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Places in the Mind: Evocative Walks Through Galdós' Madrid

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Real world or imagination, fact or fiction, truth or illusion, life or art—these competing claims of referentiality and textuality have long been the concern of writers and scholars of realist literature. In her recent book, *All is True*, Lilian R. Furst bemoans the tendency of literary critics to view these concepts as an either/or option that privileges one at the expense of the other. Rather than being mutually exclusive, referentiality and textuality are seen by Furst as complementary and interdependent. She proposes a mode of analysis that recognizes the dialogic relationship between them and focuses on the porous boundary separating the external world of verifiable reality and the internal world of fictive illusion. As Furst explains, the tension between these two worlds arises from the attempt by realist writers—especially those of the nineteenth century—to conceal this relationship from the reader. They declare their fiction to be a faithful replica of reality, but the text’s rootedness in language exposes their endeavor to be an act of creation rather than representation.

Thus, the task of the realist writer is to persuade the reader to pretend to believe that the text replicates actuality. The various tactics used by realist writers to achieve this “assent to pretense” are examined by Furst (32-33), who uses the concept of place as the focal point of her study. Although she limits herself to third-person narratives written by major authors in French, English, and German, she encourages scholars with expertise in other languages to explore the aptness of her approach for their particular world literatures as well. Clearly, Galdós’ standing within nineteenth-century Spanish Realism makes him an ideal candidate for such a study, especially since he sets virtually all of his *novelas contemporáneas* in a single city. Continuing Furst’s focus on place, I will examine Galdós’s use of Madrid in representative scenes that feature characters walking through the city’s streets.

According to Furst, the realist enterprise not only involves the fabrication of a fictive world (of characters and their actions) that lies adjacent to the real world (where the writing and reading of the text are located), but also involves the building of bridges between these two worlds, which obscure their boundaries and persuade the reader to pretend that both worlds are one and the same. Furst proposes
two major tactics used by authors to build such bridges. One is the use of place-names that refer to actual locations. Since Paris, London (and Madrid) are verifiable cities in the external world, their presence in the internal world of the text gives them a type of dual existence which merges the real and fictive realms. Recognizable place-names already hold meaning in the real world, and therefore their citation by an author prompts the reader’s imagination to transfer that meaning to the text. The other bridging strategy is more complex because it centers on the status of the narrator. Despite the fact that the narrator is a literary construct with no existence in real life, his ability to address the reader directly while telling his story makes him appear to occupy the real world of the reader as well as the fictional one of the characters. Since the narrator seems to have one foot in each world, he serves as the transition for leading the reader into the text. Once there, the reader is subject to an even greater immersion into the fictional world through the narrator’s focalization of textual material through the points of view of the characters.

This second type of bridging works in conjunction with the first to create what Furst calls “the evocation of place” (145). What matters is not the degree of faithfulness with which the text reproduces actual places, but rather, how well it projects a concept of place that functions as a possible continuation of the real world. This concept of place arises from the text’s various viewpoints—often expressed in figurative language—and is constructed through the reader’s active participation with the text. Focalized descriptions of place are filtered through the consciousness of certain characters, allowing the reader to experience place alongside those characters through their thoughts, feelings, and impressions. Thus the objective reality of an exiting place is imbued with a subjectivity that makes the fictional world of the text seem to be a personalized extension of the real one.

This dual bridging process is clearly exemplified in Chapters 37 and 38 of La Fontana de Oro, which describe Clara’s nocturnal wanderings after being unjustly turned out of the Porreño household. These chapters—containing the names of over two dozen of Madrid’s streets, plazas, and landmarks—plot the course of Clara’s journey from the northeastern Calle de Belén to the southwestern Calle del Humilladero. The streets she traverses have an identity in the external world of the reader due to their actual physical existence in Spain’s capital city, and those readers familiar with Madrid know exactly where Clara is located at every step of the way. But even the reader who knows nothing of Madrid’s topography can anticipate the dangers that might befall a young woman walking alone through an urban center in the late hours of the night with only strangers to rely

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on to guide her way. The text builds on this sense of peril, evoking a sense of place that is grounded in the real Madrid, and adding a subjective dimension by focalizing the entire journey through Clara’s point of view. Many unpleasant things happen to Clara—she is accosted by men, insulted by women, has rocks thrown at her, is accused of being a thief, and nearly gets trampled by a mule in the rain—but all of these events contribute less to the evocation of place than Clara’s impressions of what happens.

