insisting on their narrative versions of experience over that of the normative meta-narrative, the power of their narratives resonates throughout the fictitious population inhabiting Galdós's many novels. These marginalized characters resist assimilation to a normative meta-narrative and, perhaps, reflect the author's uncertainty toward any homogenizing narrative, whether political, cultural, or artistic. In this vein, *La sombra* serves as an introduction to Galdós's practice of realism by portraying the tension between personal narratives with the normative discourse governed by the socio-cultural meta-narrative. Here, Galdós begins his tense relationship with realism by portraying the discord between an externally imposed normative discourse and his character's perceptions of experience. In this early novel, the dialectic is highlighted by placing emphasis on creating narrative meaning in the process of negotiating personal identity within the boundaries of the governing socio-cultural norms. In particular, Anselmo's memory disruptions in his narrative recollection result from the new social order in which social boundaries that contributed to identity processes and integration within society were unstable. This led to his inability to create a cohesive and congruent self through time, which manifests itself in his chaotic self-narrative. *La sombra* can be heralded as the beginning of Galdós's practice of realism in which he explores the complex notion of verisimilitude that opposes memory-led narratives to externally imposed normative discourses.⁹ In his more mature works, this discursive opposition becomes one of his greatest literary achievements.

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Notes

- ¹ Alan Smith has brought to light the discrepancy in the initial publication date of *La sombra*, noting that typically the novel is dated in 1870, which may actually be the date of its creation rather than publication. In a note, Smith explains: “Según la bibliografía de Manuel Hernández Suárez, *La sombra* fue publicada por primera vez un año después en la *Revista de España*, XVIII, 70, 71 y 72 (1871), pp. 269-292, 417-439 y 601-623. Al final está fechada en noviembre, 1870” (228).
- ² The status of Paris at the end of the novel has been the subject of many critics of *La sombra*. Germán Gullón sees the enigma of Paris to be just as relevant as Anselmo’s story. He attributes this to the need to maintain suspense to keep the reader engaged (356).
- ³ In their introduction, Robyn Fivush and Catherine A. Haden note that “[r]ecent theorizing on the role of narrative in human cognition suggests that it is through the construction of a life story that self and memory are intertwined” (vii).
- ⁴ Noël Valis has explored memory and self-actualization in Galdós’s *Tristana* (1892). In her analysis, *Tristana* is afflicted by recurring forgetfulness. She goes on to explain that this is due, in part, to self-preservation, but more importantly as part of a continual becoming that alludes to the interconnection between art and life:

Galdós shows us in *Tristana* (though he does not always develop it sufficiently) that the human is subject to forgetting, that in our dissatisfaction with self we create a succession of images of ourselves—and others—that frequently, and even deliberately, obliterates our previous self. In erasing some of the tapes of her memory, *Tristana* demonstrates the impermanence and malleability of what constitutes our humanness. In the process she also seems to suggest to us that to attain *la plenitud humana* we need the ideal, i.e., art to mold our raw materiality, the *tabula rasa* of our terribly white souls. (128)

There is a positive redemptive and life instilling quality to this forgetting as Nietzsche stated in his essay *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*: “[f]orgetting is essential to action of any kind, just as not only light but darkness too is essential for the life of everything organic” (62). However, in *La sombra*, the act of forgetting seems less of a transcendental life-affirming experience and more of a conflict between self and society. This earlier novel reflects a greater pessimism that points to a loss of agency under the weight of socially construed ideals imposed on the individual. Anselmo’s forgetfulness is more of a memory dysfunction that destabilizes his ability to conceptualize identity through narrative processes. Yet, it also calls into the question the assumed objective and normative quality of society’s meta-narrative.

- ⁵ In referring to the nineteenth-century novel, Robert Strozier explains:

Fictional texts are usually taken as exemplifications, but ultimately they are productive of interiority as modern philosophical texts. They only differ on one respect: they call attention to narrative structure or, what is the same thing, the positionality of the subject of knowledge and the structure of knowing. (219-20)

⁶ Hazel Gold has argued that Anselmo's crisis is the result of self-alienation: "Galdós's novel proceeds to use the unreality of Anselmo's situation to reveal a profound psychological insight. The painting of Paris is a mirror in which the alienated protagonist is incapable of seeing himself" (835-36).

⁷ As Jo Labanyi has noted,

What we find in most Spanish realist novels is precisely a critique of this homogenizing process [...]. The issue of maintenance and erosion of difference—between town and country, middle and lower classes, public and private, masculine and feminine—is central to these texts, as it was to contemporary debate. The urban novels express anxiety at the standardization and imitation which come with democracy. (5)

⁸ In Labanyi's analysis on liberal political theory she comments that

[T]he issue of defining the boundary between the public and private spheres was central to the European realist novel in general, as it was to public debate, because the two spheres overlap in a way that makes precise distinction impossible. In Spain's case the problem of definition was particularly acute, since the uneven nature of modernization process produced a superimposition of the old and the new, while its rapidity meant that the new divisions started to be eroded by further developments before they had had a chance to become consolidated [...]. (31)

This destabilization of boundaries is less developed in *La sombra* than in Galdós's later novels, but the presence of this early detection of the crisis of modernity marks this novel as clearly participating in the author's realist agenda.

⁹ We are in complete agreement with Alan Smith's evaluation of *La sombra* as the initial piece in Galdós's *oeuvre* in which he lays the foundation for his practice of realism. In reference to the mythical character of Paris, Smith explains: "Vemos aquí nacer la fórmula que sustentará toda la obra de Galdós, la modernización de un mito, el vestirlo con trazos de un ser cotidiano" (235). Here, however, we focus on the novel's initial use of the mnemonic processes in creating narrative meaning and the tensions that arise between self and society that are present in one degree or another throughout the author's works.

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