These impressions are conveyed through indirect thought passages that permeate the two chapters. As vehicles for Clara’s point of view, these passages contain figurative language reflecting Clara’s feelings of helplessness and fear of being harmed by her surroundings. Clara’s mind presents many terrifying images to the reader, including her notion of the crowd of people in the Puerta del Sol as “un mar agitado sordamente, y avanzando, avanzando como si quisiera tragarla” (321); her impression that “la enorme muralla de la casa del Cordón y la de San Justo iban a reunirse, aplastándola en medio” (334); and her sensation that the houses on the Calle de Segovia “se inclinaban, amenazando caer” (335).” But the dominant image running through Clara’s thoughts focuses on her fear of being seized. At the very beginning of her journey she is afraid that “iba a salir por la reja cercana una gran mano negra, que la cogeria llevandosela dentro” (321). Then the trees in the Prado look like “fantasmas negros que estaban allí con los brazos abiertos; brazos enormes con manos horribles de largos y retorcidos dedos” (322).

Later, when a woman in la Plazuela de Santa Ana actually grabs Clara’s arm, Clara feels herself “oprimida por la mano de la jamona, como tórtola en las garras del gavilán” (328). This reference to a bird of prey initiates a series of analogous comparisons: the houses above Clara on la Cuesta de los Ciegos seem like “nidos de buitre en lo alto de la eminencia” (335) and the screaming women in the Morena are twice likened to “aves con palabra humana” that continuously fly above her (335-36), producing a “confuso chirrido de pájaros nocturnos, resonando encima, allá arriba” (337). This last reference culminates in a stunning image reiterating her fear of being seized, but now with the bird of prey motif attached to the characters who caused her current misfortune:

La enferma fantasía de Clara creyó reconocer en aquellas voces un horrible y áspero trío de las Porreñas, que volaban, envueltas en espantosas nubes, dando al viento las voces de

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su impertinencia, de su amargo despecho y de su envidia. Hasta le pareció ver a Salomé, que se cernía en lo más alto, agitando rápidamente sus luengas vestiduras a manera de alas, y mostrando hacia abajo las encorvadas y angulosas falanges de sus dedos, terminados con uñas de lechuza. (337)

So distressed is Clara by the end of her quest that even the statue of María de la Paz Jesús becomes a predator awaiting Clara’s approach “para asirla cuando pasara, arrebatándola con una mano grande y crispada, para llevársela por los aires” (338). This final image of the statue’s grasping hand completes Clara’s travels and echoes the initial image of the imaginary hand coming through the grate. From beginning to end Clara’s journey is focalized through her fears, and therefore the text presents a fearful image of Madrid. The reader’s extra-textual knowledge of Madrid, if any, is only incidental to the evocation of place that is achieved primarily through Clara’s indirect thought passages. In Furst’s words, it is the “perceiving subject” rather than the “perceived object” that generates the fictional reality (157-58).

Throughout her study Furst speaks of focalization solely in terms of indirect discourse. Therefore, it should be pointed out that more direct means of presenting character consciousness also can be used by authors to evoke a sense of place. An excellent example is found in the second chapter of *Fortunata y Jacinta’s* final volume, where the focalization of Moreno-Isla’s walk is rendered in a combination of free direct thought and speech. Unlike the narrator-mediated passages of indirect thought that characterize Clara’s impressions of Madrid, free direct thought passages grant the reader unmediated access to Moreno-Isla’s mind. The narrator does not need to tell us what Moreno-Isla is thinking or feeling because we are placed right in contact with his consciousness. In addition, the juxtaposition of untagged thought and speech passages engages the participation of the reader who must distinguish between what is thought and what is said. The narrator prepares us for this active role with a brief statement that opens the chapter. We are told that the narrator’s “equivocación” in referring to the Retiro as “Hide park” (sic) is a reflection of “las perturbaciones superficiales” recently affecting Moreno-Isla’s “espiritu” (2: 331). Furthermore, we are told that on that particular day Moreno-Isla was engaged in “un trabajo mental comparativo” that “permitíale apreciar bien la situación efectiva y el escenario en que estaba” (2: 331). Thus the narrator’s opening remarks not only establish

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the orientation of this scene from Moreno-Isla’s point of view, but also focus the reader’s attention on that character’s location.

The focus on place is continued in Moreno-Isla’s thoughts, which contain the names of streets and landmarks in both Madrid and London. But whether or not the reader knows that the Serpentine is an actual pond that runs through Hyde Park, or that the Calle de Alcalá is a real road that leads out of the Retiro, these places acquire their meaning within the text through Moreno-Isla’s mental statements about them. These statements, in turn, reflect the various facets of his perspective: perceptual (through his physical senses); conceptual (through his attitudes/world view); and interested (through the personal stake he has in the situation). His perceptual perspective registers what he sees and hears during his walk: the people on the street (workmen, beggars, vendors, friends) and certain physical features of his surroundings (the steep incline of the Calle de Alcalá and the “balcones tan tristes” of the Santa Cruz home) (2: 331-33). But what he sees is of less importance than how he interprets these sights through his conceptual and interest perspectives. Moreno-Isla is an expatriated Spaniard with a pro-British bias, and therefore this conceptual perspective governs his mental comparison of Madrid and London, finding Madrid lacking in all respects. Thus the street sweeper, the man watering his animals, and the girl selling lottery tickets are all viewed by Moreno-Isla as contributing to the unsanitary conditions of the city; the beggars are considered to be the result of Spain’s lack of civilized ways to combat vagrancy; and the flower seller is believed to be one of the many Spaniards who have cheated him.

On the other hand, Moreno-Isla’s interest perspective focuses on his health, using his surroundings to gauge the degree of its deterioration. Thus the exhaustion he feels after walking around the Retiro’s pond reminds him of his more robust days in London when he could walk ten times as far without any problems. He likens the climb up the Calle de Alcalá to “la subida al Calvario” and alludes to his bad heart as the cross he must bear (2:332). Having arrived at the Puerta de Sol, he is tempted to take a carriage, but he tells himself “no, aguantate, que pronto llegarás” (2: 332). Indeed, his destination on the Calle de Pontejos is just steps away, a distance which would have been inconsequential if he were in better health. The funeral procession in the Puerta del Sol reminds Moreno-Isla of his own mortality, and seeing Feijoo is a further reminder of the ravages of old age. Having traversed the Puerta del Sol, Moreno-Isla is relieved to have arrived at the Calle de Correos, and he plans to have his cousin examine his heart, which he refers to as “un fuele roto” (2: 333). Once he reaches his house, he pretends to be well for
Barbarita's benefit, but he secretly dreads the climb up the stairs. After only six, he mentally exclaims “¡Dios mio, lo que falta todavía!” (2:333). Our involvement in Moreno-Isla's plight is heightened through our unimpeded access to his mind. We experience the journey with him because the passages of free direct thought allow us to share his point of view. Taken together, his perceptual, conceptual, and interest perspectives evoke an image of Madrid as a place filled with petty annoyances and indicators of Moreno-Isla's approaching infirmity. Through this focalization process a sense of place emerges which transcends the reality of the actual city.

As can be seen in the above examples, both indirect and direct thought can be powerful tools for the evocation of place because they serve as the vehicles for rendering a character's impressions of his or her surroundings. Due to their ability to convey character consciousness—either through the mediation of a narrator telling us the character's thoughts and feelings, or through our direct contact with the mind of the character—these discursive features serve as focalization devices for individual scenes. But Furst also speaks of a more generalized way of using characters to evoke place. This involves the use of the overall structure of a text to establish the associations that are held by certain characters for certain places. Rather than immediate impressions that are formed by a character during a specific scene, these associations arise over the course of the text from the interaction among the various characters and between the characters and their surroundings. Through these associations, a particular place becomes an extension of the character's personality and is bound up in the character's memories. Such is the case in the parallel "freedom walks" taken by Rafael and Torquemada in the second and fourth novels, respectively, of the Torquemada series. Rafael (in Part 2, Chapters 11 and 12 of Torquemada en la Cruz) and Torquemada (in Part 2, Chapters 8-11 of Torquemada y San Pedro) secretly leave home to escape their current situations, and without planning to do so, both instinctively walk to a place associated with a happier past. For Rafael it is his old family mansion, and for Torquemada it is the southern districts of the city.

Rafael designs his escape route to avoid the streets on which his sisters are likely to search, and therefore he chooses to walk along the Calle de las Infantas, the Paseo de Recoletos, and the Paseo de la Castellana. In so doing he eventually finds himself in front of the mansion that had been his home before his family's financial ruin. The location of this mansion is left vague. Rafael's thoughts simply state that "El trecho recorrido de la Plaza de Colón es la distancia exacta" (218). But a more precise designation is not necessary for

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the evocation of place because *where* the building exists on a map of Madrid is of less importance than *how* it exists in the memory of the character. Rafael’s blindness allows him to see the house in his memories of the past rather than in the reality of the present. With only his sense of hearing and touch to guide his thoughts, Rafael imbues the house with all of his longings for his former life. The feel of the iron fence in Rafael’s hands helps him to recall the beauty of the house’s furnishings and gardens, while the sound of the carriage leaving and returning the grounds reminds him of the elegant evenings he and his mother used to spend at the opera. For Rafael, all of the dignity of his family’s name is associated with the mansion which once was his and now is gone, and the joining of that family name to Torquemada’s through Fidela’s impending marriage compounds that loss even further. The fascination exercised over Rafael by the mansion is so great that he spends hours on the bench across from it contemplating his family’s past glory, and it is not until nearly dawn that his unrelenting hunger reasserts the reality of his situation and requires him to return to the present to seek food. Taking the Paseo de la Castellana once again, he leaves the mansion behind and heads toward Bernardina’s humble dwelling at Cuatro Caminos.

Torquemada’s journey is a mirror image of Rafael’s. Whereas Rafael escapes from his stifling poverty by returning to a place that reminds him of his past affluence, Torquemada flees his enormous wealth by going back to the lowly neighborhoods where he began his career. Torquemada’s departure from home is initially facilitated by the use of a carriage, which takes him to the heights of Vallehermoso and the groves of the Virgen del Puerto. From there he is able to see portions of southwestern Madrid—Vistillas, Puerta de Toledo, San Francisco, San Cayetano, Escuela Pia de Fernando—and he suddenly feels a nostalgic desire to return to his roots. He associates these places with “los años mejores de su vida,” and his dissatisfaction with his present life gives a rosy glow to his memories of “aquellos deliciosos barrios del Sur, tan prolíficos, tan honrados, tan rumbosos y con tanta alegria en las calles como gracejo en las personas” (584). He orders his driver to take him to the Plaza de Puerta Cerrada, where he begins his walk through the city. After passing the house where his close friend Doña Lupe had lived, he heads for a tavern by the Plaza Mayor that is owned by another acquaintance from his past life. Rebelling against the fancy French food served in his palace, Torquemada orders the home-cooked Spanish dishes that used to be his daily fare. He attributes his renewed appetite to his surroundings, and he convinces himself that he has been the victim of
Cruz's attempts to poison him at home. His constant mental and verbal contrasting of his happy past and his unhappy present finally leads him to summarize his feelings by calling the tavern his oasis. This metaphor of place reaffirms the association he has made between the events of his former life and the neighborhoods where they took place. The contentment he feels in this oasis leads him to pretend that he still has the hearty constitution he enjoyed during his days as a moneylender, and consequently he eats and drinks far too much for his now delicate stomach. A violent gastric attack returns him to the reality of the present, and he allows himself to be transported in his carriage back to his palace. Like Rafael, Torquemada finds that the past can be remembered but not relived. Although both he and Rafael can temporarily escape into the memories of their past, they are forced to acknowledge the reality of the present by their bodies, which react to the immediacy of the moment. For both men this physical reaction occurs on the fundamental level of bodily nourishment. Rafael suffers from a lack of food, while Torquemada suffers from a surfeit of it.

In speaking of the reality of Torquemada's and Rafael's present lives, I have slipped into the role of the reader envisioned by Furst in her discussion of narrative tactics. Through my interaction with the viewpoints of these characters, I have allowed myself to pretend to believe that their Madrid is an extension of the actual one, and that their associations are the result of the lives they have lived in that Madrid. Torquemada and Rafael come from very different backgrounds, and consequently they have formed very different associations. Torquemada hates the sumptuous lifestyle that Rafael laments having lost, and Rafael disdains the lower-class attitudes to which Torquemada clings. Each man evokes a sense of place that is particular to him alone, but together they present opposing associations that add complexity to the reader's construction of the text's overall sense of place. In addition, these associations contribute toward the seeming reality of the novelistic world. Since character associations rest on memories, they are used by Galdós to contrast what is "real" and what is just remembered.

Furst has stated, "to read a realist narrative is to submit to an act of persuasion, the aim of which is to convert readers to the belief that 'all is true'" (26). In exploring what such an act of persuasion entails, she has shown how realist writers create a sense of reality by evoking a sense of place. Rather than slavish imitations of the real world, these evocations use the thoughts, feelings, impressions, and associations of characters to surpass the mere physical existence of what is verifiably real, resulting in an augmented version of reality.
that pretends to be true even though it is not. Galdós' Madrid is in example of just such an augmented reality. Places that actually exist in Madrid—streets, buildings, parks, fountains, plazas, monuments—seem more real to the reader for having been experienced vicariously through the reactions of the fictional characters. This effect is intensified in Galdós's series of *novelas contemporáneas* because story after story takes place in the same city. Each novel establishes a set of subjective responses by its characters to their surroundings, and when taken together, these novels form an interlocking network of personalized detail concerning those surroundings. Over the course of Galdós's series, our concept of Madrid acquires the depth, definition, and vividness that each individual character gives it through his or her consciousness. Galdós' Madrid comes to life as our imagination places layer upon layer of the characters' reactions onto the existing physical features of the city. These multiple evocations of place allow us to share the viewpoints of Galdós's characters, and, in so doing, we become part of their novelistic world. By constructing in our minds the Madrid of Galdós, we confer an existence on it that belies the fact that it is only a fictional version of its counterpart in the real world.

**Notes**

1 José Luis Miranda Cruz lists all of the streets, plazas, and landmarks of Clara's journey and shows how the accuracy of Galdós's description within the novel's historical context is based on the 1861 book, *Antiguo Madrid* by Mesonero Romanos.

2 Direct speech or thought records can either be *tagged* or *free*. Tagged refers to the use of introductory clauses (such as *he said* or *she thought*) to explicitly note the spoken words or thoughts. These indicators are absent in free (also referred to as untagged) statements. Both forms, however, record the exact words of a character, with or without quotation marks. As such, these records have a first-person reference and a present tense orientation (with memories in the preterite or imperfect tenses and plans in the future tense). Direct speech and thought differ from their indirect counterparts in that direct statements are actual quotes while indirect statements are reports of quotes. For indirect speech and thought the tag becomes an introductory clause (such as *he said that* or *she thought that*), the reference is in the third-person, and the tense system "back-shifts" to a past tense orientation (with memories in the past perfect and plans in the conditional). In free indirect speech and thought, the introductory clause is omitted, thereby blurring the difference between the two.

3 In the Aguilar edition no punctuation is used to separate speech from thought, but either single or double quotation marks are used to indi-
cate speech in the Porrúa and Cátedra editions, respectively. All cita-
tions are taken from the Cátedra edition.

4 Seymour Chatman makes the distinction between perceptual, conceptual,
and interested perspective in his discussion of point of view (151-58).

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